

Careful Who You Listen To

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[0:00] I'd like to welcome you back to week two of The Power of Unity and our study in the book of 1 Corinthians. I'm Mitch Sefton, the youth pastor here at the First Christian Church. We're going to be diving into a passage starting in chapter 1, verses 18-31.

The more that I studied this particular passage, the more I've come to realize that history just repeats itself. We have a group of people called the Corinthians that live life the way that satisfies any and every desire that they could be interested in.

You see, today we're going to be focusing on God's wisdom being revealed by the Spirit. As some of you know, I was a fifth grade teacher for over a decade at Greensburg Elementary School before I went into full-time ministry at Carlisle Christian Church in Carlisle, Illinois.

It was an honor and a privilege to be able to invest in the lives of young people in this way for so many years. With being in the classroom comes many different situations, but one that can be counted on is that you never know what to expect from day to day in the classroom.

There were many moments where you had really felt like you were getting somewhere with your students, and then there were other moments where you just questioned it all. I remember having a conversation with some of my students about what possible careers that they might be interested in going in one day.

[1:15] And I remember hearing lots of different options of like being a teacher or a police officer or a professional athlete or even a YouTuber, and the list just went on and on and on.

And then I had a student raise his hand and he said, Mr. Sefton, what is your job? Needless to say, there were a few moments in my career where I really questioned how much wisdom I was really giving to my students.

You see, I want to give credit before we really get started to John MacArthur and his Bible commentary for a lot of the in-depth information that come from this particular message today.

As Pastor Ray spoke last week about the terrible things that the Corinthians would partake in and how detrimental that these things were to the people of Corinth, but also to the Corinthian church. You see, whenever we have a society or a culture that is not one that is following God, we inevitably have some of those things that attempt to creep into the church and that will cause division.

[2:13] You see, fighting, sexual immorality, drunkenness, the love of power, neglect, the list can just go on and on and on. The Corinthians were a messed up group of people that were willing to do, say, or think whatever they needed in order to make their sins okay.

You see, Greeks at this time were in love with the idea of philosophy. This was a huge part of how their culture was built. The word philosophy comes from the Greek word philosophia, which means the love of wisdom.

They were a society that loved knowledge. You see, we're going to walk through different parts of the scriptures and dive into the message that God has given us here today. So go ahead and open up your Bibles to verse 18 in 1 Corinthians 1.

But before we begin today, I just want to take a moment to pray. Father God, what a blessing it is just to be able to dive into your holy word. And I thank you for the message in 1 Corinthians. And I thank you for just the grace and the mercy that you give us.

I thank you for the lessons that you've taught us about wisdom truly coming from you and not being of human wisdom, but of godly wisdom. And I pray, Lord, that the story that you've given us today and the scriptures that you've given us today are ones that can be shown through your holy word.

[3:38] And I pray that you just use my voice to be an instrument of your love. And I pray, Lord, that you get me out of the way and let your message shine through. In your precious and holy name, amen. Amen.

As we think about the things we do here on a Sunday morning as the acts of worship to the Father in heaven, anyone who doesn't understand the love of Jesus will see these things as foolishness. On a normal Sunday morning, we will sing songs together.

We will listen to a message from one of the pastors that will somehow share a story about a man who lived long ago, that supposedly lived here on earth, taught many different lessons on how to live life, claimed to be the Son of God, chose to die a death that someone would have been executed for a major crime, came back to life, and then got some books written about him.

You see, after the pastor talks, then we do some activities where we take a little piece of bread and a little cup of juice that represents the body and the blood of this man that we are talking about, Jesus. And then after we take this together, we pass around the plate and people put money in it, and the money goes to tell the story about all these things that we're talking about on Sunday morning so that we can go tell other people to all the ends of the earth.

So if you're on the outside looking in and you see all of these things that are happening because of this group of people that say that they love this man named Jesus, you might look at them and think, they're a little kooky.

[5 : 04] That's a little crazy. I don't really know what to think about all of that. They might think that we are fools for doing the things that we do. You see, this has to be the mindset of so many people that don't understand the cross.

It is the love that comes from all of this that is what is life-changing. You see, when you understand Jesus and his love and the sacrifice that he made for us, you can't help but want to worship him. The rest of the verse in verses 18 and 19 goes on to say, But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent.

I will frustrate. The fact that the gospel would be offensive to human wisdom is even prophesied in Isaiah 29, 4, where it says, Therefore, once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder.

The wisdom of the wise will perish, and the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish. All of us are choosing one of two paths. The path of salvation, which comes through the cross, and the path of destruction, which comes through denying the cross.

[6 : 17] You see, the people of Corinth would not have liked this too much because their wisdom would have been something that would have set them apart from others in society. They had pride in how much knowledge they had.

When God basically placed them in two groups, it took away their status of being quote-unquote better than other people. They went from being wise and influential in their society to being put on an even playing field with other believers.

We are now all working towards the same cause. Something that I find interesting is that our society today, we don't even look at people that are wise to listen to and base our knowledge from.

We have chosen to allow people that are really good at shooting a basketball, really good at throwing a football, really good at hitting a baseball, kicking a soccer ball, singing a song, acting in a movie, or being a great businessman or businesswoman from us to form our opinions based on things that are going on in the world, based on what these people are telling us on their social media platforms.

You see, we take what these influential people have to say, and then we form our own opinions and our own thoughts and our own philosophies on different topics. So we're taking our information from people that aren't really experts on these particular things because they have a platform where a lot of people can hear them.

[7 : 39] You see, ordinary people have become famous by videoing their lives and putting them on the internet for all to view. This in itself is interesting to me that kids would rather watch other kids play with toys than go do so themselves.

People becoming influential by playing video games and people watching them do so. Doing stunts and people watching them. What is this craziness all about?

And for me, I have to think about how many of our kids, if one of these YouTubers would begin to share their quote-unquote wisdom with the audience, our kids would take these things as the truth because of how famous and influential they have become.

You see, this famous person has a stance on abortion and I like their music, so therefore it must be correct. This particular famous person has put pictures of their party life on Instagram, so therefore

it must be okay.

This famous person has a philosophy that goes completely against the scriptures, so therefore what they're saying must be truth. And this brings us to our first point today.

[8 : 42] Be careful who you are listening to. It is so important that we are careful in who we listen to. Do you listen to the world or do you listen to the scriptures?

You see, Paul warned of this type of behavior in Corinth as well. Corinthians put great value on wisdom and learning and philosophy, and the letter was a slap in the face to their very being. Even those that were in the church could have possibly brought in some of these before Christ ways of thinking. This is exactly the type of thing that we were talking about earlier where Satan will try to weasel his way in and cause division in the church.

Going back to verse 17, or for just a moment, Paul lays out the plan very simply for the Corinthian church. He says, You see, we have to be careful to meet people where they are.

There is nothing effective about trying to witness to other people using big, quote-unquote, churchy words that many people that have been raised in the church still don't understand. What Paul is saying is that we are not here to try to impress unbelievers with our vast vocabulary, but we are here to share the story of the cross with them because that is enough.

[10 : 04] You see, people just need to be introduced to Jesus and what he has done on the cross. I want to say it again. The story of the cross is enough.

There was another situation that I thought of from my days in the classroom and I was in the middle of teaching a math lesson. My body was facing the whiteboard as I was riding up on the board and all of a sudden I hear a phone ring in my class, which was pretty uncommon at that particular time. And as I was turning around, I was mentally preparing myself of what am I going to say? How am I going to handle this? It was a non-issue. I was going to tell the student to go ahead and silence your phone, put it in your book bag, and it won't be a big deal.

Well, before I could get completely turned around, I hear the word hello. And so this young man has answered the phone in the middle of my math lesson. And as he continues to have this conversation with whoever is on the other end, the entire class is just kind of waiting to see how I was going to handle it.

Well, I don't remember exactly how I handled it, but I'm sure it had something to do with a reprimand to the student and his phone ending up at the office. But all I know is that particular phone call had to be pretty important.

[11 : 15] You see, this letter that Paul was sending to the Corinthians was very important as well. But there had to be some frustration from him because he knew that they know better.

I'm sure that Paul may have felt the same way with the church in Corinth. He had been there leading this church and teaching and preaching in the same way of the cross, only to find out later of his disappointment that the church was falling into the ways of the world.

You see, church, we are called to look different. We are called to be a people that society looks at as foolish because we believe something that really just doesn't make sense from the outside looking in.

See, we're called to love in ways that are radical. We're called to serve in ways that are selfless. We are called to live in ways that are Christ-like. The story of the cross is powerful. And the reason that we are willing to look foolish or like morons to the rest of the world is because of our love for Jesus. Paul continues on in verse 20 where it says, 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?

[12 : 27] For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know him. God pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

You see, this passage of Scripture is basically a challenge to all of the people that call themselves philosophers and do not follow Jesus. Where are you with all of your great answers?

What is your solution for the issues of this culture? Why are we no better now today than we were maybe 50 years ago or 100 years ago? Why are you still dealing with some of the same issues?

All of the wisdom that they desired to have did not get them anywhere in eternity. They totally missed the big picture of life. This passage establishes that people could not come to him by human wisdom.

This particular way of thought would only exalt man. It's by our power that we get to God is what is exactly the opposite of what God had in store here.

[13:34] You see, God designed a way for sinners that was a simple way for them to come to him. Things have not changed for us today. We have more means to help people with a society that is selfish with our time and our resources.

We have more access to information and we spend our time taking pictures of our dinner and posting about our animals. Our society is so inwardly focused that we struggle living out the gospel. Jesus has called us to look different, act different, love different, give differently, serve differently than that of the world. We can't keep missing the mark as followers of Jesus.

The eternity of others is at stake. And that brings us to point number two. The more that you know, the more problems that you have. Verse 21 through 25, it starts by saying, For since the wisdom of God, the world through the wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness that what was preached to those to save those who believe.

Jesus demanded signs and the Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified. A stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks.

[14:49] Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. And I want to make sure that you hear my heart with this.

I am not here giving you a free pass to stop learning, to stop thinking, to stop working towards your goals and your dreams. What I am doing is letting you know that when your philosophical thinking gets in the way of your relationship with Jesus, now we have a problem.

You see, the world tells us that knowledge is power. However, that knowledge, we also have the increased risk of division, of hatred, of conflict, of wars. As a person leans themselves into the wisdom of themselves, they only continue to create more of the problems and more to worry about. You see, God is calling us to rely on him, and this is why it states in verse 25, For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

You see, God at his worst is still better than us at our best. God's foolishness is better than any human wisdom. God's weakness is stronger than our greatest strength.

[15:58] Now, in this passage, is God being called foolish or weak? Absolutely not. What it is saying is that no matter how great we feel we have gotten in an earthly sense, that God is always going to be greater than us.

That God is always going to be wiser than us. God's ways are always going to be stronger than ours. And that brings us to point number three. Tell your story of God's amazing grace.

You have a story and a testimony that is powerful and needs to be heard. You see, God has given you a story not to boast about what you have done, but to boast about what he has done through you and what he has done through the cross.

You see, God will use your circumstances. Some people will have more earthly wisdom, but none of that matters if you're not willing to use it for his glory. See, I'm sure that some of you are in the same boat that I am, that you have friends that are much smarter than you are at times.

And I have this specific friend that on more than one occasion, I've had to ask him to really dummy down what he just said. His intelligence far outweighs mine, which doesn't take too much sometimes.

[17:10] But we will be in casual conversation, and I'll do a look at him, and I'll basically say, you have to stop talking like you're talking to your colleagues. I literally have no idea what you just said.

But he loves Jesus, and I know that through his wealth of knowledge that he has been able to shine the light of Christ to a demographic of people that I would never have been able to reach. You see, God has given me the ability to effectively communicate to elementary students and to junior high and high school students.

These things don't happen overnight, but they come with practice and persistence. God will equip those that he has called. Scripture over and over again lives out the old saying, God does not call the equipped, he equips the called.

Allow him to use you right where you are. If he has called you to minister to students, then do so in a powerful way. If he has called you to minister to corporate America, then do so in a powerful way. If he has called you to minister to your children, then do so in a powerful way. But make sure that you are always telling the story of the power of the cross.

[18:16] You see, all of the wisdom on earth does not mean anything for the kingdom when it is not utilized because of the love of Jesus and the message of the cross. We have to find a way to love those that don't understand who Jesus is and look for different, that look different.

And we have to look different than that of the world. Just as Paul stated in verse 18, For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved is the power of God.

You see, without the cross we are nothing. Without the cross we are all wasting our time and everything that we think or that people think about us is accurate. Without the cross we are nothing. Without the cross we are wasting our time and everyone that thinks we are fools would be correct. Without the cross we would all be on the same path to devastation and eternal separation from God.

You see, the cross is what brings us all together. We are unified through the blood that was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. We were unified when he was hanging on the cross and said the words, It is finished.

[19:28] We were unified when Jesus came back from the dead and just like scripture said he would. We were unified when we received the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us.

We are unified by the common goal of sharing the gospel of Jesus and the story of the cross to all nations and to all tongues. We are unified because of Christ himself.

You see, our worldly wisdom doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what job you have, the number of people that you run with or who you run with, the car that you drive, the degrees that you have hanging on your wall, or the number of deer heads that you have mounted around your house. What matters is Jesus. Just as it says in verse 31, Therefore, as it is written, Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

The bottom line in all of this is that it doesn't matter who you know if you don't know Jesus. Pray with me. Father, thank you for the blessing of just the opportunity to dive into your Holy Word.

[20:32] And I thank you for just your grace and your mercy. And I thank you for Jesus and the cross. Father, I pray your blessings on each and every person that are listening today. I pray that you hold them close.

In your precious and holy name. Amen.