

Bible Study 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 Leaders' notes

1. When someone famous becomes a Christian, they are often asked to speak at big church services and rallies, and have their testimonies published in Christian media. Why do you think this happens? Are there any potential problems with it?

There's no right or wrong just yet, but hopefully it might be suggested that there's no difference between a celebrity being converted and a 'no-body'. Also, newly converted people might also quickly fall away – better to let someone, especially a celebrity, grow in maturity before holding them up as the model of Christianity.

2. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.** The context in Corinth was internal quarrels threatening to break up their unity in Christ. The issue here was their understanding of the gospel message – its proclamation and its effect. At stake was that the cross of Christ might be “emptied of its power” (v.17). Two things are essential with the gospel message: i) the content (the cross of Christ), and ii) the way it is communicated (not with words of human wisdom). The way we live together as Christians is itself a fruit of the gospel. How they were behaving was impacting the message itself – introducing human wisdom to its proclamation. If this happens, the gospel itself will cease to have any power / impact in their lives or in anyone else's. This is the context for the rest of the chapter.

3. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.** What is the connection between v.18 and the verses before?

Having just spoken of the risk of 'emptying the cross of its power', Paul reminds them that the power of the cross is different to what the world thinks power is. To the world the gospel is foolishness – it does nothing. But to believers, they have experienced in person its power – to save sinners. It seems that Paul is warning the Corinthians against thinking like the world they've been saved out of.

4. Why does Paul say “those who are being saved”? Does this take away from Christian assurance?
(eg “no one will snatch them out of my hand” Jn 10:28)

Those who are being saved are also those who have been saved and those who will be saved – the New Testament speak of all three senses in salvation. It is a reminder that we must (and will) all persevere to the end (cf Col 2:6). This is an issue that will come up again in the letter; but it seems the Corinthians were in danger of presuming on their salvation and living in a way that stopped them continuing as they began – by faith in the message of the cross alone.

5. **Read Isa 29:1-14 (or vv13-14).** Who were the intelligent and the wise? What was the implication for the Corinthians?

Isaiah was referring to Israel in their unbelief, not the pagan nations. God's people must never presume on their relationship with God but continue to trust him in faith and obedience. Quarrelling Corinthians (and all of us) take care!

6. If Paul could so accurately identify what unbelievers wanted (v22), why didn't he give it to them?
Wouldn't this have led to many more people being saved?

No!! This is the whole point – miracles and human wisdom have never saved anyone. God has ensured it. If it comes down to our demands, our perceptions and insights, then we have a hand in saving ourselves. The problem is that we are all spiritually dead and can do nothing. We are enemies of God and so powerless to help ourselves before him. But the gospel continues to save any – whether Jew or non-Jew – when they put their trust in it.

7. Read through this passage again and make a list of all the times Paul refers to what God does, and all the times he refers to what we do in salvation. Comment on what you find.

*God: v.18 does the saving; v.19-20 renders human wisdom useless to save; v21 Has the gospel preached, saves those who believe it; 24, 26 calls sinners to salvation; v.27-28 chose those whom he saved; v30 makes Christ to be our righteousness, holiness & redemption. Us: v.18 perishing, v21 did not know God through human wisdom, ie did everything to deserve judgement. ** Believe what was told about Christ (NB reactive not proactive)*

Salvation is ALL of God – even what we “do” is in response to what God has done (sending Jesus, preaching gospel, calling and choosing us).

8. Do vv26-28 mean that the Corinthians (and all Christians) must be social misfits with no earthly status or qualifications?

Absolutely not! It's that those things are completely irrelevant in God's work of salvation – and therefore, they must stay irrelevant in the life of the saved. You can have human qualifications, but don't use them to rank one Christians over another – all are equal in God's sight, and so must be our life together.

9. In the context of this passage, what does v.31 mean? In what ways might we struggle to do it? How can we encourage each other to do it?

Don't find your significance among Christians or in life in general in the things that unbelieving people do (looks, careers, children, wealth, talents etc). Ask God for discernment, admit where you stumble, pray for hearts that glory in what's of eternal value, guard against competitiveness and jealousies, ...