



1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The Message of the Cross: Christ Crucified

Can you taste the pride on the tongues who boast in the accomplishments, skills or minds of men? They savor being connected to the great among them. This flavor of idolatry filled the appetite of the carnal Corinthians when they extolled the names of *Paul*, or *Apollos*, or *Cephas*. Rather than enjoy the blessings of these godly men as servants of the Great “I Am”, the fleshly disciples in this region argued like the philosophers of old, only their realm of quarrels were about the servants of Christ, rather than Christ Himself! It was emptying the power of the gospel that initially made them one in Him!

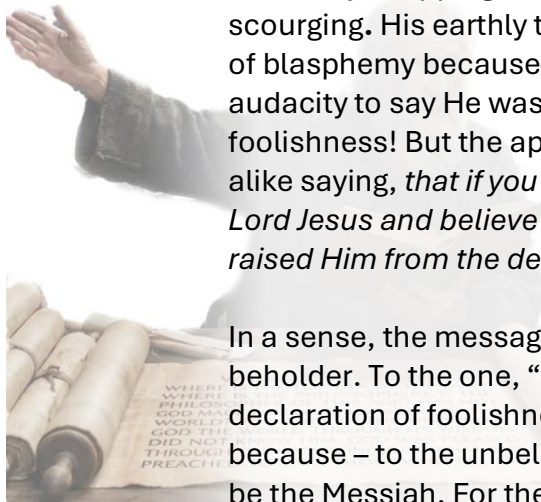
The apostle will now segue into a mindset that is upside down to the way of the dying world.

***“For the message
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those who are***

The “message of the cross” declares that Jesus Christ, who, being in a form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and coming in

For sermon on January 25, 2026

perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (18)



*the likeness of man, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death.ⁱ He was brutally beaten and hung on a wooden cross, his flesh torn open from a Roman flagra (whips with leather entwined with bone or metal) that lashed across the length of his back, invariably wrapping around his torso due to Roman scourging. His earthly tent perished under the charge of blasphemy because—they scoffed—He had the audacity to say He was equal to God. Such foolishness! But the apostle wrote to Jew and Gentile alike saying, *that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*ⁱⁱ*

In a sense, the message truly is in the eye of the beholder. To the one, “the message” was viewed as a declaration of foolishness “*to those who are perishing*” because – to the unbelieving Israelite – Jesus could not be the Messiah. For the Gentile it was foolish to think that a God could become a man or vice-versa. But this same message “*To us who are being saved*” is the power of God!

“For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. (19)

The result is that God will “*destroy the wisdom of the wise*”.

Isn't it “human nature” to be wise in our own eyes? This type of wisdom, even with the best intentions, always leads to death because mankind is too easily deceived into thinking we know what is best for us. God revealed this most basic instinct time and again, going all the way back to the beginning. *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to*

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” (20-21)

*the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*ⁱⁱⁱ The story didn’t end well for the couple and neither would it end well for the Corinthian Christians who initially placed their faith (trust) in the saving power of Jesus only to be swept away by the “wisdom of the wise”.

Let’s take a step back before returning to Paul’s possible rhetorical questions. It is as if the apostle—across the sea in the port-town of Ephesus, could visualize the Acrocorinth (where temples of deities oversaw Corinth below), as well as the agora (the public gathering place in the lower part of the city that were filled students and teachers of philosophy and learning)—could hear all the sophistry of this wise saying this or that. And Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, well studied at the feet of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel, had much of which to boast in his flesh. He could debate with the best among the wise. He could beat his chest with pride for the pedigree from which he came.^{iv}

Returning to Paul’s questions: he’s already answered them when he declared the (wisdom of) “*the message of the cross*” a few words earlier. God’s loving motive, and His sacrifice to all who call on the name of Jesus, was also matched by His wisdom to make it all come to pass.^v

“Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (22-25)

God’s wisdom is infinitely wise, yet when the message of the cross is spoken out loud today, it still sounds archaic and almost embarrassingly ‘simple.’ The pattern repeats in every culture and era: whenever human expectations don’t align with what God has actually done, people reject it as divine wisdom.

That’s why Paul writes, *Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom*.^{vi} He’s not claiming Jews had zero interest in wisdom or that Greeks never wanted miracles; he’s using rhetorical shorthand. Jews typically insisted on miraculous signs as proof of divine authorization, while Greeks prided themselves on philosophical reasoning and dismissed anything that didn’t fit their intellectual categories.

To the Jews, therefore, Jesus became a stumbling block: He didn’t match their vision of a triumphant, political Messiah. To the Greeks, preaching ‘Christ crucified’ was sheer foolishness—no truly wise or divine being would ever end up shamefully executed on a Roman cross.

To the believer in the crucified Jesus, what the world calls God’s ‘foolishness’ is wiser than the very wisest of men, and what the world calls God’s ‘weakness’ is stronger than the very strongest of men — as if an ounce of real foolishness or weakness could ever be found in Him!

Your Calling into Jesus Christ

Allow the previous words from the apostle to sink in for a moment: the message that looks weakest and most foolish is the very power and wisdom of God. If the cross flips every human measure of strength and savvy upside down... what kind of people should we actually expect to find flocking to the crucified Messiah?

Now, take a hard look in the mirror, because Paul is about to force the Corinthians—and, if you’re taking inventory on your heart —to do exactly that.

‘For consider your calling, brothers...’. Grab the ensuing verse and hold it up like a spotlight. What do you see when the light of the cross shines on the people God has called according to His wisdom and power?”

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.” (26)

The Corinthians, having just received Paul’s chastening words, are now reminded of their (original) calling. For a great majority of believers, they weren’t ‘wise’ or ‘influential’ in any meaningful way according to “human standards”. And that was the point!

You see, the world is filled with intelligent people who are “ignorant” of God’s will not because they do not have the capacity to learn it, but because their hardened hearts refuse receive with meekness the “message of the cross”. The apostle is telling the Corinthians to stop boasting in the exact same human standards (“*I am of Paul...*”) that cause the world to reject the cross as folly!

“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” (27-29)

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that

If God chose “*the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...*”, should it not cause the very quarrelsome Corinthians to immediately stop their foolishness to be convicted and ashamed of their divisive contentions? Shouldn’t it help them to focus on what God focuses on?

To illustrate what the apostle is saying here, think of Israel’s very first battle in the Promised Land.^{vii} God did not send the nation’s elite troops or siege engineers against the mighty fortress of Jericho. Instead, He commanded freshly redeemed slaves from the land of Egypt — led not by seasoned generals but by priests carrying the ark and blowing rams’ horns — to march silently around the city for seven days and then shout. Sheer foolishness and utterly contemptible by every human standard of warfare. Yet on the seventh day the walls fell flat — not by Israel’s strength or strategy, but by the power of God alone — so that no one could boast except in the Lord.

According to the world’s way of thinking, people have every right to boast when they achieve salvation through their own wisdom and strength. But God’s wisdom turns that upside down. He is the One who placed us in Christ Jesus, and He made Christ become for us our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, and our

***is, our
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Therefore, as it is
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redemption. Everything we now possess spiritually is a gift from God, not the result of our own effort. That leaves us with absolutely nothing to boast about in ourselves—and one glorious thing to boast about: the Lord alone. As the Scripture says, “*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*”

Finally, picture your greatest accomplishment: the roar of the crowd, the flash of glory and your name lifted high like a golden statue.

Now shift to the cross where thorns are used for a crown, mockery for applause mixed with a mother’s sob. From that ugly, weak, despised hill bursts the wisdom that spoke galaxies into being and the righteousness that redeems every soul He died for. Every earthly boast is nailed there, dead. Only one boast remains: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

ⁱ Philippians 2:5-8

ⁱⁱ Romans 10:9

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 3:6

^{iv} Philippians 3:3-5

^v Ephesians 1:3-14

^{vi} 1 Corinthians 1:22

^{vii} Joshua 6