

1 Corinthians

Unappealing Faith

Series Overview

Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth is a case-study in what makes an unhealthy church. In this series, we'll explore what made that church so unhealthy as a guide to becoming the healthy church God has called us to be.

Sermon Introduction

There's a reason people often find Christianity unappealing. After all, belief in God is one thing. (Most people do). But to believe that God died on the cross sounds kind of crazy. Even foolish. Absurd. Which is why it's tempting to want to make Christianity sound better. More triumph, less cross. More winning, less sacrifice. But doing so runs the risk that our faith, while more appealing and powerful, is powerless to change lives.

Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:5 (NIV)

1Cor. 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, let the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

1Cor. 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1Cor. 1:19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

1Cor. 1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

1Cor. 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

1Cor. 1:22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,

1Cor. 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

1Cor. 1:24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1Cor. 1:25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

1Cor. 1:26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

1Cor. 1:27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1Cor. 1:28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,
 1Cor. 1:29 so that no one may boast before him.
 1Cor. 1:30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.
 1Cor. 1:31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”
 1Cor. 2:1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.
 1Cor. 2:2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
 1Cor. 2:3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.
 1Cor. 2:4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power,
 1Cor. 2:5 so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Read the passage. What stood out to you? Was there anything that you found surprising or confusing?
2. Reread vv. 17-21. What is “the message of the cross” and why does it seem so foolish to some people, do you think?
3. In vv. 22-25, Paul summarizes the basic worldviews of both the Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). For Jews, God’s power was in miraculous signs and wonders, while in Greek society, power was found in education, status, and influence. How was “the message of the cross” unpalatable from either of those perspectives?
4. According to vv. 26-31, why was Paul surprised that the Corinthian Christians were trying to adapt Christianity to align better with the values (human wisdom and power) of the broader society?
5. What do you think “boast[ing] in the Lord” (1:31) means? If we’re only to boast in Jesus, what does that mean for our own self-worth and value? How does boasting in Jesus lead to a more gracious, humble, and loving attitude toward others?
6. 1 Corinthians 2:2 is one of Paul’s most famous declarations: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” What do you think Paul meant by that? Did he literally pretend to *only* know about Jesus’ crucifixion?

7. Can you think of ways that you've tried to make your faith more palatable to other people? How about more palatable to yourself?
8. "The message of the cross" is a radically counter-cultural framework for life. Rather than the power and pride we worship in our society, the cross declares that real meaning—life as it's meant to be lived—is only found through self-sacrifice, humility, and love. Are there ways in which this "message" challenges your view of power?

Prayer

Often a position of submission helps us physically connect with the spiritual reality of meeting God. A posture of kneeling with open hands can demonstrate our willingness to submit to God's power.

- Praise God that his ways are not our ways.
- Confess any ways in which you've denied the message of the cross in your life.
- Thank Jesus that he didn't come to conquer the world through strength, but through love.
- Ask God to help you live according to his wisdom and with his power this week.