

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

The Power of God's Wisdom

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Introduction

While verse 17 concludes the previous section, it also introduces the section by contrasting “preach the gospel” and “wisdom of word”

This theme of wisdom is carried until the end of chapter 3 and is mentioned no less than 8 times in today's verses.

In this it is like Paul is saying, “You think you are so intelligent and enlightened, but what you consider wisdom never led you to the gospel. Let me prove it to you!”

He then begins what will be a 3 paragraph defense. The first reveals that Worldly Wisdom sees the Cross of Christ as Foolish (18-25), Worldly Wisdom sees the People of Christ as Fools (26-30), Worldly Wisdom sees the Preaching of Christ as Powerless (2:1-5).

And if the church is to be unified, it is only possible through the

“One can scarcely conceive of a more important – and more difficult – passage for today's church than this one. It is difficult, for the very reason it was in Corinth. We simply

cannot abide the scandal of God's doing things God's way, without our help. And to do it by means of such weakness and folly!" (Fee, 81)

Wisdom's Intention (18-19)

"Structurally, 1:18 functions as a thesis statement, not only of 1:18-25 but extending to at least 3:23." (Taylor, 64)

The cross of Christ creates two groups from all the people of the world, those perishing and those being saved.

Both are present participles but "perishing" is middle because one is doing it to themselves while "saving" is passive meaning it is being done to them from the outside.

There is another contrast here "the word of the cross" (i.e. the gospel) with the "wisdom of word" in verse 17. It pits "worldly wisdom" against the "cross of Christ"

For those who "are perishing," this word or "message of the cross" is "foolishness"

Where we get moron??????????

For those "being saved," this word is the "power of God"

Romans 1:16a (NKJV) — 16a For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes

"It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to create nice things: but to convert rebellious wills cost crucifixion." (C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity, 212)

James 3:14–17 (NKJV) — 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. **15** This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. **16** For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. **17** But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

ILLUS: Isaiah 29:14 – Context is the King of Assyria, was planning to conquer Israel. The Lord said for them not to fret because the King’s plan would come to nothing. They should repent and turn back to God. But they decided to do the “wise” and “prudent” thing which was to make an alliance with Egypt to protect them and ended up in captivity.

Wisdom’s Location (20-21)

Wise:

Scribe: scholar and teacher of the law

Disputer: “Debater” or “Philosopher of this age”

Paul is asking where all the smart people are.

“How much closer to peace is man than he was a century ago – or a millennium ago? How much closer to eliminating poverty, hunger, ignorance, crime, and immortality than men were in Paul’s day?” (MacArthur, 42)

We have never been more “wise” and yet more “foolish” than we are today!

“And astronomer can look through his telescope and see a hundred thousand stars, and not see God's greatness. A natural scientist can look through his microscope and see intricacies of life beyond description, yet not see God's creation. A nuclear physicist can produce a thousand megatons of destruction, and yet not recognize God's power.” (MacArthur, 45)

ILLUS: Can't tell one's gender

Romans 1:22 (NKJV) — 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

“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 more crime and war. We have not changed, except in finding more ways to express and excuse our human nature.”
(MacArthur, 42)

Our wisdom can solve our problems because we are the problem. The source of our problem is sin.

“Just as there are essentially only two categories of people ... so also there are only two kinds of wisdom, the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world.”

We cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to us.

God in His wisdom has chosen to reveal Himself through the preaching of the gospel message.

Romans 10:14–15 (NKJV) — 14 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? **15** 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!”

Wisdom’s Foundation (22-23)

Jews: A Miraculous Sign

Deuteronomy 21:23b (CSB) — 23b ... for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse ...

ILLUS: Odds taken from *Science Speaks* by Peter Stoner. “We find that the chance that any man might have lived down to present time and fulfilled eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} .” Which would be covering Texas in silver dollars two feet deep and finding one with an “x” on it.

If 48 prophecies, it would be 1 in 10^{157} . For comparison, it would take 2.5 times 10^{15} electrons to make a single file line 1 inch long (that’s small!). If we counted the electrons in this inch at a continuous rate of 250 per minute, it would take 19,000,000 years to count them. Then if it was a cubic inch of electrons it would take $19,000,000 \times 19,000,000 \times 19,000,000$ years to count them all. “Such is the chance of any one individual fulfilling forty-eight prophecies.”

Greeks: An Intellectual Wisdom

The pride of the Greeks was “wisdom”

Wisdom is Sophia and philo is love so philosophy is the love of wisdom

Acts 17:21 (NKJV) — 21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

Homer, Plato, Plutarch, Socrates, Aristotle, Archimedes

We Preach Christ Crucified: It is emphatic in the text noting the contrast

1 Corinthians 2:2 (NKJV) — 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

“The cross in Paul’s context is often lost to the modern Christian for whom the cross is now a symbol of the faith.” (Taylor, 64)

But Paul was not going to change the message to better suit the hearers.

To the Jews a Stumbling Block

From *skandalon* – it was a scandal

They were looking for a royal, conquering king, political deliverer

Romans 9:33 (NKJV) — 33 As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,

And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

To the Greeks a Foolishness

From *morian* – absurd

They saw only a condemned criminal.

“The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.” (Cicero quoted by Akin & Merritt, 26)

“These people were refusing to examine something outside of, or contrary to, their own thinking, contrary to their own philosophies.” (G. Campbell Morgan, 31)

“A crucified Messiah looks like a complete contradiction to Jews and utter lunacy to everyone else.” (Wilson, 17)

“Without an absolute standard for truth, ideas of right and wrong were based entirely on human opinion.” (MacArthur, 36)

“The ultimate idolatry is that of insisting that God conform to our own prior views as to how ‘the God who makes sense’ ought to do things.” (Fee, 77)

Wisdom’s Personification (24-25)

BUT ... to those who are called

Both ... Jews and Greeks ... CHRIST IS THE power and wisdom of God

Verse 25 is a summary

“By the cross God outsmarted the wise and overpowered the strong.” (Akin & Merritt, 31)

“What God has done in Christ crucified is a direct contradiction of human ideas of wisdom and power, yet it achieved what human wisdom and power fail to achieve.” (Taylor, 73)

Colossians 2:3 (NKJV) — 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Conclusion

“Faced with the horrendous ills of society, modern man looks to science, technology, and engineering. He looks the sociology, psychology, and philosophy; to education, business, and politics; to government programs and the occult. It never occurs to him that God's answer is the cross ... it is not until we come to an end of ourselves, of our own ideas, our own cleverness, our own efforts, and our own self will and see our own folly and futility that we can experience the mighty power of God to save.” (Phillips, 38)

Luke 9:23 (NKJV) — 23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.