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# The Wisdom of Man & The Power of God

I Corinthians 2-3 | Week Two

## Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

## Where We Are Now

In kicking off the study last week, we discussed the danger of letting our intellectual knowledge become a point of pride and division in the Church. Paul's example was to filter all wisdom through the Christ, cross and the Gospel to become truly wise.

## This Week

In this session, we will talk about the difference between human wisdom vs. the power of God. We will look at how a dependence on human wisdom harms the Church and keeps us from growing deeper spiritually.

## The Big Idea

We cannot rely on our own wisdom to lead us into maturity. We must depend on the wisdom that comes from knowing Christ and His Holy Spirit inside of us.

## Memory Verse I Cor. 2:1-2

## Looking at the Text

**Ask someone to read I Corinthians 2:1-5** - *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

1. Paul could have been eloquent but chose to amplify Christ and His cross? Why?

### Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

### Don't Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

“...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Paul is contrasting a faith built on the wisdom of men vs. Christ and His gospel. One is informational, even entertaining, the other is a transformational demonstration of God’s power. If the divisive fads of eloquent speakers passes (and Paul refuses to be one of those), their faith solidly rests on the work of God that changed them.

**Ask someone to read verses 6-13** - *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **7** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9** But, as it is written,*

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” —*

***10** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

2. Paul speaks of the goal of wisdom for the mature? How is that characterized?

It is not from contemporary philosophies that are fleeting. It comes from God himself, hidden from those who don’t follow Him. The Gospel is incomprehensible without the Holy Spirit opening eyes and imparting truth!

3. According to Paul, why is the Spirit essential in bringing His wisdom to believers?

He draws men, allowing them to understand the gospel. He knows the depth of God and reveals it to us. He gives words to speak spiritual truth to make us wise.

**In vs. 14-16, Paul makes it clear that there is a spiritual component to us, which cannot be overlooked. He will characterize the Corinthians as babes, not mature.**

**Ask someone to read 3:1-4** - *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?*

4. What is the major sign of spiritual immaturity Paul is mentioning here?

They are babes needing milk, not solid food (truth for wise, surrendered, spiritually discerning). Their divisions reflect sin and immaturity and prevent the Spirit from bringing understanding.

**Summarize verses 5-15** – Paul, Apollos and others are His servants and workers, but God causes the growth. Christ is the foundation and our work builds on Him. Our discipleship, teaching, and evangelism, are viewed as “building materials of gold, silver,

#### Think About It

#### Illustrate It

Have you ever seen God transform a person’s character in a way that just seemed unexplainable? Share about that experience with the group or invite others to do so.

#### Tie It Together

Spouses have been known to “finish each other’s thoughts” because they know them, think alike, and express their hearts. Imagine the understanding the Spirit has of God’s inner thoughts. He longs to “share these with us” if we look to Him for truth, power and His words to speak.

#### Illustrate It

A radio picks up a frequency and broadcasts to all listeners tuned to the station. A large building can block transmission so that only static is heard. Once clear of the hindrance, the message returns. Sin can hinder your receptivity of spiritual truth and leave you in a state of spiritual immaturity (babes) like those in Corinth. See John 15:1-5 for insights on abiding.

etc.” Our efforts are tested by fire and that which survives is affirmed.

5. What does Paul mean when he says we “receive a reward?” How do we insure approval?

Build on Christ! Don’t rely on your power or eloquence but let your efforts be empowered by His Spirit, His wisdom, careful to confess sins (like divisiveness) so that He is free to work through you, for His glory! Notice that your salvation is NOT at stake. Our Kingdom efforts as believers will be tested and rewarded.

**Paul ends his criticism with a final thought for them in vs. 18-23 -**

<sup>18</sup> *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.* <sup>19</sup> *For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,”* <sup>20</sup> *and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”* <sup>21</sup> *So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,* <sup>22</sup> *whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,* <sup>23</sup> *and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*

*I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.* <sup>15</sup> *For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.* <sup>16</sup> *I urge you, then, be imitators of me.*

We saw in chapter 1 that what the world sees as “folly” God used to save those who believe (1:21). Chapter 2 states that the lost world can’t understand things of God because he sees them as “folly.” (2:14) Now Paul says that GOD deems the world’s wisdom as “folly” (3:19)

6. What does Paul mean when he calls on those who consider themselves wise to “become a fool” first?

Some quotes by John Piper distinguish between the world’s wisdom and the wisdom of God that puts Christ at the center. The world considers this foolish. You can embrace the centrality of Christ, looking to the world as a fool, but avoiding the true “folly trap” when worldly wisdom and craftiness leaves out God. It eliminates boasting because human wisdom will not find God through their wisdom, but only revealed through the Spirit. The fear (reverence) of God is the beginning of wisdom. Psalm 111:10

## Wrapping Up

7. What does it look like to NOT rely on the “wisdom of men” today? How are Christian graduate students tempted to do this?

There are hoops that every grad student must jump through to complete a degree. One is often required to “give what a professor requires” even though it may conflict with your belief. It is at those times that a Christian grad must be personally clear on what they believe concerning the nature of God, the condition of man and the hope provided through God’s plan and not swayed by academic pressure. You may “reflect the current views on a paper” but hold to truth according to scripture. A community group of peers can understand the struggle and help you process your thinking.

Rewards: some have said that it would be painful for believers to stand before Christ and see their work tested and burned. However, Christ will love you and welcome you on that day and your only thoughts will be of Him. It can be illustrated like one who holds a thimble that is full to the brim and pleasing to the one holding it. Another is holding a large goblet, also full and satisfying. Both feel affirmed and loved before Christ, though some may have more to show for their faithful service.

### Tips for a Better Discussion

**Since God’s wisdom aims to exalt the glory of God’s grace, God reveals this wisdom in a way that nullifies human pride and boasting.**  
John Piper (*Think*)

As your discussion comes to a close, end the session in prayer.