

Christ: The Power and Wisdom of God

1 Corinthians 1:18-31; June 19, 2022

Introduction:

I want to take a moment to recognize and speak to the Father's in the room. There are a couple of things that I want to share with you today:

- The older that I get, the more thankful and grateful I am for my dad. I don't get to spend a lot of face to face time with my dad (that's one of the sacrifices we've made by planting our lives here in Boston). We usually FaceTime a few times a week for a few minutes to check in.
- I'm also extremely aware of how fast my kids are growing up. Ava is now driving. She's visiting colleges this summer. My day to day, in-person influence and impact on her life will be limited at some point soon.

Read Psalm 145:4-7

“One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.” (Psalm 145:4–7, ESV)

Pray for Fathers

Transition: Fathers, our text today lays out what our kids most need from us. They need to see us making much of us Christ: The Power and Wisdom of God.

Context:

Last week, Tanner introduced us to this letter to which Paul seeks to address a number of issues in the church at Corinth. The first issue he addresses is their division (read 1:10).

- The church was disunited and at odds with each other. They had taken the gifts God had given them (such as godly preachers) and twisted them into obstacles of unity (see 1:10).
 - They became “groupies” of specific leaders: Paul, Apollos, Peter.
 - Paul seems to insinuate that they spoke negatively and disrespected those who favored a different leader or teacher.
- Paul introduces the solution to their problem in 1:17

“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” (1 Corinthians 1:17, ESV)

- The Corinthians needed the power of the cross infused into the chaos of their division.

Transition: Paul continues and unpacks the cross even more so in our passage today.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The first truth that Paul wants us to see today is this:

I. The Cross Turns Worldly Wisdom Upside-Down (18-25).

A few initial observations:

- The word of the cross = The message of the cross (NET)
- There is a wordplay throughout this passage contrasting...
 - Folly and wisdom
 - Foolish and wise
 - Weakness and power
 - The world the God and the cross.

1. The Cross Divides all of Humanity into Two Camps.

- “Those who are perishing”
 - *Perishing* is a word that refers to end-time destruction (cf. Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10).
 - Paul is speaking of the *present* road of those currently who reject the gospel, though not necessarily their final destiny.
 - The tragedy of this group is that they are unaware or they don’t recognize where they are headed, thus demonstrating their own foolishness.
- “Us who are being saved”
 - *Saved* is a word that refers to end-time rescue and deliverance (cf. Rom. 5:9; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:15; 1 Thess. 2:16).
 - This phrase at first may seem odd to us as we don’t often talk about “being saved.” But, the NT speaks of three theses of salvation and each one of them is true:
 - Past: we have been saved.
 - Present: we are being saved.
 - Future: we will be saved.
- What you do with the message of the cross determines which group you belong to.

2. The Cross is Folly to the Wise of the World.

In Corinth, there was a fascination with wisdom as means to gain influence and power (similar to many in our day).

- One commentator notes, “Corinth was a magnet for the social ambitious...status hungry people” (Ben Witherington).
- Reference vs. 20: where is the...wise, scribe (expert in the Mosaic Law), debater?

- They were enamored by intellectuals, scholars, debater's, those with Ph.D's, those who could give wicked awesome TED Talks, etc.
- What Thomas Schreiner says is important: "Paul is not denying the intellectual or rhetorical gifts of those under consideration. His point is that their intellectual capacities are ultimately foolish if they do not know the God of the universe, the one true God who created and sustains them."
 - Those wise by the worlds standards may be applauded by the world but they have gotten nowhere in their relationship with God.

Why is the cross "folly" to the wise of the world? Paul answers that in v. 22.

- "It is only our familiarity that dulls the strangeness of Paul's message for us" (Ciampa and Rosner).
- Jews demand signs and the cross is a stumbling block.
 - The Jews are offended by the cross.
 - The Jews demanded signs (see Matt. 12:38–39; 16:1–4; Luke 11:16, 29–32; John 2:18–22; 6:30) to validate their faith. Thus, a dead and crucified messiah was a contradiction for them.
 - The cross was the most degrading death conceived of at that time.
- Greeks seek wisdom and the cross is folly.
 - The Greeks say the cross is nonsense
 - In their eyes, "saviors" would be wealthy and powerful. A crucified savior has no power. A crucified savior is the epitome of weakness.
- "The sign-seeking Jews were blind to the significance of the greatest sign of all when it was before them. The wisdom-loving Greeks could not discern the most profound wisdom of all when they were confronted with it" (Leon Morris).

In what ways is the cross foolish and offensive?

- The cross demands that you confess that you have sinned against God.
- The cross demands that you confess that Jesus is the only way to God.
- The cross doesn't enhance the status or reputation with most in the world.
- The way of the cross is opposed to the ambitious, self-promotion focus of our world.
 - Consider others more significant than yourself.
 - Don't use your power to manipulate others and gain influence.
 - The greatest among you will be the servant of all.

Application Questions:

- What are you demanding from God?
- Where are you asking God to submit to your terms?
- In what ways is the cross a stumbling block for you?
- What are you seeking after in life that's a barrier to you seeking after God?
- In what ways is the cross foolish to you?
- What's hindering you from embracing the cross?

Do you know what the biggest barrier to the cross is? You! You must die! The cross is an invitation to die to yourself!

3. The Cross is Power and Wisdom to those who Believe.

- When it comes to knowing God, the heart of the issue is belief and trust, not wisdom (1:21).
- And, this is for both Jews and Greeks/Gentiles.
- What do we believe? We believe the cross is the wisdom and power of God.
- Here's the irony: the cross is a sign and points to the true wisdom from God.

How does the cross display the wisdom and power of God?

- At the center of Paul's preaching, is the crucifixion of Jesus.
 - He was beaten, bloodied, tortured, mocked, ridiculed, humiliated, nailed to a cross and hung up for all to see.
 - And yet, this was the very will and plan of God. This was central to Jesus' coming.
 - "I came not to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
- It is the simultaneous punishment of sin and mercy and forgiveness for the sinner.
- It is the simultaneous display of the wrath and love of God.
- "Can there be a greater display of God's wisdom than that singular act wherein the unrelenting holiness of God is satisfied even as the untiring grace of God redeems the guilty?" (Thabiti Anyabwile)
- It is both WISDOM and POWER:
 - Christ crucified is power because it has the power to defeat evil and save from eternal death.
 - The gospel has a divine power that other messages lack (Rom. 1:16)!
 - Christ is not just the source of wisdom and power for our lives, he is the expression of God's wisdom (cf. Col. 2:1-3).
- V. 25:
 - There is a tone of irony here:
 - Is God weak? Never!
 - Is God foolish? No way!
 - This verse affirms that "God at his worst is better than humans at their best" (Ciampa and Rosner).
- For those with eyes to see, the cross displays the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:4-6).
 - What seems weak is actually strong.
 - What seems foolish (the cross) is actually wise.
- It is God's pleasure to save those who believe!

How does Paul's argument connect with their disunity and divisions in the church?

- Their disunity was a result of elevating human wisdom and a lack of focus on the cross.

- They took their eyes off of Jesus.
- This passage is a call to take your cue not from the culture of the world but from the gospel, and in particular, the cross.
- When the cross is central in the church, competitiveness, grumbling, and unholy allegiances dissolve away.
- The solution thus is a renewed radical Christ-centeredness. Unity will come when we focus on Jesus and his work. We should think about every area of life through the lense of the gospel.

Transition: Paul now proceeds to talk about the sovereignty of God in salvation, in particular, in calling and choosing them. Why does he do this? When rightly understood, this crushes our pride and produces a Christlike humility.

II. God calls and saves in such a way that he alone gets the glory (26-31).

- “For consider your calling...”
 - Paul picks back up on this theme of *calling* (see 1:24).
 - Calling speaks of the sovereignty of God in salvation.
- Why does he do this?
 - Remember, Paul is writing to a city and church obsessed with reputation and honor.
 - When rightly understood, this crushes pride and produces a Christlike humility.
- “Not many of you were...”
 - Wise
 - Powerful
 - Noble birth = a privileged position (NET)
 - Paul’s point: not many were leading figures in the community.
- “But God chose what is...”
 - Foolish
 - Weak
 - Low and despised
 - Paul’s point: the things that the world elevates and praises (knowledge, intellect, power, rank) is not what leads to salvation and to knowing God.
 - God’s calling is not contingent on your status in the world.

The Effectual Call of God:

- We often talk about salvation from the human perspective. What must I do to be saved? Repent and Believe!
 - There’s no doubt a human perspective and responsibility when it comes to salvation!
 - Believe (see 1:21).
 - Paul’s actions in Acts 18:
 - “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to

persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4).

- The Scriptures also talk about salvation from God’s perspective.
 - We refer to this as the doctrine of election - RHC STATEMENT OF FAITH

Election is the gracious purpose of God, whereby He chose some persons unto everlasting life—not because of foreseen merit in them, but of His sheer mercy in Christ—in consequence of which choice they are called, justified and glorified. God’s grace therefore excludes boasting and promotes humility (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:27-29; Eph. 1:4, 11).

- God chose me. God called me.
 - “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 4:1).
 - “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved —” (Ephesians 2:1; 4-5, ESV)
- “And because of HIM you are in Christ Jesus”
 - He is the reason you have a relationship with Jesus.
 - Wisdom
 - What’s most likely is that the following 3 words unpack the nature of God’s wisdom.
 - Righteousness
 - By believing, we are justified and Christ has become our righteousness.
 - Sanctification
 - Most likely, Paul is referring to positional sanctification vs. progressive sanctification.
 - Through the cross, we are now holy because of our union with Jesus.
 - Redemption
 - As a result of being in Christ, our future redemption is secured, the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 8:23).
 - And being “in Him” also unites you in the body with other believers. He is their and our source of unity.
- Yes, we are called to repent and believe, but God is the one who initiates salvation and who brings it to completion.
 - “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30).
- The Scriptures teach both the Sovereignty of God in salvation and human responsibility.
- This is often the pattern throughout the entire Bible:
 - God bypasses the firstborn.
 - God read about why he chose Israel (Deut. 7)

- He chooses the most unlikely figures (David, Mary, Jesus).

Why does God work this way?

- To condemn human pride.
 - If the pathway to God were through wisdom, then we would praise gifted humans.
 - We would boast in ourselves!
- Paul repeats it twice:
 - 1:29: “So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”
 - 1:31: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”
- God has orchestrated salvation such that our only boast can be in him!
 - Not our strength, our power, our money, our intellect, or our wisdom.
 - “The cross passes judgment on those who perceive themselves as ‘something’ but lifts up ‘the nothings’” (NDBT, A. Thiselton).
 - If my salvation is due to the calling and choosing of God, then I have no grounds for considering myself any better than anyone else.
- Based on what Paul has taught about the wisdom of the world and God’s wisdom, the Corinthians should not be boasting or elevating teachers and leaders. Why?
 - If it’s worldly wisdom, it will be destroyed by God.
 - If it’s the wisdom of God, he deserves the credit.
- The solution in Corinth and at RHC is to make much of God and the gospel rather than on individuals or groups.

“Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 9:23–24, ESV)

The Point: Humble Yourself and Make Jesus your Boast!

Personal application/encouragement:

- Will you hang on to your demands and pursuits or will you lay them down and find eternal life in the power and wisdom of Christ-Crucified?
 - Is God opening your eyes to see wisdom and power in the cross?
 - What’s your next step?
 - Repent and Believe. And continue to repent and believe.
- God often works in a way to nullify human pride.
 - Let’s think and pray like God and not like the world.
 - Don’t just pray based on what you perceive to be the most likely outcome.
 - Pray with the expectation that God will work and move in a way that nullifies pride.
- RHC, may our boast be in Jesus!

- Not in...
- Make Jesus your boast!
 - Not your pastors: Tanner, or Reddy or myself.
 - Not your CG leaders
 - Not your DG leaders
 - Not your Team Leaders
 - Not your Directors

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Galatians 6:14. ESV).

Pray.