

THE LOOKOUT

APRIL 2024

Unit: 1 Corinthians (Part 2) Theme: The Powerful Church

Overview: If the living church had problems (which was last month's emphasis), then the powerful church had answers. Even churches with brokenness, like the Corinthian congregation, can provide knowledge and insight. Powerful churches learn to stress the right things (i.e., the big things of the book, the Bible). Powerful churches stress God's wisdom over the foolishness of this world. Powerful churches stress spiritual gifts that edify others over pandering to the pride of the user. Powerful churches stress love over self-centeredness. Powerful churches stress the resurrection over the hopelessness of the world.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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WEEK OF APRIL 7, 2024

LESSON AIM: Pursue godly wisdom, and don't be discouraged if the world thinks you're foolish.

UNIT: 1 Corinthians (Part 2)

THEME: The Powerful Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:7

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Kings 3; Proverbs 1:1-7; Romans 11:33-34;
1 Corinthians 3:18-23; James 1:5; 3:13-18

STUDY

GOD'S WISDOM

BY MARK SCOTT

Wisdom can show up in the strangest places. Books like Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, Philip Gulley's *Front Porch Tales*, and the too-numerous-to-count *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books are not deep in content but all were bestsellers. Maybe it indicates that for all our knowledge, we do not recognize true wisdom.

The supplemental texts for today's lesson help us focus on God's wisdom. Solomon prayed for God's wisdom, and it showed up in his decision about the prostitutes' babies (1 Kings 3). Solomon also wrote that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:1-7). Paul reminded us that no one knows the depths of God's wisdom (Romans 11:33-34) and that the wisdom of the world is folly with God (1 Corinthians 3:18-23). Finally, James said the pure wisdom from above has to be prayed down (James 1:5; 3:13-18).

The Corinthians were in danger of becoming enamored with the wisdom of the world. Wisdom can look shiny, and we might wrongly assess the cross of Christ as comparatively dim. The Corinthians could not put their fractured fellowship (1:10) back together without wisdom from God. Paul reminded them that what seemed profound in the world had no power to unite them.

God's Wisdom Shows Up in the Gospel

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-7

There is a mind-boggling profundity in the message of the cross. What seems to be a picture of weakness actually is the only true power to get us home to God. The *message of the cross* (1:18) and the *testimony about God* (2:1) are synonymous. They refer to the gospel message (i.e., the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus). Some translations use the phrase "the foolishness of preaching." While there has been plenty of that through the ages, Paul was not referring to the activity of preaching but rather the content of the message preached. In fact, Paul had little respect for *eloquence* or *human wisdom* (2:1). Paul was pushing back against the long-winded Corinthian rhetoricians who said nothing.

The contrast between the seeming wisdom of the world and the message of the cross was strong. To many, the message of the cross seemed foolish (i.e., moronic). But to those *being saved* it was *the power of God*. Paul rein-

forced his argument by reciting Isaiah 29:14, where God seemed to take delight in frustrating the worldly wise with his superior wisdom.

Paul called out the *wise person*, the *teacher of the law*, and the *philosopher of this age*. No one was going to learn the wisdom of God by just visiting the library. God's wisdom was learned by revelation. The preached message of the cross would reveal God's wisdom. And this wisdom was greater than miraculous *signs* (which the Jews desired) or the *wisdom of the world* (which the Greeks sought). In fact, the Jews looked at the cross as a *stumbling block* (a scandal, in Greek), and the Greeks looked at the cross as *foolishness* (that is, moronic). Paul spoke of the *foolishness of God*. How could God be called foolish? Paul also spoke of the *weakness of God*. How could God be called weak? God's seeming foolishness began at the apex of human wisdom, and God's seeming weakness began at the end of human strength.

All of this is why Paul put no confidence in the rhetoric of this world. He desired to make Jesus and his crucifixion central in his *message* (Logos). Paul could hold his own with the rhetoricians, and he did have a message for *the mature*. But he chose a posture of *fear and trembling* for his message was a *demonstration of the Spirit's power*.

God's Wisdom Shows Up in Less-than-Stunning People

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

The Corinthians needed only to look in the mirror to embrace what Paul was saying. The Corinthians were "nothing to write home about" (as the saying goes). They were not exceptionally *wise* or *influential*. They did not come from a royal bloodline (*noble birth*). In comparison to the people of this world, the Corinthians were foolish, weak, lowly, and despised. But God's power was revealed in that he took *foolish, weak, lowly, and despised* people and shamed the wise and powerful.

The reason for this was so that people would know whom should get the praise. Fallen creatures have nothing to boast about. Boasting in God is the only thing that makes sense. Paul put Jesus forward as the epitome of God's wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption. God deserved the praise because he is really smart and strong. ■

APPLICATION

SWIM UPSTREAM

BY DAVID FAUST

Comedian Steven Wright is known for his offbeat, witty observations. For example:

- “I think it’s wrong that only one company makes the game Monopoly.”
- “I bought some instant water one time, but I didn’t know what to add to it.”
- “For my birthday I got a humidifier and a de-humidifier. I put them in the same room and let them fight it out.”
- “My neighbor has a circular driveway. He can’t get out.”
- “I went to a general store, and they wouldn’t let me buy anything specific.”

Here’s another Wrightism: “Hermits have no peer pressure.” Wouldn’t life be easier if we didn’t feel pressured to go along with the crowd?

Competing Worldviews

Peer pressure isn’t new. First-century believers swam against the current of competing worldviews. The apostle Paul summarized two of them by saying, “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:22). Modern versions of those perspectives remain with us today.

Secular humanists seek wisdom but reject divine revelation. They idolize science, dismiss the Bible as myth, view ethics as situational and relative, and see life as a product of what Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer called “the impersonal plus time plus chance.” Others rely on their feelings and experiences. They demand miracles and say, “Show me a sign from God, or I won’t believe.”

The apostle Paul varied his presentation methods, but he preached the same gospel message to all. He wrote, “We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23). The cross offended first-century Jews who expected the Messiah to be a ruling king, not a suffering servant. Even the manner of Jesus’ death offended the Jews; Deuteronomy 21:23 said, “Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse.” Greek philosophers considered

crucifixion abhorrent and miracles impossible. At the mention of Jesus’ resurrection, “Some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject’” (Acts 17:32).

The apostles used different starting points in their sermons. To Jews who already believed in God, they quoted Scripture and cited messianic prophecies. When talking to Gentiles, however, whether unsophisticated idolaters in Lystra (Acts 14) or sophisticated philosophers in Athens (Acts 17), Paul began with an introductory lesson in monotheism and taught his hearers about the true God. Although the starting points varied depending on the audience, New Testament preaching invariably led to the cross and the empty tomb, for even if some considered it foolish, the gospel of Christ expressed God’s highest wisdom.

Go Against the Grain

It is reasonable to believe in God, trust the inspired Scriptures, and hold a gospel-centered worldview; but unless you are a hermit, you must contend with cultural currents that flow against biblical truth. Are you willing to be a nonconformist and swim upstream? Instead of conforming “to the pattern of this world,” will you “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2)?

Charles Colson wrote,

Genuine Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus, as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study, and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing a system of doctrines about God. Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending all reality. It is a worldview.

It takes courage to hold, defend, and publicly declare a biblical worldview many consider foolish. If you dare to go against the grain, don’t be surprised when you get splinters.

Personal Challenge: Expand your understanding of worldview issues by exploring resources like the Colson Center (colsoncenter.org) and Room for Doubt (roomfordoubt.com). ■

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Talk about a time you received advice that at first seemed foolish to you, only to discover later that it contained a great deal of wisdom?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:7**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. In what ways can we rely on God's wisdom (especially when it seems strange or foolish to us) rather than our own?
 - Share about a situation in your life where you need to trust in God's wisdom and understanding instead of your own?
3. Why do you think some people regard the preaching of the gospel as foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-21)?
 - What adjustments might we make in presenting the gospel to others that would be less likely to come across to them as foolish?
4. Why particularly would Christ's resurrection be seen as a "stumbling block" or "foolishness" to some people (v. 23)?
5. How does understanding that God chose those considered foolish and weak by the world affect how we view ourselves and our own achievements (vv. 26-29)?
 - What is one area of your life where you can give credit to God for any accomplishments you've made, reminding yourself of the humility he desires?
6. In what way does Jesus Christ "become for us wisdom from God" (v. 30)?
 - What does this say about the part Christ plays and the part we play in living wisely?
7. Paul wrote, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). How can we live by this principle today?
8. In what ways do you think Paul taught and preached "with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (v. 4)?
 - How can our lives demonstrate the power of the Spirit today?
9. How would you explain the difference between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom of God?
 - In what ways can we seek God's wisdom instead of relying on the world's wisdom?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖