



This Sunday we finished our topical series at Magdalen Road, looking at the counter-cultural 'shape' of the Christian life – especially that 'the way down is the way up'. Why is it that God says we must be weak to be strong, foolish to be wise, go through suffering to enjoy glory, be slaves to enjoy true freedom?

This week, as we ended the series we considered what it means to be wise in the Lord's eyes. We were at the start of Paul's first letter to Corinth, examining his ministry in that area, and especially his defense of his weak preaching style whilst there. We noted that between 1v26-2v5 there are 2 kinds of wisdom being explored – a worldly wisdom that sees things through the lenses and mindset of the world, and God's wisdom, which means he does things his way and for his glory. This can be seen in the 2 'so-thats' in 1v29 and 2v5. The reason Paul does it this way is so that we will not boast in ourselves, or put faith in ourselves, but rather in him.

**1v26-31: God calls foolish people: so that we cannot boast in ourselves.**

Corinth was a city of hierarchy, where strong and impressive people were paraded and followed. But God, rather than using Corinthian methods, worked through the margins: Paul reminds them that not many of them were from wise, influential or noble backgrounds. Some obviously were, but not many. And so God does not use the world's methods for fulfilling his plan, rather to shame the wise and the strong (both now and in eternity) he uses the foolish, weak and lowly. He does it (v29) so that we cannot boast in ourselves, however (v31) we can boast in him.

**2v1-5: God uses foolish preachers: so that we can only have faith in Him.**

Paul's outlining of the weakness of the Corinthian church (and indeed the message that brought them life if you glance back to the verses prior to that) is not simply theory for them. It was a very deliberate method that he used whilst in Corinth. The message he brought to them was matched by the messenger that he was for them. He might have been expected to use the rhetoric etc that he had been trained in, but he very deliberately did not (and neither did he need to), so that they would know the fruit that came was not from Paul's brilliance, but rather from God's power.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

What aspects of your faith make you most likely to be embarrassed about being a Christian?  
If you were to do an advert for church, what would it look like? What sort of stuff would you include?

1v26-31

How does he describe the Corinthians here? How do you picture the Corinthian church? Why does it say that God does it in this way

2v1-5

How does Paul describe his ministry in Corinth?

How did he feel?

Why did he do it this way?

What was the outcome?

So what do we learn about the message? How might this encourage us?

What implications does this have for those who teach the bible to others?

Paul very deliberately changed his method whilst in Corinth so that they would not be compare him and assume he was like every other travelling preacher. His example is an interesting one – what implications might it have for us in our seeking to witness for Christ?

Extras...

What place has apologetics etc in our evangelism? What are the good things about apologetics? What are the dangers?