

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Title: Christ, the Wisdom of God

Truth: The gospel glorifies God by means of the foolish and weak.

Date/Location: Sunday February 2, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

To be a divided church is not the way of God. The cross of Christ unifies Christians together in a way that the world's ideas cannot. Yet the Corinthians were enamored with the ideas of philosophy and rhetoric and other worldly concepts such that they began to divide into factions on the basis of that mindset. Paul is helping them to correct their thinking by setting the gospel on one hand over against the "wisdom" of the world on the other.

Notice the contrasts set against one another in our passage:

The message of the cross is **foolish** to the unsaved. That means they consider it moronic and nonsensical. The message of the cross is the **power of God** to the saved.

There are two groups of people: those who are **perishing**, and those who are **being saved**. That is always the case. A person is in either one of those groups. There are no other options.

There is the **wisdom of this world**. And yet it has been turned to **foolishness** by God.

I. Wisdom of Man vs. the Wisdom of God, v. 18-25

A. **The unsaved** view the cross as foolishness. Christ crucified does not satisfy the Jewish desire for a powerful sign authenticating the message of God (Matt. 16:1-4; Luke 11:16, 29-30; John 2:14-22). It seemed to them that the cross was an ignominious end for a criminal, and therefore no sign at all.

Christ crucified also does not satisfy the Greeks' demand for wisdom. To them, it is foolishness. A man living and then dying on a Roman cross—that is supposed to have some powerful effect? In one case, they pictured their contempt for Christianity by depicting the body of a man on the cross with the head of a donkey.

B. **The saved** understand the cross is not ultimately a sign of weakness, but of power. The cross now is not emblematic merely of death of a man, but of the life-giving substitutionary sacrifice of the God-man, who rose victorious from the dead and thus conquered sin and death. Our most

mortal enemies—sin and its consequences of physical and eternal death—have been defeated. This makes the minor victories of technology and social reform and education and improvements in housing and personal wealth look very small by comparison.

B. Verse 19 is a quotation of Isaiah 29:14. See also Jer. 8:9 and 1 Cor. 3:19. This is a promise of the future destruction of the wisdom of the so-called wise. It is a thing that is fulfilled whenever God intervenes in society with—in Isaiah’s case—a calamitous judgment, or—in the church era—the revelation of the way of salvation. God’s actions show that man’s approach is entirely inadequate.

C. The apostle asks where are the wise people of this age. He is taunting them because they have been rendered obsolete. God **planned** His gospel program to render the wisdom of the world as foolishness. He purposefully designed the way of salvation so that it would show up the world’s so-called “wisdom.” Eventually it will appear openly for all to see this plain fact.

If the wise had a “leg up” on salvation, then they would think it came due to their innate cleverness. This would exalt man and his mind. As God designed it, however, worldly wisdom is actually a “leg down” compared to the simple child-like faith of a believer. It is those who *believe* who are saved, not those who are *worldly-wise*, brilliant, educated, powerful, politically well-placed, etc.

Christ and His work (under the shorthand “crucifixion”) are the true sign from God and the true wisdom of God.

D. Romans 1:18-32 shows what human wisdom has done with the knowledge of God, and how it has perverted it into something awful. Proverbs 14:12 tells us about this.

II. God Chooses things Foolish to the World to Glorify Himself, v. 26-31

A. The fact is that among those Christians in Corinth, the vast majority of them were not in the “wise” crowd as viewed by the world. Not many were mighty, or noble. Rather, the majority of them were servants/slaves, people in the lower class of society. This fact tends to exalt the humble—God has chosen to reveal Himself to US! But it also humbles the exalted—my riches and noble birth and intellect are not saving.

B. God does it this way on purpose. As with verse 19, He has chosen foolish things in the world to shame the wise. Note, it is those who the world

views as foolish and lowly that are being spoken of here. It is not that God is saying “you are fools.” No, in fact, believers are far wiser than their unbelieving teachers and philosophers. But the culture doesn’t see us that way. It sees us as intellectually poor, backwards people who are stuck in a time of Victorian mores who actually need to be rescued from the ancient error of a crucified Jewish rabbi. Worse yet, the society is beginning to turn against Christians as not mere foolish, but as evil.

- C. The contrasts keep coming: God chooses weak to shame the mighty; God chooses base/despised/insignificant things to bring to nothing the high/loved/exalted things.
- D. verse 29 opens with “that.” The designed purpose of all the above is that no flesh should boast in the presence of God. No man can arise before God and lay claim to greatness or boast of his great works, how God has to let him into the eternal heaven for his righteous merit. In fact, he is nothing. He is a sinner, with no godly wisdom in himself, who in pride rejected the way of God. He is not worthy of glory! In fact, he is only worthy of judgment. Glory comes through humility, not self-glorification.
- E. Instead of humans boasting in God’s presence, the point is that Christ Jesus gets the honor (v. 30). He stands in for us and becomes our wisdom. This is a summary word for the three words that follow. He also is our:
 - 1. Righteousness – the great exchange is our sin for His righteousness. God accounts the righteousness of Christ to us when we believe.
 - 2. Sanctification – the righteousness of imputation does not make our behavior better in and of itself. God does something more—namely, He purifies us. Christ provides this to us as well.
 - 3. Redemption – Christ releases us from the bondage of sin and forgives us the demerit of our sin.

Human wisdom cannot produce any of those three things. If you want those, and thus true wisdom, there is one place to find it, and that is Christ.

- F. Anyone who boasts should do so in Christ Jesus the Lord, not in him- or herself. See Jeremiah 9:23-24. The issue is not how smart or rich you are; it is that you understand and know God.

Conclusion

With all the world’s wisdom and knowledge, it cannot come up with its own way of salvation. Human wisdom cannot fix man’s sin or provide ultimate

rescue from the horrid condition of death and devastation on the face of our planet. Education cannot solve the world's problems. Money doesn't fix it. Authoritarianism doesn't solve it. Reform doesn't improve it. Psychology cannot repair it. Medicine cannot heal it. Welfare only disguises the problem. All the world's works-based religions don't provide victory over rebellion against God. Multiplying legislation provides no hope either, for it only serves to add more sin to the sin we already have.

In fact, not only does the world's wisdom *not* fix the human condition, it often makes it worse. Consider the wisdom of the world in its approach to over-population and unwanted people: murdering unborn babies. Billions of them. Or, how about the wisdom of the world in constructing a utopian society: communism. The death toll from that in the last century or so is 100 million. How about the misery under such a governmental system? It takes a resource-rich nation like Venezuela and impoverishes it within a few years. How did fascism work out? This ideology directly led to the deaths of millions in concentration camps and the Second World War. How about secular education? Pushing God *out* means that worldly educators have to cast about for some fiction to tell their students—like evolution. When you turn away from the true answers and throw God out of the system, all that is left is made up stuff, which is not much different than worshipping a golden calf. It cannot move or speak or do anything.

Where the problem of human wisdom is most acute is in the realm of spiritual/religious matters. The seemingly diverse results of human wisdom have created the world's hundreds of religious systems. Yet in their supposed diversity, they produce a broadly similar approach to God in which man is sovereign and makes the ultimate decisions about his soul, usually by good works to achieve merit.

Through worldly wisdom, you *cannot* be saved, you cannot be forgiven, you cannot know God, the world's problems cannot be fixed—all these are impossible on the strength of human intellect. Human smarts and “righteous” works are but filthy rags before God when it comes to relating to Him. They have their place—but not in boasting. Their proper place is in service to God.

But salvation in all its aspects is available in Christ, despite how the world sees Him and His work. This is to the glory of God in Christ.

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