

“Where is the Wise Man?”

1st Corinthians 1:18-25

I. Wisdom of the world, the wisdom of God.

A. *“Can you define what a woman is?”*

1. Characteristics of man’s wisdom.
 - a. It is complex.
 - b. Centered on the thoughts of man.
 - c. As it evolves, the more complex it becomes.
 - d. Always in flux.
 - e. Based on feelings, opinions, man’s reasoning, preferences.
2. Characteristics of God’s wisdom.
 - a. It is very simple.
 - b. It is singular—Only God.
 - c. It is stable—never in flux.
 - d. It is a result of His infinite attributes.

II. Context: The church in Corinth and the world around it.

A. Corinth had a massive population density.

1. Resulting in diversity of philosophical and intellectual ideas.
2. Cultural influences.

B. The Corinthian church was a speck in a sea of intellectual diversity.

1. Located near the intellectual center of the world, Athens. The church faced immense cultural pressures.
2. In light of this reality, Paul addresses the church the differences between man’s wisdom and God’s wisdom.
3. The Christian faith is foolishness to the outsider.
 - a. It is difficult to be a Christian in a hostile world!.

III. Paul's message to the church and to us.

A. He wants to lower our expectations.

1. Christianity always has and always will look foolish to the outside world.
2. Don't assume all people need is more information and they will believe the gospel...their eyes must be opened by the Holy Spirit.
3. The amount of people who believe or disbelieve something has no bearing on its truthfulness.
4. **"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing..."**
 - a. The cross was more than a painful punishment, it was designed to humiliate, shame, and degrade.
 - b. *"How foolish to worship one on a cross!"*

B. He wants to adjust our minds.

1. The cross is not foolishness, the world's wisdom is foolishness.
 - a. Man is limited, fallen, finite, fickle and fallible, has infinite knowledge, perfect knowledge, unchangeable, stable, dependable—*why would you ever choose the wisdom of man over God?*
2. How does man know something is true?
 - a. Through his thoughts and feelings.
 - b. Science? Science—"a consensus of human thought." – Scientific American

III. Why make the adjustments?

- #### A. There is salvation through the message of the cross, guaranteed by the power of Almighty God!

“Where is the Wise Man?” Pastoral Notes

1st Corinthians 1:18-25

My friend Ben James (perhaps sitting out there this morning) sent this to me, I don't think he will mind me sharing it with you... in light of 1st Corinthians:

A free spirit parrot lived in the loft of a tavern. On a Saturday night after closing time he flew outside to stretch his wings. Being tired he mistakenly flew inside a nearby church and perched in the loft. He was awakened by singing and peering down he thought “New entertainment”.

The preacher stepped to the pulpit... “Hmmm, new bartender!”

The pews began to fill and he thought, “Same old crowd”...

Ben adds *The Corinthians series will keep telling us we are... “the same old crowd”....AMEN!*

1st Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to an imperfect church...full of imperfect “Saints”... brothers and sisters in Christ who should be in process of becoming more and more like Christ... but they're stuck... and the apostle Paul is trying to unstick them.

The culture around them has not crept in... it leaped in... and what should be a unified, God glorifying body of Christ had become a fractured, disjointed body of Christ... before we think critically...too lowly of the Corinthian church... we need to look at ourselves...

We are all sinners in conflict with the world and culture around us...and the culture has influenced each and every one of us to varying degrees....Paul is calling us all out of being “the same old crowd.”

Turn with me to 1st Corinthians 1... we will be reading verses 18-25...we will be spending our time on just one of those verses...verse 18...which introduces us to a vital topic that runs all the way through chapter two... if I was to make a short list of the most relevant Biblical passages regarding Christianity and culture today... this would certainly be at the front of the list...

It was these verses that a few months ago decided for me to go through 1st Corinthians...please follow as I read:

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

As far as the Christian is concerned... there are only two types of wisdom in the world... there is man's wisdom... and there is God's wisdom... and the two are polar opposites.... And exists in great tension.... In fact they war with each other.

Last March of this year was I believe one of the most revealing moments of our current times... revealing the wisdom of man... What lead up to this moment was president Biden's nomination for his choice for the then vacant seat of the Supreme Court.... Admittedly he specifically searched for an individual that satisfied two minority classifications of 1. Being black and 2. Being a woman...the latter making all this even more ironic.

So he nominated who has since become our ninth Supreme Court justice Ketanji Brown Jackson... he forwarded her to the process of congressional hearings... Ketanji Jackson is a bright woman... Harvard law school grad... an extensive legal resume... the memorable senate hearing and the memorable moment in that hearing was when Senator Marsha Blackburn took the floor to question Ketanji Jackson

Blackburn asked whether Jackson believed there are differences in men and women, a question the nominee sidestepped.

Blackburn then asked, *"And can you provide a definition for the word 'woman?'"*

Jackson now famously responded, *"No, I can't."*

Blackburn retorted, *"You can't?"*

"Not in this context. I'm not a biologist," Jackson replied.

"So, you believe the meaning of the word 'woman' is so unclear and controversial that you can't give me a definition?" the Senator asked.

"Senator, in my work as a judge, what I do is, I address disputes. If there's a dispute about a definition, people make arguments, and I look at the law and I decide," Jackson said.

Of course... the question didn't reveal an ignorance within Jackson regarding the definition of a woman...she is far from an ignorant woman...we know had she answered that question... however she answered it would cause a firestorm somewhere...because...

If you remember... the hearings took place at the same time Lia Thomas, the transgender "male to woman" swimmer was making headlines as he/she dominated the collegiate women's swimming competitions...

Which followed some years of "Bathroom bills" being presented to states to restructure men and women designated bathrooms to become genderless... we see the results of that even here in Moscow... a restaurant in town took down their men and women signs from the doors of their restrooms and replaced them with *"whatever"*— *Just wash your hands"*

And of course the concern over the overturning of Roe Vs Wade was amping up regarding the "rights of women"... the horrifying thought to many regarding the possibility of protecting the

life of unborn human beings over the rights a woman has over her OWN body..... all of these issues have been in the making for years to get them to such prominence and acceptance....

So for Jackson to define what a woman is....could have derailed the transgender movement... but to protect the transgender movement could have derailed the woman's movement...and the confused preferred pronoun movement....

Well... as the Philadelphia inquirer stated *"Defining a woman is difficult for everyone"....* Or the Atlantic magazine... *When it comes to defining what a woman is... there is no simple answer.*

When it comes to the wisdom of man... there really are no simple answers... you see the characteristic of man's wisdom is that it is complex... it can't help it... man's wisdom is centered on the thoughts of man... and every man has his own thoughts...millions of thoughts... as man's wisdom evolves the more complicated it all gets...Man's wisdom is always in flux... always changing...based on feelings... opinions... man's reasoning... preferences...

Man cannot see the ultimate destination of his wisdom... in man's quest for perfect equity among all people... perhaps they could not foresee that down the road would mean to eventually redefine everything about what it means to be human...so as not to exclude anyone... to have perfect equity... the very definition of what is a man... what is a woman... what is a human... must be reconfigured if not eliminated....

God's wisdom in contrast is simple... very simple... there is only One... God...He never changes... He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow...God's wisdom is NOT in flux...it is stable... it is solid... it is a rock.

God's wisdom is not based on emotions or feeling... opinions or preferences... **God's wisdom is a result of His infinite attributes.**

Being all knowing, all powerful, being the designer and creator of the universe and all that's in it...His wisdom is perfect...His wisdom is transcendent...it goes far beyond the limitations of man... yet the world hates God's wisdom... Man's wisdom and God's wisdom are at war with each other.

First Corinthians 3:19 says, **"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight."** And verse 20 says, **"The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."**...The world looks at God's wisdom as ignorant stupidity... There is obviously a difference between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom....and that is what our passage is all about.

Let's get it into context... Remember that Corinth is a major city of commerce... its location is ideal for international trade... because of that it is a wealthy city... a melting pot of diversity... Last Sunday night in our ethics class, Michael Camin gave us some figures of population density of various cities here in the USA..

Los Angeles—8359 per sq mi

Boise, Id – 2888 per sq mi.

Moscow, Id.—3720 per sq mi. (6.9sq mi.)

Idaho—20 people per sq. mi.

Now consider this...I've had a hard time wrapping my brain around this... Corinth in Paul's day had a population density of 128,000! Per sq. mi...(7.8 sq. mi.).if you have an acre of land... imagine 200 people living on it...

So what?... imagine the diversity!... being just fifty miles from Athens... the intellectual center of the world...and that bled over to Corinth... Corinth had the Isthmian games... like the Olympics... but the favorite entertainment was to gather around a philosopher and listen to him... a philosopher in that day was like a movie star today... or a starting quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks...

They would pontificate on the big questions of life... *“why am I here...what am I to do?...where am I going?... does life have a purpose?... Is there a God or are there many god's... what happens when you die?”*...and hundreds of people would take it all in...

None of those questions had pat answers... it is estimated that there were no less than 50 different major philosophies and hundreds of minor philosophies circulating Athens and Corinth...all with a different take on those life's biggest questions... people began following their favorite philosopher...

Last week makes a little more sense doesn't it... why Paul addressed the problem of following their favorite pastor... Apollos, Paul, Cephas.... That's what they did in that day... grab an intellect and follow them!

also...in light of that population density...and diversity... think of how small the Corinthian church was...scholars estimate the church being somewhere between 40 and 150 people... all smashed between thousands.... so you have this new religion... Christianity... surrounded by this diverse plethora of philosophical beliefs...

It is no wonder being a Christian in Corinth was a difficult reality... it is no wonder the culture had infiltrated into the church... it is no wonder that the saints might be doubting the reality of the Christian message... the gospel of Jesus Christ....and it is not wonder Paul is writing this letter!

Certainly the Corinthian saints were grappling with the fact that they are in such a minority in their beliefs that they wonder if they are foolish to embrace them...How could the Corinthians

church not feel like a collection of misfits in society?... We can relate to some degree... can't we?

Let's face it... it's getting more and more difficult being a Christian in today's world...the world is becoming more and more hostile... more and more unaccepting of the Christian faith... as man's wisdom clashes with God's wisdom...God defines what a woman is!... there is a growing divide...the culture is getting more and more powerful and the church seems to be shrinking

The church is either embracing the culture around it becoming the culture in an attempt to be relevant and accepted resulting in being completely irrelevant yet marginally accepted.....or its isolating itself from the culture ...becoming outcasts... or it's closing its doors due to lack of interest...in all that... there is a tendency to doubt the Christian faith....

Part of the reason is that Christianity seems to be intellectually deficient... *how could anyone with any brains believe that stuff?...it doesn't really make any logical sense... there is little cognitive substance...*to believe it you have to check your brain at the door.

- We believe in an invisible God – you can't see Him, touch Him, hear Him... you can't empirically prove He exists...and He created the universe in six literal days.
- We believe in a world of spiritual beings... angels and demons...
- All sorts of miraculous interventions:
- We believe a donkey talked...
- We believe in seas splitting in two leaving dry land for God's chosen people to walk across...
- The sun stopped in the middle of the sky...
- We believe in thousands being fed a fish feast all from a boys lunch.
- People can rise from the dead....resurrected bodies.

And here's what really takes the cake... we believe that all people are headed to hell for their sins.... But that can be averted by accepting as your Lord and Savior... a man who was born from a virgin birth, lived a perfect life...and was nailed to a cross ... died there... was buried... and then in three days came out of His tomb and walked around for 40 days...walked through walls.... Then airlifted to heaven.

Beyond all that... we believe in a totally outdated moral and ethical system... so narrow minded... exclusive... archaic... just plain offensive to many... so dogmatic... thinking we're right and everyone else is wrong....so we think... *Why do we believe all that?*

Or maybe a bigger question... why is it that so many smart, intelligent, educated people don't believe in it?... *"If the Bible is true... if Jesus is God and He is the way the truth and the life... how come more people don't embrace Christianity?...am I being foolish?"*

We all have thoughts like this don't we?... well... these are the questions the Corinthian church was asking... *"why Paul, aren't any of these intellectual elites... these brilliant philosophers following Christ?"*....

Why is it that there is this small little group of Christ followers among this vast...gigantic sea of intelligent academic educated minds who don't think this Christianity makes any sense?

I think that question is what the apostle Paul is addressing in this passage... so Paul is wanting them... and us to make some adjustments in how we think about all this...adjustments in how we think while being a speck in a sea of hostility....This morning, three adjustments Paul wants us to make.... the first adjustment is:

1. He wants to adjust our expectations.

The first thing we need to remember... and this is what Paul is showing the church... is that barring the work of the Holy Spirit... **Christianity is ALWAYS going to look foolish to the outside world.**

(18)For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...

This was the case in 50ad... it has been the case throughout history... today... and until the end of time...*the word of the cross is foolishness to those outside of Christ...*Don't ever EXPECT it to be any different... If you're one of the fools who believes in the cross of Jesus... which I hope you are.... Let me add salt to your wounds.

That word we translated as *"foolish"* is the word *"moria"* (moor-ee-a) in the Greek...we get the word "moron" from it... so literally... anyone who embraces the word of the cross is a moron!... we are a church of morons!

apologist theologian Michael Krueger shed some great insight on what the apostle Paul is addressing here in this passage... *why does he spend so much time differentiating between God's wisdom and man's wisdom?*

Basically he said that the apostle understood that *we all have within us... deep inside us a nagging assumption... we don't even realize It's there... we all have a belief we don't realize we have about the condition of the world...*

Tucked deep back in our minds, so deep we don't even reflect on it... We think if something is true, most people will believe it... or to put it another way... **if most people believe something... it is probably true.**

Here's the rub... MOST PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.... Think of the poor Corinthian saints... maybe a hundred of them within 700,000 people...(200,000 slaves, 700,000 freeman). just a speck believe the gospel among a sea of unbelievers.... That's an assumption we make in the deep recesses of our minds.

So the logical conclusion would be.... *Therefore the gospel is not true!...it's foolishness!* you know... when this hits me is when I'm amongst a throng of people... like SEATAC airport Seattle... do you ever sit there at peak flying times and just watch the throngs of people walking by in the terminal... you feel like just a speck... "*who am I amongst these thousands?*... you start to feel small."

That's when I think... "*I bet most of these people have nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ...I might be wrong...maybe I'm the fool....* But that's what I think because that's how it looks... and I'll start to think "why in the world do I think I have the truth when there is SO MANY PEOPLE... all these people don't give it a thought?"

What about high density populations like in India... so many people... who are living without the gospel... *what makes me think I have the truth?* ... it's the idea that if most people believe something then it probably is true and the reverse... if most people don't believe something it is not true.

Paul steps in and says... 1. **Christianity is always going to look foolish to the outside world...**
2. Get this... Paul is lowering our expectations... don't assume 1. **All people need, is more information and they will believe the gospel...** that they will consider it if you share it...some might... most people have made up their minds to what they want to believe...man's wisdom...

NOBODY will see the gospel as NOT foolishness unless the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to that truth.... Verse 21 says that **for since the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God...**

Romans 1:18-23

Man's wisdom cannot bring anyone to the knowledge of God...

In Ephesians 1... Paul prays for the church at Ephesus that, verse 17 **that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of the revelation in the full knowledge of Him...**

Only through the Holy Spirit does anyone come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ... the gospel... (18) **so that you—the eyes of your heart HAVING BEEN ENLIGHTENED—will know**

what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

Unless God opens their hearts... people will ALWAYS see Christianity as foolish...which leads to the fact that just because there are so many against Christianity does not determine Christianity as not being true...

3. The amount of people who believe or disbelieve something has no bearing on its truthfulness... That should help us... that should help silence that deep thought we have but don't realize it... we can be a party of one amongst a million others and be the only one with the truth.

It is hard for us to realize just how hard it would be for the world of Corinth to understand let alone embrace Christianity...that's what Paul is getting at in verse 18... **For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...**

You have to understand their view of the cross to understand this...in the Greco-Roman world... crucifixion was very common... the tragedy of the cross wasn't that it was the most painful death for the criminal... that isn't to say it wasn't the most painful... But the real purpose of the cross was to humiliate and shame the assumed guilty person.

Even at Easter... We tend to think most about the physical pain Jesus had to endure on the cross... it was far more than that... the cross was designed to humiliate... to embarrass... To scorn... to strip away one's worth and humanity.

It was a public display for all the world to see.. this person hanging there is total shame... So this small group of "Christians" worshipped a "crucified" Savior... and all the people are saying *"are they crazy?... that is the most absurd thing I can possibly imagine!"*

Back in 1857, in Rome, archeologist discovered an ancient wall with graffiti on it...dated around the end of the first century... an amazing find really... it was found after they unearthed an ancient palatial house called the *domus Gelotiana*...turned out to be the house of the wretched Roman emperor Caligula... the graffiti is remarkable... that's what you've been looking at behind me .

Maybe you can make it out... it is a picture of someone hanging on a cross... But the person hanging on the cross has the head of a donkey... in the ancient Roman world that would have been a sign of mockery... It probably would be today as well!...some of our politicians are donkeys.

SO you have a man hanging on a cross with the head of a donkey.... And near the bottom is another man who has one arm raised showing that he is worshipping the donkeyman on the cross...

You might be able to make out some Greek letters near the bottom of the image... in Greek it says "*Alexemenos worships his god*"...Alex worships his god! *Look at stupid Alex... worshipping this pathetic man with the head of a donkey hanging on that cross....how foolish is that!?... how silly all that is!*

Of course there is no doubt the depiction is of Jesus Christ hanging on the cross... how foolish it all is!... [by the way it is believed to be the oldest depiction of the cross]... **For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...**

SO... the first thing Paul is wanting us **to adjust is our expectations**.... 1. The world will always see Christianity as foolish unless God opens their eyes...2. It's not an issue of people needing more information... it's an issue of submitting to God and He will open one's eyes. 3. Just because the majority of people see the gospel as foolish doesn't make it not true... the amount of people who believe in the gospel does not make it true not true... it is true because it is true!... so we need to adjust our expectations to this truth.

2. Paul wants to adjust our minds...we need to completely understand that the gospel is not Intellectually foolish...it's ultimately non-Christian thinking that is the foolish option...in other words... the gospel is defensible...it's actually intelligent... it is the world's thinking that puts on the donkey head!

Really? Yes!.... remember... its world thinking that has taken itself to a place where they can't define what a woman is!...I think part of the problem is many...even within the church... don't see Christianity is something intellectual.... In fact... I've heard professing Christians say things like...

"I know it is far-fetched but it works for me" ...I know it all sounds silly... but I feel better after I go to church... whatever you believe is ok... whatever works for you is ok... but this seems to be working for me right now...It makes me feel good...

It's a pragmatic approach to religion... *whatever works for you!* ... the fact is... that you approach Christianity not just with your heart... but with ALL your mind!...it holds up!...that's what Paul is saying here:

Read verses 20 & 25

"All those intellectual elites you're so impressed with in Corinth?..... BRING THEM ON!" ...
why would you follow someone's puny human mind when they tell you how the world works when you can follow the omnipotent perfect mind of God Himself?

Man is limited... fallen...finite...fickle...fallible.... You have God who has infinite knowledge... perfect knowledge... unchangeable... stable... dependable... why would you ever choose the wisdom of man over God?

How many times have you heard from your non-Christian acquaintances make huge sweeping truth claims with absolutely no basis.....things like...*there is no hell... there is no God...* or they will tell you what god is like... because that's what they think or feel he's like... *well I can't believe in a god who allows evil in the world...* so therefore they conclude that god does not exist.... Because they have a troubling question they can't figure out or don't like....

What's right... what's wrong... they know!... on the basis of what?.... their feelings.... Their logic... their mood...HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT'S TRUE?..... "*Cause I thought it!*" ... "*Well... we have science!*" ... science has been stellar these last three years!... there was an honest article in Scientific American that was titled:

"If You Say Science is Right, You're Wrong" ... yes...Scientific American... It started off saying that "*science cannot supply the absolute truths of the world*"...bottom line was that **science is merely a consensus of human thought**... Nobel prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg stated *scientific theory is in a sense a social consensus*.

In other words...maybe hundreds, thousands of limited... fallen...finite...fickle...fallible humans get together and create the theories of science!...the article went on to say...*A popular move is to say scientific findings are true because scientists use "the scientific method."* But *[the problem is]*... *we can never actually agree on what that method is*.

The apostle Paul is telling us to put our faith in Jesus Christ... make God's word your standard of truth... seek God's wisdom...we have access to the mind of God in His word!... ignore being a minority... a speck in sea of human wisdom.... Adjust your minds... it is the world's wisdom that ultimately is foolish.

So... we are to make adjustments in our expectations... we are to adjust our minds... it is not God's wisdom that is foolish... it is the world's wisdom that is foolish.... And thirdly...

3. Why make these adjustments?

It's the second part of verse 18...**but to us being saved, it** (the word, or message of cross of Jesus Christ) **it is the power of God.**

It is the **word**...what is the word here?... the logos...it is the entire gospel of Jesus Christ... the cross represents the entire message of salvation for all of us who were perishing in our sins...it includes ALL of God's plan for redemption of sinful man... I believe the "**word of the cross**" is God's entire revelation of the Bible....

The entire Old Testament points to the cross.... The entire New Testament is centered upon the cross... the cross was God's plan to restore His people back into fellowship with Him.... It is not the cross that is powerful... it is the **word** of the cross...

The bad news is that all are guilty of sin and condemned by God...the bad news is countered by the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. God, because of His love for the world, has made a way for man to be forgiven of their sins.

He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to take the sins of mankind on Himself through death on a cross. In placing our sin on Christ, God ensured that all who will believe in the name of Jesus will be forgiven. Jesus' resurrection guarantees the justification of all who believe .

The Bible specifies the content of the gospel message: **“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time”** (1 Corinthians 15:1–6).

How can we be assured of all this?.... because the gospel of Jesus Christ... the message of the cross... our salvation... is all through **the power of God**.... the gospel is not the thoughts of man...

We adjust our expectations and we adjust our minds..... because of the power of the message of the cross...our salvation... the gospel of Jesus Christ...

By the way...In that same unearthed house... just down the hall on another wall...also discovered was an inscription...*Aleximemos Fidelis*...he was looked at as a fool.... But Alex was faithful!

Christian.... The world looks at you as a moron.... The fool of fools... the overwhelming odds are against you if consensus makes something true...

