

God's Nothings and Nobodies Outline

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

- I. The interconnectedness of life.
 - A. We tend to compartmentalize our lives.
 1. We seldom ever stop to contemplate or question how all the aspects of our lives are possibly connected to each other in some way.
 2. Specifically entertainment/media.
 - a. Entertainment— *the action of providing or being provided with amusement or enjoyment.*
 - b. Amusement— *an enjoyable occupation of time.*
 - c. Media—the channel which tells us how to think.
 3. Paul shows two world view possibilities to the church at Corinth.
 - a. One leads to destruction.
 - b. One leads to life.... choose!
- II. Media- Ecology.
 - A. The study of how media impacts society: does it “*facilitate or impede our chances of survival*”?
 - B. Media-ecology’s main argument is that *communication technology is the primary cause of social change.*
 1. Neil Postman
 2. Dr. T David Gordon
- III. What happens to the wisdom of the world?
 - A. Paul’s reference to Isaiah 29:14.
 1. God will destroy the world’s wisdom.
 - B. The world’s wisdom.
 1. Refers to accessing a life that is egocentric.

THE MEDIA OF THE DAY WAS DETERMINING THE WISDOM OF THE DAY

IV. The media of 1st century Corinth.

- A. Poetry
- B. Dialogue
- C. Drama
- D. Rhetoric.

V. Media

- A. Ask:
 - 1. What will it do FOR me?
 - 2. What will it do TO me?
- B. Media is NOT neutral!

VI. How is God going to destroy the wisdom of the “wise”?

- A. One can only come to God through God’s wisdom.
- B. Man cannot find God through his wisdom:
 - 1. The Jew—looking for miracles (signs).
 - 2. The Greek (gentile)—looking through philosophy, logic, science.

There is GREAT WISDOM in not allowing man’s wisdom the key to knowing God...

- 3. God was “well pleased” to level the playing field:
 - a. ALL people must go through God’s wisdom to gain knowledge of God.
- C. “Preaching” is God’s medium of “choice”.
 - 1. a. The message is the foolishness of the cross.
 - b. The messenger is a “nobody”.
 - A “herald”, a proclaimer.

“God gave us an impossible message, to preach to an incapable people, and we ourselves are nobody.” J. MacArthur.

God's Nothings and Nobodies Pastoral Notes

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

We tend to compartmentalize all the things that we engage in each week that fill our time, fill our minds and dictates our activities...for some it is our work that fill 40-45 hours of our week... eating a few hours...sleeping 50-60 hours a week... chores and maintenance of our dwellings... we could put church in there...school activities... we must not forget our entertainment... or more appropriate.... Our media....

Which is more than just entertainment... by definition entertainment is *the action of providing or being provided with amusement or enjoyment*... there's a key word... *amusement...an enjoyable occupation of time*.... but media... ignore the dictionary... media is the channel which tells you how and what to think!

We basically view all those as separate parts of our lives... separate boxes that we either have allowed by choice or by necessity to be placed in the orchestration of our days.... We seldom ever stop to contemplate or question how each one of these may possibly be connected to each other in some way... This morning I'm specifically thinking of our media.

Few have ever stopped to consider just how much media takes up their life!...influences their life... and maybe even controls their lives.

Seldom do we stop to think about how what we watch, on whatever screen you're watching, may (does!) influence how you think... how you develop your values... your morals, your marriage... how you parent... what you will allow into your lives or not.... who you will vote for...your political views... I think most truly believe that media... is an independent box that we are able to keep segregated from the other boxes of our lives.

It is something that we do ... we participate in... we amuse ourselves....and then move on

We can watch and handle anything that Netflix or Amazon Prime puts in front of us and we can keep that limited to that 2 hour time slot...we can keep that in the movie box of our lives and it won't affect the other boxes in any way.....we can spend 6 hours on social media of choice and that can be constrained to just those six hours.... Never leaking out or consuming the other boxes of our lives.... not to mention affect our ability to think.

The idea that media is "neutral"...neutral... neutrality is impartial... not persuaded to join a side... immune to what is put in front of us... the idea that we can stand on our principles regardless of what we indulge in.

Well.... Some of you would rather not have me get into this this morning... you came here to get into God's word...we will do just that... get into God's word... not a lecture on the dangers of media...no lectures this morning... I want to follow the spirit of Paul as he addressed the church at Corinth....

There was enough there on the saints of Corinth that would have warranted the apostle to rip them a good one.... But he doesn't... he loves this church.... In fact... as very serious this passage is that we will be looking at this morning....

It is not a lecture... a warning... a criticism... some demand.... Or a condemnation... Paul addresses something very serious that is a reality within this church... he wants them to make a decision to change that reality..... but he doesn't scold them.

He presents two opposing realities... he reveals the final outcome of both of them... and he leaves it to them to decide what to do with it all.... And I would like to propose that the passage we are looking at is all about media... Yes...media.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

There is a fairly new discipline in many colleges and even seminaries today... added to such departments as English, Biology, Engineering and sociology is the department of "Media Ecology"...a professor of media-ecology is called a media ecologist.... Media ecology theory is the study of media, technology, and communication and how they affect human environments... it concerns itself with the media technology of the day...

It looks into the matter of how the media of communication affects human perception... understanding, feeling and value... and it is a serious discipline... for the media-ecologists studies how our interaction with media "*facilitates or impedes our chances of survival*"....did you hear that?.... is media that important?.... that it can determine whether or not we survive in the future?

Media-ecology's main argument is that *communication technology is the primary cause of social change*.

The first media-ecologist...back in 1968... the one who came up with that term was Neil Postman... If you ever talk about... teach.... Or speak about media and its effects on society... you MUST quote Neil Postman... a prophet from the last century who wrote a book called *Amusing Ourselves to Death*....a catchy title with a very serious implication.

Amusing ourselves...an enjoyable occupation of time... so trivial that the result is death...

In Neil's day television was the medium...

"Television is the command center of the new epistemology...(Epistemology=the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the

investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.) *“Television is the command center of the new epistemology...*

Choose language

There is no audience so young that it is barred from television. There is no poverty so abject that it must forgo television. There is no education so exalted that it is not modified by television.”

“There is no subject of public interest—politics, news, education, religion, science, sports—that does not find its way to television. Which means that all public understanding of these subjects is shaped by the biases of television.”... we could exchange the word “television” to media of the day.

There... I quoted Neil Postman!... what Postman said about television... which is applicable to us today in our media... would be applicable to the medium of 1st century Corinth... every “day” has a medium... in Paul’s day... the Corinthian church was being shaped by the medium of that day...the problem was that the media was winning over the gospel message...

This is why it is the first line of business Paul gets into... everything else that he addresses...the adultery... the sexual sin... legal matters.... All have been influenced by the wisdom of the day.... Brought via media.... last week we began this section of scripture looking at the two types of wisdom in the world:

1. Wisdom of man—the world...the wisdom of the age.
2. Wisdom of God.

Verse 18 was our basis... **for the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us being saved, it is the power of God.** this morning... we will see what is going to happen to the wisdom of man/world and how that is going to happen... and maybe you guessed it... it is through media!....let’s go through the verses a bit... we find out immediately what is going to happen to the wisdom of this world....

1. What happens to the wisdom of the world?

Read verse 19

Paul is loosely quoting Isaiah 29:14... many believe this is describing an event in Isaiah’s life found back in 2nd Kings 19... The Assyrian army had invaded the Promised Land... they had marched all the way up to the gates of Jerusalem... and the Jews panicked... they barricaded themselves... they were scared...Israel’s King Hezekiah was little help... he was scared to death as well... he calls out to Isaiah.

Isaiah says to him “*settle down, it’s all going to be ok*”... (not only am I changing the actual words, I’m leaving out a lot)... “*You don’t need to strategize... don’t rely on your wisdom... God is going to turn this thing around...*”

Isaiah 29:14 **I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside**...who’s in control?.... *as ominous the world around you is... as overpowering is may seem...as hopeless it may see,... how crushing in on you it feels... don’t worry... God has it all in His control.*

What happened?... Israel awoke the next morning and they looked out at the encampment of the massive Assyrian army...what did they see?... 185,000 of them laying there dead.... And angel came in the night and took care of it.

Paul picks up on this story to make his point... what’s the point?... even if the entire world seems to have it... they have the wisdom... they are the smart ones... they’ve got it figured out... God is going to step in and expose their foolishness... and destroy the wisdom of the world...this is eschatological.

Read verses 27-29

What exactly is Paul referring to as the wisdom of the wise?...the Greek word *sophia*... we get a hint in verse 20...

Read verse 20

Where are the smart people that have all the answers?...Each one of those represents a different medium... we’ll see the mediums in a minute

.wisdom here is not referring so much the esoteric...the highly philosophical concepts of the day...listen to the words of some historians regarding the wisdom of the world at that time: it refers to an attitude of hubris.... Hubris being *excessive pride or self-confidence*.

The wisdom of the world is not so much a system of thought as much as it is a style of life...a way of accessing life that is ego-centric.... It’s the spirit of the age... an outlook of the times... a habit... a fashion of thought... a self-serving outlook on life...here’s some adjectives:

- *Self-exalting*
- *Elitism*
- *Comfort and ease*
- *Not humble*
- *Non suffering*
- *Personal elevation, honor and esteem*

Wisdom of the world exalts oneself in the face of God!... the wisdom of the world breaks down community... tears down the fabric of society...diminishes morality and ethics...removes absolutes...all for the elevation of the self.... Any of that sound familiar? Can you relate?... and all of that is promoted and accomplished through the media of the day.

What was the media in Paul's day... in ancient Corinth?... what was the controlling, cultural forming medium of his day?... there's so much on this... we don't have to guess... there were four main mediums that dominated Corinthian culture....

Media

There were at least four mediums in Paul's day that would have normally been preferred (by culture).

1. **Poetry** was highly regarded. It was an 'oral ' culture. Poetry was always being recited as the preferred method of media. Everything important in that society was relayed through poetry....we don't understand that because poetry today is like modern art "*what in the world is he saying?*"

And poetry exalted individuals...if you were an emperor you would bring the poets in and have them compose exalting poems about you to be recited by everyone in your kingdom... Poetry reported important events... full of commentary.... Poetry expressed the values of society...

2. **Dialogue**—the tradition of Socrates and Plato. Learn by asking questions. These mediums elevated one's self... Elevated the ego.... Socrates preferred dialogue over the written word... his logic was if someone read something you wrote... and did not understand it... tough luck... but in dialogue they can ask questions...

3. **Drama**—the mass medium of the first century....the television of the day. Drama was the great mass media of that time. If you wanted to reach the masses in the first century... you wrote and produces a play...far more than entertainment...

Corinth had a gigantic amphitheater that seated 22,000 people... and they were always filled.

4. **Rhetoric**—esp. in public policy and political . People attended these rhetorical events as a form of entertainment.... It actually became a performing art.

Poetry, dialogue, drama and rhetoric fashioned the culture of the day...was the wisdom of the day... and it infiltrated the Corinthian church...it was through the impact of media that clashed with the gospel message.... It was the media message that comforted the Corinthian saints in their sin...

you see enough dramas that glorify extra-marital sex you start accepting it... that's normal!... you see two men romantically involved with each other on the screen will shock and repulse you the first few times....

But the more that happens... the more you are exposed to that... You start to have a level of acceptance.... What in the world is Hallmark doing!... *The movie, The Holiday Sitter, will air on December 11 and tell the story of two men who fall in love. Although the Hallmark Channel has included LGBTQ characters in its films, this is the first one to feature a same-sex couple at the center of the story.*

Family entertainment!...

Will that be neutral?... [oh...I slipped into our age.]

Paul tells them...the wisdom of this age... the world's wisdom is going to be brought down by God himself!..... we can't and we shouldn't miss the application for our day... instead of poetry, dialogue, drama and rhetoric.... We have what?... we have our televisions streaming... our computer screens...our electronic notebooks..... and of course... our "smart phones".

I'm not going to stand here and rage over the evils of technology and media... but we must make the correlation between the Corinthian situation and our own situation today... let me just quote from a Christian media-ecologist T. David Gordon:

Today many refer to our culture as a "media savy culture"...I do not believe it for a fraction of a second...ours is perhaps the most media naïve culture in the history of humanity...the fact that we are surrounded by, or immersed in digital media does not mean that we think about them well.

The trout is emersed in water but has very few conversations about it... [probably never thinks about the water!].

To be immersed in a thing is not the same as understanding a thing. Our culture is really quite naïve about media... most of our culture believes that media is basically neutral... that they are merely packages in which we put communicative acts... and we naively believe that media does not shape the people who use them, when in fact, they do shape the people who use them profoundly.

He concludes by giving us two questions to keep in our minds at all times... when we look at our devices... which are the tools of media...ask:

1. What will this tool do FOR us?.... then ask
2. What will this tools do TO us?

Consider a shovel... what will the shovel do for us?... it will dig holes.... What will it do to us?.... give us blisters!

As you can probably tell...I so dove into all this, this week... come to find out our media has a lot to say about our media and its effects on us... one example that I found... confirmed by six historical sources just to make sure was regarding eating disorders...

You can find a few examples of what might be considered to be eating disorders way back into the 13th century... but eating disorders as we understand them today.... And there are several severe types of eating disorder did not show up in the world until the nineteenth century... not until the photograph was invented.

Not until some group felt it necessary to show us what the “ideal human “looked like...via photographs.... The media of photography is not neutral!... it produced a completely new category of illness.

Not to mention that media can reform and structure the brain

Just last Wednesday the *Wall Street Journal* released a teaser for an article that will be released next week... it reported that Microsoft, after extensive research and surveying found that the attention span of the average person is 8 seconds.... Down from 12.... Sighting the rapid images that dominate social media today as the culprit.

Joel Beeke is a theologian I enjoy reading... speaking about preaching and the use of illustrations in sermons.... illustrations are designed to bring your audience BACK into the message... in other words to “wake up”... ten years ago he recommended doing an illustration every 15 minutes... he now recommends every 7 minutes....

There is no doubt that media is the cause of this.... Now there’s media addiction:

Last year a research report came out of Oxford England (*Oxford Mail*) regarding the addiction of social platforms.... (per week).

TikTok: 12 hours, 12 minutes

YouTube: 12 hours, 4 minutes

Facebook: 11 hours, 59 minutes

[Do you know how many hours you have a week?... $24 \times 7 = 168$ hours...]

Twitter: 11 hours, 56 minutes

Instagram: 11 hours, 46 minutes

Snapchat: 11 hours, 24 minutes

WhatsApp: 11 hours, 18 minutes

“When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; a culture-death is a clear possibility.”

Neil Postman...1971

Media is NOT neutral!

Our media transports to us the wisdom of this age...and it does affect us and forms us.. yet what was true for the Corinthians is true for us... God is going to bring it all down. *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise”*.... So that’s the first thing.... what’s going to happen to man’s wisdom.... The second....How’s He going to do that?...

2. How is God going to destroy the wisdom of the wise?

Read verse 21

The wisdom of this world falls very short of providing knowledge of what really matters... **what really matters is to know God**.... One can only come to God’s wisdom through God’s OWN wisdom.... The wisdom of the world is so adverse to ANYTHING of God it could never lead anyone to Him.

He gives us two examples in verse 22 of man trying to find God through their own wisdom...

Read verse 22

1. The Jew—the religious person... Paul says the Jews are looking for signs.... They’re looking for miracles... miracles for the Jew would be proof that 1. There is a God 2. That He is doing something.

Show me a miracle and I am all yours God!... do something spectacular that defies all laws of nature and I will believe in You God!...total lack of faith!.... man’s wisdom.

2. The Greek... or we could say the Gentile... or the non-Jew... the non-religious person....the one who uses logic... science... the senses... what I can see, smell, hear and touch.... That’s our wisdom!...

So what does God do?... how does God make foolish the wisdom of this age?.... He does it through a medium... he uses media!.... Poetry? Drama? Dialogue? Rhetoric?..... no... he uses a medium that could never make the list.... He uses *kerugma!*

The word means *“to herald”*... to make a proclamation...to give a message... we know it as *“preaching”*.... Back up to verse 21

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God...God was well pleased, through the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe.

Before we get into preaching... why would God be well pleased? At the wisdom of man not leading them to know God and pleased with the foolishness of the message preached?... **there is GREAT WISDOM in not allowing man’s wisdom the key to knowing God**...

God’s wisdom which is revealed through the foolishness of His message... remember what that is?... (18) **the foolishness of the cross**.... In the cross... God puts both Jew and Greek... wise

and foolish, seminary student and heathen all on the same level and is VERY PLEASED to have them come to know Him ONLY through His word.... His wisdom...

I love the implication... that means even those who do get to know God through God's wisdom cannot congratulate themselves for being so smart... so insightful... so clever...so perceptive.... In finding God they are no wiser than anyone else!...WE DON'T COME TO GOD IN OUR WISDOM!

It is God that makes Himself known..... through the foolishness of the cross.... Having removed any possible advantages in *all of mankind*.... God is well pleased to provide an exclusive wisdom available to all who respond to the foolish wisdom of the cross....that's why He's well pleased...

By the way... searching out why God was "well pleased" lead me to all the places in scripture that said "God was well pleased".... All of them... refer to the stupendous things that God does against all expectation... and every single one of them are in connection to His Son Jesus Christ... here's a few:

- God was well pleased with His Son at His baptism (Mark 1:11; Matthew 17:5).
- He was well pleased to give the kingdom of His Son to the "little flock" (Luke 12:32).
- He was well pleased to reveal His Son Jesus Christ through the man Paul so that he could preach to the gentiles (Galatians 1:15-16)
- He was well pleased to have all His fullness dwell in His Son Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19).
- He was well pleased to make known the mystery of His will which He purposed in Christ (Eph. 1:9).
- And here He was well pleased through the foolishness of what was preached, to save those who believe.

now....preaching.

Out of all the forms of media in that day... kerugma was the lowest...nobody would have chosen kerugma to try to convince or to persuade society to do anything...drama would have been far more "effective"... Dialogue far more interesting.... Poetry far more thought provoking.... But preaching?.... that's foolish!

God is pleased in the mediator Jesus Christ and He is pleased with the medium of preaching. This is a deliberate choice... "He is pleased"... God was not limited to preaching as the medium of the day... God "chose" to use the foolishness of preaching.

As I said preaching was simply to "herald" something... a message.... To proclaim something.

- The role of the herald was NOT to discover the persuasive properties in a message...

- In fact a herald was not to tamper with the message.... It is not his message to tamper with.
- A herald simply delivered someone else's message to others.... So a herald was NOT to use his creativity in presenting the message.... He was bound by the precise instructions given by his master and it had to be delivered EXACTLY as it was given to him.
- He wasn't concerned with the packaging of the message in any humanly skillful way to get the message accepted by his hearers...
- To herald was not about the herald!... He merely was to convey a message already articulated by someone else.

This explains why in chapter 2 Paul says (1) “...**I did not come with superiority of word or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the witness of God...(4) ...and my word and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom (man's)...but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.**”

- The herald was among the lowest... historical accounts say that heralds rival the status of prostitutes, tax collectors, day laborers and we could add used car salesmen.

How much we can learn about preaching from this passage!... Oh how pragmatic we are!!! You me all of us!... something the preacher must do but seldom does is to remove himself being the message...

There's that great temptation all preachers must fight and that is when all is said and done... did I do a good job?... Did they like it?... Do they think I'm the best preacher in the world?... and the listener (or sleeper!) is not off the hook either...

I don't like that church, the preacher is dull... boring... I like that preacher because he has good jokes.... The preachers are doing whatever “works”... and the listeners choose the best entertainer. With the most exciting relevant message.

And Paul is showing them and us... that all that is human wisdom and it will be done away with... what will succeed is the most foolish message delivered by nothing preachers who are nobodies.

“God gave us an impossible message, to preach to an incapable people, and we ourselves are nobody.” J.Mac.

Read verses 23-29