

03

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5





THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS

WEEK 3

The Wisdom of the Cross

What is wisdom? One simple definition is that wisdom is knowing how to live in the world. It is a practical kind of knowledge. In the opening of the letter, Paul critiqued the divisions that were growing in the church, particularly around the personalities of different leaders. In today's passage, Paul exposes and admonishes the bad thinking that led to those divisions. The people had embraced the wrong kind of wisdom.

Paul refers in verse 18 to the "message of the cross" which is "foolishness" to some. What is this message of the cross? To begin with, it is the message that Jesus the Messiah was crucified. But how could this be foolishness? The Cross of Jesus is not only a historical event about what God did for us, but it is also a kind of wisdom. The cross shows an approach to living life, as He called His people to take up their own crosses and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). The New Testament presents the good news about the cross and calls people to live the way of the cross.

However, in the Roman world strength was wisdom. The people of Corinth would want to project importance and power, aligning themselves with the important. Apparently, they had brought this thinking into the church, substituting cultural significance with Christian significance. But this is a contradiction of the gospel itself. God doesn't save people because they are significant or important. He saves people because they are needy and broken. Paul is challenging people to make sure their approach to life and community corresponds to the life Jesus lived and the cross He bore. He calls them to a cross-shaped wisdom, which looks crazy to the world but leads to eternal life.

Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 1:18-29
- 02 1 Corinthians 1:30-2:5
- 03 Isaiah 29:14-16
- 04 Jeremiah 9:23-24
- 05 Romans 3:21-24
- 06 Romans 3:25-28
- 07 1 Corinthians 12:7-11



CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS GOD'S POWER AND WISDOM

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

²⁶ Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

2 And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

Discussion Guide

WARM UP

A smart person can access and retain a wide breadth of knowledge. A wise person can apply knowledge appropriately to life. Who is one of the smartest people you have ever known? Who is one of the wisest?

At what point in your life did you realize that your parents were wiser than you once imagined?

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-2:5

Remember the Corinthian church is quarreling unnecessarily over petty issues, such as what leader they preferred. Read 1:17 and 2:1-5. Does Paul claim that his message to them was persuasive because of his wisdom and eloquence? What was powerful about his message?

The Gospel (good news) is simply this: Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. Those who wish to follow Christ humbly accept this truth as the gracious gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). How is it that so many stumble over the simplicity of this truth?

In verses 1:19-21, Paul teaches human wisdom and intelligence will not lead to salvation. He is not diminishing the need for education but makes it clear that human effort does not save us. Why are we so prone to rely on self-efforts for salvation?

In verses 1:22-25, how does Paul compare the wisdom of man to the wisdom of God? If we can never achieve God's wisdom on our own, how important is it that we seek Him?

APPLICATION

We often argue because of pride. We want to win! In verses 1:26-31, Paul asks the Corinthians to reflect on their own lives. What is the point being made in this guided reflection and what does he ask them to do? How might our lives change if we embraced the wisdom of the cross by living in humility?

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.



I counted dollars while God counted crosses.
I counted gains while He counted losses.
I counted my worth by things gained in store.
He sized me up by the scars that I bore.
I coveted honors and I sought degrees.
He wept as He counted the hours on my knees.
I never knew till one day by the grave,
How vain are the things that we spend life to save.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN