



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **“The Wisdom of God”**

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1 Corinthians 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. 19 For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” 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?”*

Sometimes I wonder about the direction of my life. What my life is centered on. How I interact with my kids. Am I impacting the future? Am I making a difference? What’ll happen if things go bad? Maybe you wonder too. Because this Christianity stuff seems fluffy sometimes. Irrelevant sometimes. After all, did you ever look at it and think “How bizarre?” How bizarre...that those people who go to that place all sit in front of a death-instrument, and are inspired by it? Do you know that this instrument of death is literally the tallest piece of construction on our property and in all of Dexter, (thanks to the old Catholic church)? What is it about the cross?

At my Grandpa Hook’s funeral, when I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, we sang this song, and something about it grabbed me. *“On a hill far away, stood an old, rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame. And I love that old cross, where the dearest and best, for a world of lost sinners was slain. So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down. I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it one day for a crown.”* How bizarre...

Here’s something I’ve noticed: In the media, you just don’t hear much about the cross. You don’t hear much about it when Christians or churches are in the news. You don’t hear much about it from most of the television preachers. Some churches get rid of the cross in their worship. It’s too alienating. But you know what? The cross is supposed to be alienating—that’s the point!

Think about this: When Paul wrote this letter to the Christ-followers in Corinth, 99.9% of the world thought the cross meant one thing: a publicly displayed torture & death instrument, mostly for slaves. Execution & humiliation. It was capital punishment, used by several empires from the Persians, to the Romans, till it was abolishing by Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. We read about the cross, and it’s like no big deal. But when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the cross meant one thing: a symbol of Roman power. Roman conquest. Roman dominance. Shame. Grossness. Criminals. Insurgents. Over those 900 years, 10s of 1,000s lost their lives this way.

Andy Stanley asks this question: Can you imagine if 2000 years ago, somehow we were able to gather people: the slaves of that time, those who had to clean up after crucifixions, those who had to drag the dead bodies of the Christians killed in the Roman persecutions, and the parents of the men and women who were crucified for worshiping Christ, not Nero. And imagine if we were to gather them: 1000s of Christians living in the shadows, fighting to stay alive there, afraid of death. And we could say “Someday, crosses will hang all over the world that don’t represent the power of Rome, but represent one single crucifixion out of all those 10s of 1,000s. Do you know the story? Basically a public figure for 3 years, betrayed by his own people, whose message affected the entire world. And one day His name would be so big, His power felt in

so many places in the world, that these crosses don't represent death, or Rome, but they are there as a reminder of this one man's message, His death, & His resurrection. There will be millions and millions of people who place their faith in Him.

One day, the Roman cross will not have anything to do with Rome; but instead with this single figure. Years from now, people will gather together in winter, and they *will* name Caesar Augustus, but only as a tiny part in the birth of this Other. And years from now millions of people will visit Rome, but the main attraction will be to see the things built in honor of a Jewish fisherman named Peter who followed this man. They will visit the place where 1,000s of Christians were crucified; and they won't remember the Emperors, they won't remember Rome. They will remember those who lived and died there, in glory to that man Peter followed. Countless people will wear crosses (images of torture instruments) around their necks...and they will *only* reflect the crucifixion of one person, the man they call Jesus."

Would those ancient people have believed you? No. They would say, "You don't understand. Rome is forever. The Roman Empire is forever. It *is* POWER." They would say "Are you *kidding*? A Jewish carpenter? A single crucifixion changing the meaning of crucifixion for the whole world? Galilee & Judea are under the heel of Rome! I don't know who you are, or where you've been, but this will never happen." We *know* they'd say that, because I think if we're honest, we'd say the same thing. We say it by our words and actions every day. WE are the future. WE engineer the future. WE have wisdom. WE have power.

And yet today, this cross keeps us uncomfortable: maybe there is this ancient story; and it is not about us. The cross means but one thing. Even in Rome today, where 1,000s of Christians were killed, the cross represents one single thing: the power of God (that the rest of the world calls foolish).

If it *is* foolish, then why is it that His message lasted beyond His life & spread around the world? Especially when you remember that 25 years after Jesus died, there was a 4-6 year war called the Jewish War, which destroyed the Temple and scattered the Jews. On August the 6<sup>th</sup>, 70AD, the last sacrifice was made in the Temple, and that was the end of Judaism as it existed in the Old Testament. The context for everything Jesus taught regarding the Temple & the Lamb was destroyed. The context for everything Jesus had to say vanished. But today, there are crosses everywhere, that don't represent death and humiliation, but the transformative power of God through Jesus. It just doesn't make sense. There were many leaders who claimed to be the messiah, who raised armies and money. And every time the leader was executed, the followers dissipated. But not this time...

SOMETHING was different about Jesus. HIS CROSS. Here's why we're here today: Why his message didn't evaporate: at the core, was a brand new kind of love, and a resurrection. A radical love, and a resurrection. His love coupled with his resurrection catapulted 1000s of people outside of Jerusalem, to the world. Foolishness to those who are perishing...but in reality, the power of the cross is the wisdom of God.

Jesus said to his followers in John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (New = strange. We think what's new? But to them it was new). And it was strange. Love one another. As I have loved you, not as you've been loved by others, not with a conditional love, but you must love one another as I have loved you. And Jesus served them. He did something so unusual, they carried it with them. He became like the lowliest servant and washed their feet. I think this is what the church has forgotten. When we come back to it, we are strong, we impact culture, rather than react to it. When we forget this kind of suffering love, we lose our center. When we measure ourselves by other things or other people, we miss it. When we're not willing to look foolish, we lose it. Jesus said it: 35 "BY THIS ONE THING...everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another." Not by your church attendance, or your knowledge, or your programs. But by THIS: Everyone will know you're my followers if you love one another. The primary thing that marked Christians in the first century, was this love. Radical, serving, sacrificial, weird, never-seen-it-before LOVE.

**And He showed them that every single person has value.** Every person, no matter what, has value. If an outsider came to the meeting, they would see slaves, they would see rich, they would see poor people, they'd see children, all kinds of people gathered together. And there seemed to be this equality that was *not* forced, but natural; when everyone was given value. There has been this thread throughout history. And Jesus would

say “I want you to love your enemies, because they have value to your heavenly Father.” MEN love your wives. We think “No big deal.” But then it was. When we look at other cultures around the world today, and in the 1<sup>st</sup> century culture, we see women were just one notch above a slave. But in the teaching of that moment, the status of women had been elevated to a place it hadn’t ever been before.

Paul also wrote Masters, you treat your slaves with respect. Do justly by your slaves. *Your* Master, your Savior, and *their* Master, their Savior is the same. You do not own them. They are owned by your heavenly Father. Treat them well. This had the potential to wreak havoc with the entire Roman culture. What is normal to us was radical in the first century. When people met people empowered by the message of this cross, there was this value they gave men, and women, and children, and lowly people. It gave value and rights and recognition. It is through the power of the cross of Jesus for all people. It was this radical, bold message of love.

This is so important because there are things today you don’t like. And we talk about voting, and petitions, and legal action. And there’s a time to do all those things. But here’s what we know works. Here’s what we know changes culture. Here’s what we know gets the attention of a world who so desperately needs this kind of understanding of human life: It’s this radical, radically irrational, unusual, unconditional love for one another, shown by our Master who gave His all. The reason I know it works, is because there is a cross hanging here. And there. And all over the world. The message & the movement should have died with Jesus.

But 3 days after He died, it gave power to everything He taught. And it sent 100s of his followers into the streets where He walked, and the message was “You killed the Author of life, but God raised him from the dead, and we are witnesses of this.” And they told their story, and they loved like crazy.

Amish people—Means horse and buggy, difficult, long line of traffic, etc. A couple high school boys were boozing it up, threw a rock in the back of a buggy. They didn’t know that it was a young couple who had just had a baby. The boys killed the baby. The Amish acknowledged the pain, but the community came together and said “We must come together, love our enemies, and forgive.” If Jesus Christ is not Lord, then their life makes no sense. But if Jesus Christ IS Lord, their life makes perfect sense. It bears witness to the power of God represented in this cross.

While it’s true that we benefitted from the architecture & history of Rome, we have benefitted far more from the death and resurrection of a living Savior whose cross changed everything. And God is still changing lives. And God is still calling young men and women, and old men and women, and rich men and women, and poor men and women, to center their lives on Him, and love like crazy, and to give of ourselves for others, and to sacrifice our lives to Him, that we might be raised up with Him in resurrection power.

## **STUDY GUIDE for 1 Corinthians 3 - 7**

**Monday: Read 1 Corinthians 3. Division in the Church.** Each faction within the church thought it was more spiritual than the others. Paul defines “worldly” vs. “spiritual” people, explains how people grow toward Christ, not individual leaders. If you’re honest, are you an “infant in Christ?” What evidence is missing in your life? Do something about it today! What is a way you could help build “God’s temple around here?”

**Tuesday: Read 1 Corinthians 4. Apostles of Christ.** Paul explains that leaders are simply “servants of Christ”. Jesus will evaluate their work, based on faithfulness, not gifts. Your gifts might not be appreciated by the world; nevertheless God values His people using their gifts faithfully. Do you model a life that you say you believe? How would Paul respond to the popular idea “God just wants you happy, rich, and successful”?

**Wednesday: Read 1 Corinthians 5. Discipline & Judging.** How do you react when a fellow believer persists in sinning? Paul is concerned about the Corinthian’s indifference toward a man involved in incest. The whole community is called to be holy, not corrupted by what Scripture calls sin. We are not called to judge unbelievers. We’re not called to withdraw, but to share Christ. We are called to judge those who call

themselves Christ-followers but still practice sin. In what areas of discipline are you overly judgmental? Too permissive? Inconsistent? In what area are you most helpful?

**Thursday: Read 1 Corinthians 6. Lawsuits.** Believers in lawsuits against each other are told to let communities of believers settle the disputes, rather than pagan courts. What bugs Paul most are the lawsuits in the first place. Paul warns about repeated sin that reduces the person to an urge or an emotion or the sin itself. Notice verse 11: “And that is what some of you were...” One motto of our congregation is “No perfect people allowed. Jesus accepts everybody just where they are. But He loves us too much to keep us that way.” Do you agree? Sexual Immorality (12-20). Paul states a believer can do anything. But our body is designed to serve and glorify God. Thus we choose to serve holiness & righteousness, not sin. If your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, how can you begin a “temple maintenance program?”

**Friday: Read 1 Corinthians 7. Sex & Marriage.** This is a beautiful description of sex, love, and marriage. Notice the mutuality of verse 3-5. Some thought marriage was bad, but Paul says differently. Paul responds to some believers who left non-Christian spouses, and some who were left when they became serious about their faith in Christ. Paul is pretty specific. This isn't intended to cover every marital situation. But the stress is on faithfulness & grace. How has your status (married or single) helped you serve Christ more effectively? Whatever your current situation, what is one way you can show “undivided devotion” to God?