

1 Corinthians

1:18–2:5

Introduce

Do you ever remember being so right about something where everyone else was so wrong? What was the situation and how did it make you feel? What was your response to the people who were wrong? We are going to look at how the world perceives what we believe and how we should respond.

Investigate

Background

Paul continues to build his case for unity within the church in Corinth. Remember that this was a church that was allowing itself to be infected by the lifestyles and views of the people around them. There was a certain mindset in the minds of Greeks and Jews that made it difficult for them to accept the gospel message and this mindset was beginning to influence the church. Paul wants the Corinthian believers to understand this rejection and to help them understand the nature of the gospel message. In this passage he builds directly off his statement in verse 17 concerning how he preached the gospel message.

Explore the Passage

[Read each section before asking the questions]

1:18-25

- Why is the word of the cross folly to those who are perishing? Why is it the power of God to those who are being saved?
- Who are the groups Paul identifies as potential opposition to the gospel message through his questions in verse 20? What is the purpose of these questions? [*To take on those who would oppose the gospel and draw the Corinthians into the fight*]
- How has God made the world's wisdom foolishness? [*By saving those who believe through the very message seen as being foolish*]
- Why did it please God to do these things? [*His desire is to show Himself as great*]
- What are the signs Jews demand? [*Messianic signs—a desire for power through political conquest*] Why do Greeks seek wisdom? [*Idolatry of wisdom—man making heaven on earth himself*]
- Why would "Christ crucified" be a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles?
- Why would Michigan students think that the word of the cross is folly? What are opinions you have heard on the nature of the gospel message?

1:26-31

- How does Paul describe the Corinthian believers? What does this tell us about the social and economic status of the Corinthian believers? [*They were probably of lesser economic and social status than many of the Corinthians.*] Why might this have been a problem in how they saw themselves in relation to the rest of Corinth?
- How does God chose to work in the world? Why? [*So that no person would boast in the presence of God*]
- Why is it important to God that no one be able to boast in His presence?

2:1-5

- How does Paul describe his own preaching?
- Why should Paul's description of his own ministry give us hope in our personal ministries?
- How might we be tempted to appeal to the world's desire for wisdom in our "preaching"?
- How might we tend to go beyond the simplicity of preaching Christ crucified? What is the danger in doing this?

Discover the Big Idea

- How does what Paul is saying in these paragraphs relate to his appeal for unity in the first part of chapter 1? [*The power of God is in the cross, not in human wisdom which is what they were focusing on in their allegiance to human teachers.*]
- What does Paul want to accomplish in the lives of the Corinthian believers through this passage?

Summary: God has always worked through weakness—the supposed weakness and foolishness of the message as well as the weakness and foolishness of the messengers. He does this to magnify His wisdom and power and to clearly and definitively bring the glory to Himself.

Respond

- What are ways that your boasting can sometimes be centered on something besides God?
- How have you found yourself focusing on your own abilities and wisdom in ministry rather than the power and wisdom of God?
- Why do you sometimes desire to boast in other things besides God? Why is it hard to think rightly about our relative unimportance and instead be satisfied in bringing glory to God through our weakness? [*It is our natural tendency to want to put ourselves in the place of God. We don't fully understand how holy and awesome He is and so desire to make ourselves look awesome instead.*]
- What do we need to understand about Jesus that would direct our desire to boast in God? [*He is the power of God and wisdom of God*]
- What is true about Christ that will enable us to deal with the sneering and contempt of the world? [*He is the source of life—our wisdom is centered in Him, our righteousness comes from Him, and our redemption and sanctification is accomplished through Him.*]