

The Message Of The Cross!

Our Text: **1 Corinthians 1:18-25** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Over the next couple of weeks, we will be in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5 and continue to deal with the problem of division in the church . . . But Paul is going to examine who is wiser and best able to fix this problem. One group says man can fix it by means of his intellect. Yet we are going to learn that this thought is actually the height of pure foolishness! It is a contrast between God's true wisdom and man's supposed wisdom, between God's supposed foolishness and man's true foolishness.

"The ancient Greeks were in love with philosophy, around which their culture was built. They had perhaps as many as fifty identifiable philosophical parties or movements, which vied for acceptance and influence. Each had its views of man's origin, significance, destiny, and relationship to the gods—of which they had many. Some of the philosophies had detailed schemes for the religious, political, social, economic, and educational ordering of society. The Greeks were in love with human wisdom. They believed that philosophy (philosophia, "love of wisdom") was all-important. Philosophy provided a view, invented by man, of the meaning of life, values, relationships, purpose, and destiny. Thus there were as many philosophies as there were philosophers, and people tended to line up behind their favorite. They widely disagreed as to which philosophy was the truest and most reliable, and, inevitably, many factions developed, each with its own leaders and adherents. Without an absolute standard for truth, ideas of right and wrong were based entirely on human opinion."

Why bring this up? Unfortunately many of the Corinthian converts carried their spirit of philosophical factionalism into the church. Some of them still held onto beliefs of their former pagan philosophy. They were divided not only regarding Christian leaders, but also regarding philosophical viewpoints because they could not get over their love for human wisdom. They had trusted in Christ and recognized their redemption by grace through the cross, but they wanted to add human wisdom to what He had done for them.

“Psychology is another form of human wisdom that frequently contradicts or is used to modify or “enhance” God’s Word. It is not a true or exact science but is basically philosophical. It seeks to understand and modify man’s inner workings—his mind, emotions, and spirit—by human observations and theories. But every form of psychology has an underlying, preconceived philosophy that colors, and to a great extent predetermines, its methods and its interpretation of findings. Like every other form of philosophy, it sees man and the world through the lens of human reason and understanding. By its very nature, psychology could never discover and understand sin, because sin is offense against God—whose nature and will are totally outside psychology’s scope. Psychology may understand men’s offending men and try to deal with a person’s feeling of sin and guilt. But human reason and wisdom cannot possibly identify, much less determine, what sin against God is or give a remedy for any of it. Only God’s Word can identify sin and only His forgiveness can remove it. Because sin is offense against God, only God can determine what sin is or provide forgiveness for it. The Bible is clear that the heart of all man’s problems—physical, mental, social, economic, and spiritual—is sin. And a true understanding of sin is completely out of psychology’s realm. But Christ not only can remove guilt feelings; He can remove the guilt itself—in fact, the sin itself.” John MacArthur Jr.

But we need to be equally clear . . . It is also true that becoming a Christian does not give us all the answers to everything . . . Certainly not in the areas of science, electronics, math, or any other field of strictly human learning. Many nonbelievers are more educated, brilliant, talented, and experienced than many believers.

- If we want our car fixed we go to the best mechanic we can find, even if he is not a Christian.
- If we need an operation we go to the best surgeon.
- If we want to get an education we try to go the school that has the best faculty in the field in which we want to study.
- Therefore, as long as they are used properly and wisely, medicine and technology and science and all such fields of human learning and achievement can be of great value.
- And Christians should thank God for them.

But if we want answers to what life is about—answers about where we came from, where we are going, and why we are here, about what is right and what is wrong . . . **THEN HUMAN LEARNING CANNOT HELP US!!!**

If we want to know the ultimate meaning and purpose of human life, and the source of happiness, joy, fulfillment, and peace, we have to look beyond what even the best human minds can discover. Man’s attempts to find such answers on his own are

doomed to fail. He does not have the resources even to find the answers about himself, much less about God. In regard to the most important truths—those about human nature, sin, God, morality and ethics, the spirit world, the transformation and future of human life—philosophy is bankrupt!

Let's dive in here . . .

God's Word Alone Is Powerful!

1 Corinthians 1:18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

The reality is, when people try to elevate our own human wisdom we automatically attempt to lower God's wisdom! Why? Because it seems foolish to us since it conflicts with our own thinking.

Think about it . . . God took on human form, was crucified, and raised in order to provide for man's forgiveness of sin and entrance into heaven. That is an idea far too simple, and even seemingly "foolish", for us as natural men to accept.

"That one man (even the Son of God) could die on a piece of wood on a nondescript hill in a nondescript part of the world and thereby determine the destiny of every person who has ever lived seems stupid. It allows no place for man's merit, man's attainment, man's understanding, or man's pride."

This **word of the cross** is **foolishness** (*mōria*, from which we get *moron*). It is moronic, absolute nonsense, to unbelievers who rely on their own wisdom—to **those who are perishing**. That phrase is a graphic description of Christ rejectors, who are in the process of being destroyed in eternal judgment.

Message = **λόγος** *logos* = *Word. Speech. Language. A thing pronounced.*

Foolishness = **μωρία** *mōria* = *Foolish. Moronic. Idiotic. (This is where we get our word "moron" from.)*

In other words, It is moronic, absolute nonsense, to unbelievers who rely on their own wisdom — **to those who are perishing . . . The Christ rejectors!**

The contrast here is between man's word, which reflects man's wisdom, **and God's Word, which reflects God's wisdom!** Consequently **the word of the cross** includes the entire gospel message and work, God's plan and provision for man's redemption. In its fullest sense it is God's total revelation, for His revelation centers in the cross. God's whole redemption story and His whole redemption process seem

foolish to unbelievers. And because Christ's work on the cross is the pinnacle of God's revealed Word and work, to reject the cross is to reject His revelation, and to perish.

Human wisdom cannot understand the cross. Peter did not even understand it: **Matthew 16:21-23** *From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Notice . . . Peter's wisdom was contrary to God's wisdom, **AND ANYTHING CONTRARY TO GOD'S WISDOM IS FROM SATAN!!!**

Also remember, when the soldiers came to the garden to arrest Jesus, Peter still did not understand and he still tried to interfere with God's plan:

John 18:10-11 *Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.*

So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"

*What happened after Peter drew his sword and cut off a slave's ear? **JESUS REBUKED HIM AGAIN!!!***

Only after the resurrection and ascension did Peter understand and accept God's understanding of the cross:

Acts 2:23-24 *Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.*

Acts 3:13-15 *The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.*

Now that's it! He finally had God's wisdom regarding the power of the cross, and no longer relied on his own wisdom or feelings regarding it.

God's Word Alone Is Permanent!

1 Corinthians 1:19-20 *For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."*

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

Here Paul uses a quotation from Isaiah 29:14:

Isaiah 29:14 *Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; **For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.***

Now, Isaiah's teaching will have its ultimate fulfillment in the last days, when all men's philosophies and objections to the gospel will be swept away. Christ will reign unopposed and unobstructed as Lord of lords and King of kings, and all of man's wisdom will become ashes.

But the prophecy also had a more immediate significance and fulfillment, which serves to illustrate its future and ultimate fulfillment:

- When Isaiah made the prophecy, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, was planning to conquer Judah.
- The Lord told His prophet not to worry or fear, because the king's plan would fail.
- But this was not due to the strength of Judah's army or because of the strategy of King Hezekiah and his advisors. **"For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden."** (Isaiah 29:14).
- Judah would be saved solely by God's power, with no human help.
- He destroyed 185,000 men of the Assyrian army with just one angel (Isaiah 37:36). **Isaiah 37:36** *Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead.*

God continually told Israel that He would fight for her. All she had to do was trust and obey.

Men are all inclined to try to solve their problems and fight their battles by their own ingenuity and in their own power . . . **BUT HUMAN REASONING AND INGENUITY IS A HINDERANCE AND ONLY GETS IN GOD'S WAY!!!**

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*
Jeremiah 8:9 *The wise men are ashamed, They are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD; So what wisdom do they have?*

Look at the questions Paul asks in verse 20:

- *Where is the wise?*
- *Where is the scribe?*
- *Where is the disputer of this age?*
- *Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

This verse specifically teaches that human wisdom not only is unreliable **BUT IT IS ALSO IMPERMANENT!!!** It's like he is asking in each question, ***"Where are all the supposedly smart people that really have no answers?"***

- *How much closer to peace is man than he was a century ago—or a millennium ago?*
- *How much closer are we to eliminating poverty, hunger, ignorance, crime, and immorality than men were in Paul's day?*
- Our advances in knowledge and technology and communication have not really advanced us as people.
- We are more educated than our forefathers but we are not more moral.
- We have more means of helping each other but we are not less selfish.
- We have more means of communication but we do not understand each other any better.
- We have more psychology and education, and yet more crime and more war.
- We have not changed, except in finding more ways to express and excuse our human nature.
- In other words, throughout history human **“wisdom”** has never basically changed and has never solved the basic problems of man.

Could the apostle have written anything more appropriate for our own day?

“Where have our great thinkers—our philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, scientists, and statesmen—brought us?”

- Never before has mankind been so fearful of self-destruction or been so self-consciously perplexed, confused, and corrupt.
- Modern human wisdom has failed just as ancient human wisdom failed, except that its failures come faster and spread farther.
- The outer life improves in a material way, while the inner life seems to have correspondingly less meaning.
- The real issues are not solved.
- Human wisdom sometimes sees the immediate cause of a problem but it does not see the root, which always is sin.
- It may see that selfishness is a cause of injustice, but it has no way to remove selfishness.
- It may see that hatred causes misery and pain and destruction, but it has no cure for hatred.
- It can see plainly that man does not get along with man, but does not see that the real cause is that man does not get along with God.
- Human wisdom *cannot* see because it will *not* see.

THIS IS WHY WE NEED TO PREACH CHRIST FROM THE WORD OF GOD!!!

God's Word Alone Should Be Preached!

1 Corinthians 1:21-25 *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Simply put, **JESUS AND JESUS ALONE IS GOD'S PLAN TO FIX BROKEN MANKIND!!!**

WE NEED TO PREACH THE SIMPLE, UNADORNED, UNCOMPLICATED TRUTH OF THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST AND WHAT IT ACCOMPLISHES!!!

It is not through philosophy, intellectual understanding, or human wisdom that salvation comes, **BUT THROUGH BELIEVING IN GOD'S WORD!!!!!!**

Romans 10:8-17 *But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 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. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

I want to end with a quote from **"The Psychologizing of the Faith"** by: Bob Hoekstra

"Instead of the ministry of counseling being the Lord counseling us with His treasures of wisdom and understanding from His Word; churches are often referring hurting and needy people to human "experts" of the world who have not been trained in the Lord, but in worldly psychological theory. Even if they call themselves "Christians" they have been trained in the same psychological theories as the secular theorists and so their approach is corrupt. They are guided to books written by men rather than focusing on the Book that has been penned by God Himself. This is not to say that all books written by men are all destructive, but we need to encourage people to seek the all sufficient Lord through His all sufficient Word!

When it comes to sin, there is no doubt that man has a problem. Yet we need not be concerned with why this problem exists. God alone has the remedy for this sin nature, yet today we are so concerned with whether they are dysfunctional, or co-dependent, or maybe a victim of some unforeseen circumstance. Why not take them to God who knows all of that and let Him deal with their sin problem. We don't need self help groups, or how to seminars to help us deliver ourselves from our sin. We need to surrender to Christ and allow He and His Word to deliver us. The Holy Spirit can do a much better job of convicting people of their sin and thus bring it up from the roots! His approach is not old-fashioned or primitive, but is relevant to everyday situations from times past until Christ's return.

In the area of discipleship, we need to go back to Biblical fundamentals. Right now a good population of the church is being taught to esteem themselves, and find self-worth from within. They then make the mistake of thinking God loves us because we're good enough, yet the Bible makes it clear that we are nothing but filthy rags before the eyes of our Holy God. We need to deny ones self, pick up our cross, (the slow agonizing process of crucifying one's flesh) and follow Jesus. Instead people seem to want to follow the intellectual answers of men rather than the spiritual answers of God. This is where the problem lies. Our supreme goal needs to be to know God and not know ourselves; To love God and not love ourselves. We do not need to love ourselves before we can love others as the world says. Rather, we need to yield to God and His love will then flow through us.

A Warning: Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns--broken cisterns that can hold no water. We need to be involved with the Lord and not religion! The enemy is enticing the church to follow after psychological insights and theories that sound so scientific, so wise, so beneficial, so justifiable, yet they are incompatible with the things of Christ. We are to watch out and sound the alarms when these philosophies creep up. They are not to be welcomed in the church, nor incorporated into our ministries. We need to trust God, and God alone to teach us, carry us, and sustain us with His will for our lives."

God's power is real power, power that means something and accomplishes something. It is not *of* men but it is offered *for* men. It is the power of salvation from sin, of deliverance from Satan, of life in God's very presence for all eternity.

Have we truly experienced God's power?

Let's pray . . .