

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 The Gospel vs. Human Wisdom

Paul set up the contrast between cleverness of speech and the Cross in verse 17. In 1:18 through 2:5 he brings a crashing end to human self-sufficiency by three arguments. 1) The gospel is not a form of human wisdom, 2) Those who receive the gospel are usually not very wise in the eyes of humanity and, 3) Paul's example was one of human weakness united with spiritual power.

The Folly of a Crucified Messiah 1:18-15

Verse 18

The word of the cross – Word is *logos* and is contrasted to speech (*logos*) in verse 17. It is the message of the sacrifice of Jesus for the sin of the world (John 1:29, John 12:32-33).

Those who are perishing – The verb for perishing is a present, middle participle which means that the action is occurring in present time and the subject is being affected by its own action. They are perishing because they have rejected the message of the cross, the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 2 Corinthians 4:3)

To us who are being saved – This verb is a present, passive participle which means the subject is being acted upon. When we believe in Jesus, God is the one who saves us (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The power of God – The word is *dunamis* from which we get the word dynamite!

Verse 19

This quotation from Isaiah 29:14 shows that it has always been God's method to expose the folly of those who trust in human wisdom alone.

Verse 20

These three questions reflect Isaiah 33:18 which foretells the Lord's victory over Sennacherib (Isaiah 36 & 37)

Wise man – The Greek philosopher

The scribe – The Jewish Scribe

The debater – The Greek and Jewish doubter (Acts 6:9)

Age...world - Synonyms for the world system. The wisdom of this system is shown to be foolishness by God.

Verse 21

Wisdom of God – In sharp contrast to the wisdom of the world mentioned in verse 20.

Did not come to know God – The world's wisdom will never allow man to know God since it elevates man and not God.

The foolishness of the proclamation – The message of the cross seems foolish to the world.

To save those who believe – In contrast to the world's system and all other religious systems the gospel offers eternal life to all who simply believe.

Verse 22

Jews ask for signs – See Matthew 12:38, 16:1, John 6:30.

Greeks search for wisdom – Human reason is elevated above everything. A man dying on a cross made no sense to them.

Verse 23

We preach Christ crucified – The content of Paul's gospel message was the sacrificial death of Christ as the full payment for sin and God's offer of eternal life by faith alone.

Jews – A *stumbling block* because they expected the Messiah to come and claim the throne of David, not to die on a cross. See Matthew 27:42, Luke 24:21.

Gentiles – *Foolishness* because a man dying on a cross and coming back from the dead did not fit their reason. Notice their reaction in Acts 17:32.

Verse 24

The called – The same adjective used in 1:1, 2. It describes both Jew and Gentile who have put their faith in Christ.

Christ – The *power of God* in conquering the forces of evil and delivering those who believe. The *wisdom of God* in providing salvation in a means totally contrary to human wisdom.

Verse 25

Paul uses paradoxical language to emphasize that the gospel message of the cross is wiser than human wisdom and the so called 'weakness' of God is much more powerful than human strength.