

# The Power of the Cross

In our generation, knowledge is available to anyone who has access to the internet. No longer do people have to accumulate a library of Encyclopedia Britannica or National Geographic magazines to discover about world history or the natural realm. We can watch Ted-talks<sup>1</sup> and subscribe to Masterclass sessions, to learn new skills and the trade tips of experts. We can acquire the skills that make us academically skilled and knowledgeable, physically fit and strong, as well as leadership skills, to become more influential and powerful.

**GETTING STARTED:** Who is someone that you consider to be the most intellectually 'bright' person? What is their field of expertise? Who is someone who is physically strong? Who is someone who is powerful and influential? What do you find attractive or compelling about them, as people? Then – think about those same people: what message, if any, do they give to people about spirituality and, particularly, their own beliefs about faith and/ or their spiritual practices? Are their messages about spirituality and faith, as attractive and/ or compelling? Why? Why not?

## READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

🗨️ What did you notice/ what things stood out, as you just read the passage?

🗨️ What things did you take away from the sermon this week?

❗ It is a human tendency to think about people in 'categories', based on gender, ethnicity, education, political allegiance, etc. One commentator says, that, at the start of today's passage: "Paul's thesis affirms that there are only two kinds of people in the world - those in the process of perishing and those in the process of being saved (v18). Each will respond to the gospel message in diametrically opposite ways."<sup>2</sup>

🗨️ Evangelical Christianity affirms that Jesus claimed to be the only way to God and that there is no other name by which we can be saved. (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) How do you feel about this claim, especially if you live and work alongside people from other faiths?

❗ Last week, I encouraged you to start to memorise Rom 1:16-17. These verses talk about not being ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God to salvation. Yet, in today's passage, we are told – quite bluntly – that people who are perishing, think that the message we believe, is foolishness, ie it is stupid / moronic. In turn, some would say that people who believe this message are, at minimum, 'religious nutters' or are gullible and stupid. Even moreso since the Enlightenment, there have been many philosophers and scientists who have written and spoken about how religious belief is both irrational and non-sensical. Some would also say that faith and scripture are dangerous.

🗨️ Many Christians do not think it is safe to express their religious beliefs or views, let alone to disclose that they are part of a faith community, especially if they work in secular workplaces. To what extent have you experienced antagonism towards your faith?

🗨️ What comments have you had, that communicate that others tolerate your faith, but that there is a preference that you should keep your religious views to yourself? How do you respond to these messages?

❗ Phil commented that we can start to think that 'human wisdom is all we need.' The apostle Paul counters that thought, by highlighting that the effectiveness of the gospel isn't a result of someone being a clever, articulate or convincing preacher. Phil encouraged us to 'just tell the story of Jesus'.

🗨️ What is one story about Jesus, that you find in the gospels, which has been a long-term favourite for you? Why? What has been the enduring message of that story, for you?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ted.com/watch/tedx-talks>

<sup>2</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p52.

❗ One of the points Phil made is that we must never be ashamed of the gospel, because it is the only way that people come to Christ. While there are a certain amount of people who have come to Christ through the ministry of famous evangelists, there are probably many more people who have become Christians through the ministry of ordinary people who are involved in youth ministry, Sunday School, Scripture teaching and chaplaincy roles. Often, the people who are most effective in ministry, are very ordinary people.

🗣️ Who was one person, who had a significant influence on your decision to follow Jesus? What do you remember about them and their relationship with you? What do you remember about their message?

❗ In 2 Cor 4:3-4, the apostle Paul commented that those who reject the gospel, have a spiritual 'veil' over their eyes which keeps them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. In 1 Cor 1:21, Paul says that we don't come to know God through the wisdom of the world. Instead, he prays, in Eph 1:17, that God "may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him." We can only come to know God, as the Spirit reveals God to us. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes, enlightens us and reveals Jesus to us. It is the Spirit that is at work in the conversion process, firstly by enabling the speaker with courage to speak about what God has done (Rom 15:18-19, Acts 4:31) and by enabling the listener to hear and accept the message. "those whom the Spirit of God touches and convicts, from whatever ethnic background, will find in the cross both godly wisdom and power to transform their lives (v. 24)."<sup>3</sup>

🗣️ Read the following verses from 1 Pet 3:13-17. What attitudes and behaviours should we adopt, as we seek to live out our Christian lives and share our faith? Why do we not need to be fearful about how others will respond to our message?

*<sup>13</sup> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threat; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

🗣️ Re-read 1 Cor 1:22-25, then consider the following two quotes by different commentators. Paul talked about us being saved by "grace through faith, that no one can boast". (Eph 2:9) We can't expend any effort to achieve salvation. We can't rationalise the gospel or make sense of it, in order for it to be cognitively grasped. It is all a gift of God. What insights do you gain from these quotes?

"People never have acclaimed the gospel as a masterpiece of wisdom. To the natural man it does not make sense. Paul was not unaware of what he was up against as he preached the gospel. *What was preached* (the *kérygma*) is the content of the proclamation. It is not merely the fact that men preach the gospel that is 'foolish'; it is the gospel itself, the message that God saves us through a crucified Saviour. People do not receive salvation by exercising wisdom. Salvation comes to *those who believe* (the present tense points to a continuing faith)."<sup>4</sup>

"In contrast to both Jews and Gentiles, Paul preaches the paradoxical notion of a crucified God. This apparently powerless and foolish deity allowed himself to be killed by Romans - a scandal to Jews and foolishness to pagans. Yet this crucified messiah is both the wisdom and power of God for salvation for believers, so that salvation would not be the result of human effort or wisdom. Thus the foolishness of God outstrips human wisdom and the weakness of God exceeds human strength."<sup>5</sup>

**HOMEWORK:** Don't stop memorising Scripture and hiding God's word in your heart.

Rom 1:16-17 *<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."*

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

<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, C. (1994). *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. p53.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, L. (1985). *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p50-51.

<sup>5</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1995). *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. p113.