

1st Corinthians



Lesson 2: Wisdom of God vs. Wisdom of Men

Suggested Responses

Suggested responses are provided for the purpose of guiding group discussion safely within the bounds of Church teaching. Small group discussion leaders should become familiar with the suggested responses prior to group discussion. In order to make the most of this study, all participants are encouraged to respond to the questions on their own before reading the suggested responses.

1. Ultimately, God desires to reveal himself to us fully so that we may become partakers in his very nature. This intimate knowledge of God is beyond human reason; it is only accessible through faith, which is defined by the Catechism as “a personal adherence of the whole man to God who reveals himself” (CCC 176). Only in faith, then, and by the grace of God, are we able to receive God’s self-revelation of himself and in this way enter into the relationship that he desires us to have with him.
2. God’s fullest revelation of himself is found in his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ—“his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely” (CCC 102) and in whom dwells “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). The Holy Spirit is given for the express purpose of “reveal[ing] to men who Jesus is,” and “[of making] known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance.” St. Paul teaches us in 1 Cor. 2:9-11 that “the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God”; so the Holy Spirit comprehends the thoughts of God in order that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. In this capacity, the Holy Spirit doesn’t speak of himself, but always glorifies Christ; for, as Jesus said, “All things that the Father has are mine: therefore [the Holy Spirit] shall take of mine and shall show it unto you” (John 16:13, 14).
3. Far from being a detriment to his mission in Corinth, Paul’s “weakness” was the means through which the real work of God became manifest. As stated in Points to Ponder: “Paul’s success here at Corinth was the result not of his own eloquence, but of the power of God working through his weakness to the conversion of souls.” This is why we are told in the Catechism that God “displays his power at its height by freely forgiving sins,” and that Jesus “gave scandal above all when he identified his merciful conduct toward sinners with God’s own attitude toward them.”
4. By way of contrast, the “spirit of the world” cannot perceive or understand the mind of God because its focus is on worldly things, fueled by the flesh and the carnal mind apart from the revelation of God. The “spirit of the world” is also revealed as a person: the Devil who blinds and deceives the world. Regarding the dissension and divisions in the Corinthian church, St. Paul knows full well that the root cause of the problem lies in the fleshliness and worldly attitude of the Corinthians; the solution, of course, lies in surrender to the Holy Spirit, who alone is able to “nourish, heal, organize, build, animate, and sanctify the Church.”
5. In his declaration to “know nothing among you except Jesus Christ”, St. Paul is not suggesting there is anything wrong with intellectual pursuits and knowledge per se. Every gift and talent that a person has—whether intellectual or otherwise—is God-given. But, in order for our various gifts and talents to bring glory to God and bear the good fruit of love within His Body, the Church, they must be subjected to and directed by the Wisdom of God and His Holy Spirit. Otherwise, our gifts and talents will follow the direction of human and worldly wisdom, which leads to dissension and division, such as occurred in the church at Corinth.
6. In the best interests of everyone, then, God expects us to give him first place in all things—to love him “with all [our] heart...all [our] soul...all [our] mind, and with all [our] strength” It is only in the light of Christ that we can come to understand our various gifts and talents—whether many or few, great or small—and invest them in a manner that will truly glorify God.

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7. This verse does two things: 1) it informs us that in times past no one knew the mind of the Lord, but through the Holy Spirit we have a fuller understanding of the things God chooses to reveal to us; and 2) it teaches the Corinthians that Jesus Christ is God because Paul equates the mind of Christ with the mind of God in the Old Testament.