



## 1 Corinthians 1:25-2:16

### The Wisdom of God vs The Wisdom of the World

*“For God’s foolishness is God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Cor 1:25)*

Have you ever had a speak on a topic of conversation, where you felt out of your depth, and not clever enough? Perhaps you’ve been in a situation at your work where you had to give a presentation, and you were well aware that those you spoke to were experts? I’ve found this more and more the case whilst at college having to give sermons in front of my tutors – the fear of sounding foolish when everyone around you seem to be learned and wise.

It’s one thing to feel our of your depth on a work topic, but how about when you get asked a difficult question as a Christian, or a churchgoer? What do you say when one of your friends comes and asks you to explain how God can exist in a world of suffering? Or how can you be sure about life after death, that what you read in the Bible is true, or how to explain the theory of evolution? What about when they ask you about

politics, and how the church can help the world solve the current economic crisis?

Well, at those times, we might feel foolish about what to say as Christians. We might get worried that we can’t understand the Bible well enough to give good answers. We wonder what message we have to share as Christians, as a church, that will help.

The consolation is, that one of the founders of the early church, the great apostle Paul, felt exactly the same as us. He says in 1 Corinthians 2:3, “I came to you with great fear and trembling”. Because Corinth was a great city, in worldly terms. It was a bustling trade city in the Roman Empire. There were plenty of rich, influential, people of importance in Corinth. And they were proud of their philosophers, and debates. They would have been interested in hearing from Paul, but only with the intention of testing his worldly eloquence and wisdom in a debate, just as the Oxford Union might find it interesting to invite the Archbishop of Canterbury to debate with Richard Dawkins. They wanted to know what cleverness Paul had to bring to Corinth. And they would have laughed at and scorned the small church of ordinary, simple folk at Corinth who were not people of great power and learning.

So how does Paul respond?

Firstly, by explaining that God's wisdom is for all, not just the clever.

The wisdom of God is for all, not just the wise. In fact, Paul says that the people that are wise in the eyes of the world often ignored God and he in turn overlooks them.

Paul says to the church in Corinth in verse 26, "*not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.*" God has a habit of picking people who are fairly flawed by human standards. Moses wasn't a great speaker and murdered a man. David had a good heart but was led astray when he slept with Bathsheba and murdered her husband. Paul himself was accused of being a babblers and not good at public speaking.

That's what the church is full of. Ordinary people from all walks of life. Not just great theologians and Bible scholars, although some people are called and gifted to study in depth. Not just people who seem to have lived a charmed life. The Christians I have known have come from all sorts of backgrounds: they have day to day jobs in factories, schools, colleges, hospitals; they are full time mums, farmers, secretaries; some

are unemployed, some are former prisoners whose lives have been changed by Jesus. Sometimes people who have lived troubled lives are great witnesses for the church are great witnesses because they can understand what those in difficulty in the world are going through.

Paul says in verse 27, "*God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.*"

God chose to shame those who think they are so clever that they don't need God. Imagine how horrendous it would be if God only accepted the clever people. Yet clever people in the world regard themselves as superior. Scientists like Dawkins who think they have all the answers. Politicians who think they don't need to answer to anyone. Bankers who think they can take all the money off the poor and it doesn't matter. But God didn't build the church of Corinth out of such people. He didn't rescue an "elite class". He called weaker people to show up the strong, to say to them – you need God as much as the rest of us.

So don't put your status in who you think you are. Don't see yourself as superior. As children of God we are all equal. Look at the person in the pew next to you. You are no more important, or less important, than that person. And don't think you aren't clever enough to spread the good news of Jesus. It doesn't matter whether you have a theology degree, or

a new Christian who hasn't read much of the Bible. We have all come to know the wisdom of God.

So what is that wisdom? It is the wisdom that comes through Jesus Christ. Paul says in verse 30 of chapter one that "Christ Jesus became for us the wisdom of God, and righteousness and sanctification, in order that as it is written, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." We are all wise, not because of our learning and ability to win arguments, but because we follow Jesus and he alone has saved us. The fact that Jesus has rescued us all is a great leveler. It has nothing to do with our degrees, or our finances, or how useful we've been to society, or how many good turns we have done. He came to earth, died for us on a cross, to forgive us from all our sins, and to rescue us, so we can have eternal life with him for ever. He didn't do that because he thought we were the clever, and influential people to be saved. He did that because he loved us. We did nothing – Jesus did everything for us.

So we have no reason to boast of our achievements. If we are to boast, it is not in our learning, and we need not be ashamed of our lack of learning. We can all have pride in the fact that God, in his wisdom, sent Jesus to save us. Paul wanted his hearers to boast in Jesus Christ. As the song we will sing shortly goes, "I will not boast in anything / no gifts,

no power, no wisdom / but I will boast in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection."

Which brings me to my third point. God's wisdom is the message of the cross. Paul says in verse 2 of chapter two "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. The philosophers of Paul's day wanted to know what he felt about grand wordly questions, about the nature of existence and morality. And it is no different today. Those around us in our country, in politics, in the media, all want to know what we have to say about scientific theories, and other religions and grand economic schemes to save the planet. The only time that our media is interested in Christianity is when they want to report our Archbishop criticizing the government's Big Society proposals, or else when they want to mock Christians in TV comedies, to present them as simple minded people. But Paul didn't get embroiled in such conversations. He had one, simple message to preach – that we are all sinners, who need to turn to Jesus Christ, the only son of God for our salvation. That's it. I'll say it again, because even though Paul addresses all sorts of topics in Corinthians, this is the message of God's wisdom – that even though we are sinners, deserving of death, Jesus was crucified on a cross to die for our sins so that we can be saved.

You see, the people of Corinth totally misunderstood wisdom. They thought it was all about deep knowledge of God, and philosophy, and religion, and reasoning the hard questions of life. But the wisdom Paul had to offer was a response. God's wisdom is not about what we know, it is what we choose. It is all to do with whether we accept that Jesus' death on the cross is our only means of salvation, or whether we consider it foolishness, and decide not to follow Christ. It has been the same all throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs 11:10 says that Wisdom is not about recognizing the authority of God over us; "*The Fear of the Lord is wisdom.*" Jesus, in Matthew 7, described wisdom as being like the Wise Man who built a house on a rock, and said that this meant that those who heard his words and followed his teaching were wise. And the ultimate secret wisdom of God was revealed to the apostles, such as Paul, who recognized that Jesus' death on the cross was the only hope for humanity, and that the only human response was to follow Jesus and accept this. Paul was only interested in one thing – the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, through whom all could be saved.

So the wisdom of God is the message that Jesus died on a cross for our sins. And the wonderful thing about this message is that it is simple. It is a simple message that God wants us to share with all those around us. This is the good news that everyone can spread – not just vicars, or

people who have gone away to study at college like me, but all of us. And because Jesus has saved you, as an individual, through his death on the cross, you have a personal, unique story to tell to those around you – a story which is very, very special.

And finally, the wisdom of God is given to us through the Holy Spirit.

How do you know what other people think? How they will act? The better we know them, the more we are likely to say we know their mind. We know what their habits are – whether they will rush over to the TV to watch the tennis or football, or bury themselves in a book or the garden whenever the football or tennis is on. The more we know people, the more we know their views on politics, how they might vote, what they are passionate about.

But Paul says, that if we really want to know someone, we would need to know their thoughts, and to do that, we would need to have their Spirit in us. He says in verse 11, "Who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

When we invite Jesus into our life, we receive the Holy Spirit. And the

Holy Spirit *reveals to us the wisdom of God*. The first way the Holy Spirit revealed God to us was by showing us the truth about the death of Jesus on the cross. The Holy Spirit helped us understand the truth of who Jesus was and why his death was important when we first became Christians. The very fact that we know this to be true, is God revealing it to us, through our spirit.

There are also other ways in which the Spirit reveals to us things to us to guide us, when we pray. For all of us the Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible to show us the wisdom of God, as I believe he is now, as I share 1 Corinthians with you. Sometimes the Holy Spirit reveals truth to Christians in very visible and spectacular ways, sometimes he pricks our conscience to do the right things. But the Spirit in us guides us into the wisdom of God as shown through the words and actions of Jesus. So Paul says in verse 16, we have the mind of Christ in us.

So, what have we learned about the wisdom of God?

1) God's wisdom is for everyone, no matter who you are.

2) God's wisdom comes through Jesus Christ, so we can't boast of our own wisdom

3) God's wisdom is the message that Jesus died on a cross to save us from sins

4) God's wisdom is revealed directly to us, through the Holy Spirit, so we might know how to live.