

“The Preaching of the Cross”
1 Corinthians 1:18-21

INTRO:

To this church caught up in these divisions Paul held up the cross as the priority. He wanted them to understand their divisions were inconsistent with the very core truth that brought them to Christ in the first place. The central reality is the cross of Christ.

I. The Priority of the Cross (v. 18)

II. The Reason the Cross Is the Priority (v. 19-21)

I. The Priority (v. 18)

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.”***

A. To properly understand what Paul is saying in **verse 18** we need to retreat to the paragraph before it for a moment.

1. In **verses 13-17**, Paul sought to reason with the Corinthians about the foolishness of their bickering over the various men that God had used in Corinth. The Corinthians were into soaring rhetoric and exhibitions of so-called wisdom. But Christianity is not about rhetoric or worldly wisdom, it is about Christ!

2. His discussion comes to a head in **verse 17**.

“Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

When I, Paul, was in your midst, I did not preach in such a way as to make personal disciples. I did not try to establish a fan club. No, I preached not with the wisdom of logos but the logos of the cross!

B. Here then is the priority of Paul’s ministry and the guiding principle of Paul’s life – the cross of Christ.

“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.”

1. The logos of the cross is the message that God in seeking to redeem the lost world, sent His Son into the world to die on a cross and to bear our sin that we might be saved. Yet, it is more than this. It is the message that after we are converted, we need to give everything to the Lord who saved us. Listen to what Paul said in another place about the cross of Christ.

Galatians 6:14 *“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

We come to Christ through the cross, and then we serve Him because of the cross in our lives. It cuts to the heart of self-centeredness.

2. The message of cross is also a watershed. It divides humankind into two groups; not Jews and Gentiles, but *“those who are perishing and those who are being saved.”* (v.18)

C. When the message of the cross is preached, those who are perishing see it as foolishness.

1. The participle is in the present tense. This introduces a different perspective. Those who reject the Gospel are not those who potentially could perish, but they are those who are right now perishing.

2. We do not see spiritual realities as real as they are. Think again about how John presented the peril of the lost in **John 3:36**.

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

3. These folks who are perishing cannot understand the message of the cross. They see it as foolishness. It is foolishness for the Jewish person who is perishing because they are looking for a supernatural sign.

v.22 *“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.”*

They expect God to do something that benefits them to convince them. They cannot see the power of God in the crucifixion of His Son. To the Jew, to die hung on a tree is to be under the condemnation and curse of God. How could a Savior hung on a tree be God’s Messiah? They did not understand that He was made a curse for us.

4. At the same time, the Greeks saw this also as foolishness because they looked for wisdom. The Greeks wanted something which appealed to their understanding of reality. They were into Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, and so forth. How could a simple Jew who was hung on a cross compete with the soaring knowledge of Socrates?

D. However, to those who are being saved, it is the power of God. For through this simple message, God the Holy Spirit called us from death to life. Through the message of the cross we understood our need of a Savior. We understood that He had been made sin for us, He who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him!

II. The Reason the Cross Is the Priority (v. 19-21)

A. Why is the preaching of the cross such a priority? It is a priority because God is going to destroy the wisdom of the world. God spoke to this in **Isaiah 29**, Paul quoted it.

“For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’”

By the cross God shatters all human pretensions to wisdom and strength.

B. Paul makes it clear that God has done this with three rhetorical questions in **verse 20**.

1. The first question is: ***“Where is the wise man?”*** The concept of the wise man here is the description of one who has a well-established world view point which explains all of the complexities of life. What is really real? Did their wisdom lead them to God? Did their wisdom produce salvation or deliverance from the power or penalty of sin?

2. Next he asks: ***“Where is the scribe?”*** This second question dispenses with the Jewish Biblical expert. The scribe did not find the only way to approach the true and living God. They did not come up with the cross as the only way to deal with sin.

3. Finally, he asks: ***“Where is the debater of this age?”*** Rhetoric and debate were the fashion in Corinth. They loved to hear the debates of the philosophies of the day. Did any of these debates bring to light the truth of the cross? Did any of them shine the light of knowledge on the Gospel? No!

4. Three strikes and you are out and that is exactly what Paul declared. ***“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”*** God has reduced to utter foolishness all the wisdom of the world. While men have tried to understand reality with their minds and with their senses, they have not found it at all.

C. Here is ultimately how God undermined the world’s wisdom and shown the importance of the cross.

v.21 *“In the wisdom of God, the world through its so-called wisdom will never know God.”*

Mankind has searched for God in many ways over human history. He has sought God in nature, in rational thought, in science, and in philosophy. Has any of these methods ever brought man to God? Man’s wisdom is totally unable to bring us to know God. It is incapable of making us right with the God whom we have offended. If all man has is the world’s wisdom, he will never find God.

1. God's way is an entirely different way. God is pleased through the ***"foolishness of the message proclaimed – preached to save those who believe!"*** (v.21) The cross, which to the wise man seems to be the height of foolishness is the means of our ultimate salvation. Notice the methodology here. It is a message proclaimed.

2. God is not presenting His Gospel as one of many competing philosophies to be explored, debated, and considered. God says it is to be preached. It is to be proclaimed as the only Gospel. Here is the truth, there is no other. Here is the Lord Jesus, the Savior. He is the only one. If we do not proclaim this as the only truth, the ultimate reality, we are not proclaiming Him as God says He should be proclaimed.

Have we been to the cross? Do we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Is the cross central to our ministries, message, and life? Can we say with Paul: ***"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world?"*** Galatians 6:14

Hymn #385 ***Near The Cross***