

**THE
POWER AND WISDOM
OF GOD**

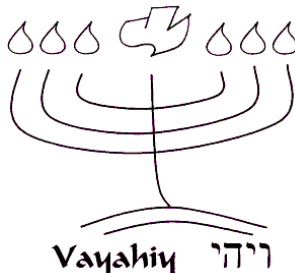
The offense and foolishness of preaching the Cross of Jesus Christ

written by
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October 2007

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Prior to the ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven, He commanded His disciples to be witnesses unto Him and that the gospel be preached, to all nations, to every creature, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).

“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16).

“And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48).

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

What does it mean to be Christ’s witnesses, μαρτυρες (*martures*) in the Greek language? What does it mean to preach the gospel, or good news, which is the Greek ευαγγελιον (*euangelion*)?

PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED

“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

I know some very sincere, well-meaning Christian brothers that might suggest, from this verse, preaching Christ crucified, preaching the Cross unto salvation, is foolishness to the Greeks, that is, to those that do not know of the God of creation. They insist that the one preaching must logically explain that there is a God, that He is *the* God, and that He has revealed

Himself through His Word, the Bible. **Acts 17:22-32** is often cited as the proof text for this suggestion.

In the passage from **Acts 17** above, the apostle Paul is in Athens, a prominent city of ancient Greece. Grecians were polytheistic, believing in many gods, and therefore, erected many altars, statues, and temples to honor their gods. Paul noticed an inscription on an altar that read *ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ* (*Agnoostoo Theoo*), “*TO THE UNKOWN GOD.*” Then Paul begins to preach of the Creator God of the Bible:

“Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:23-24).

Because they had no concept of the Biblical God of creation, they would propose, these Athenians would need to be taught from the very beginning of his message of whom it was that Paul was proclaiming. And because Paul used this kind of approach in order to lay some groundwork for his hearers, even to the extent of quoting a Greek poet (**Acts 17:28**), the conclusion reached by some is that this would be the Biblical precedent established for the means by which we must preach the gospel to those who have not grown up with facts and information about God.

Because, they say, more people have been indoctrinated with Darwinian evolution in these post-modern times, it would make more sense to approach our evangelism with the same kind of methods Paul used on Mars’ Hill.

I have to admit that, after I heard a minister present this kind of evangelism, it seemed reasonable to me... for a couple days until I prayerfully thought through it over the Scriptures.

But what really happened when Paul preached on Mars’ Hill? The Scriptures declare:

“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:32-34).

Some gave an answer similar to that of Felix (**Acts 24:25**). Some mocked as Festus did (**Acts 26:24**). A few believed such as Dionysius, Damaris, and others.

After that, Paul went to Corinth (**Acts 18:1-3**) and he reasoned with the Jews and the Greeks, perhaps even convincing them through his discourses the truths concerning the Messiah (**Acts 18:4**), until Silas and Timothy

arrived from Macedonia, whereas Paul straightly testified that Jesus of Nazareth was *the* Messiah that fulfilled the Scriptures (**Acts 18:5**). When Paul did this, they opposed him and blasphemed Christ (**Acts 18:6**).

Could it be that the Holy Spirit included Paul's preaching at Mars' Hill to give us an example of what NOT to do? Allow me to suggest that Paul realized in Corinth that preaching Christ, and Him crucified, was the power of God unto salvation. This is why he wrote to the Corinthian church,

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (**2 Corinthians 2:2**).

You see, sometimes we forget that the God of creation has revealed Himself to all men. In fact, the apostle Paul, from Corinth, writes to the Christian believers at Rome to tell them this very truth, God revealed to all men:

"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (**Romans 1:20-21**).

Now, returning to our verse, why, then, is the preaching of the Cross a stumblingblock to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks?

First, of whom is the apostle Paul speaking? The Jews he was speaking of is easy to understand. Ιουδαίους (*Ioudaiois*) are the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who have received the Mosaic covenant.

As far as the Greeks, there is a little disparity between manuscripts. The Nestle Greek lexicon uses εθνεσιν (*ethnesin*). This is where we get our English word "ethnic" or "ethnicity." It is a word that is typically translated heathen, Gentiles, or nations. In other words, these are non-Jews.

The Textus Receptus (received text) or "majority text" have the word Ἑλλήνων (*Elleenoon*). Typically, this word, whose root gives us our English words Hellenist and Hellenistic, was used to describe non-Jews (Gentiles), as in **John 7:35**. Yet, this word was also used to describe those who were ethnically or culturally Greek, as it was used to describe Timothy's father in **Acts 16:1-3**.

Whichever word is used, it still conveys the same meaning as if both words were used because *Elleenoon* is used in **1 Corinthians 1:24**.

Stumblingblock to the Jews

The word stumblingblock, Greek σκανδαλον (*skandalon*), is also translated “offense” or “occasion to fall” in the New Testament. It is where we get our English words “scandal” and “scandalous.”

The preaching of the Cross was a scandalous offense to the Jews because the Cross of Jesus Christ presented God’s salvation, not through the keeping of the Law of Moses, but through the sovereign grace of God by faith in the only precious work of Christ’s atoning death.

Foolishness to the Greeks

The word foolishness, Greek μωριον (*moorion*), is only translated “foolishness” in the New Testament and is used five times all in **1 Corinthians**. It’s where we get our English words “moron” and “moronic.”

The preaching of the Cross was moronic to the Greeks because the Cross of Jesus Christ presented justification, sanctification, and glorification, not through the increase of man’s wisdom and knowledge, but through the sovereign grace of God by faith in the only work acceptable unto God, the substitutionary death of Christ upon Calvary’s tree.

THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD

“But unto them which 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” (1 Corinthians 1:24-25).

The preaching of the Cross (**1 Corinthians 1:23**) is the power and wisdom of God. To whom? It is the power and wisdom of God to those whom God has called, whether they are Jewish or Greek.

Those that are “called” speaks of those who are “appointed.” Appointed by whom? God. “Called” is the Greek word κλητοις (*kleetois*). The first place this word is used in the New Testament is **Matthew 22:14**,

“For many are called, but few are chosen.”

In the case above, it means “invited.” Yet, in **1 Corinthians 1:24** it is used in the same way that it is used of Paul the apostle in **Romans 1:1** and of the saints in Christ (believers) in **1 Corinthians 1:2**. One could say that these “called” and “appointed” are the ones God has selected or elected.

It is by the supernatural power of God that the preaching of the Cross is wisdom unto those that hear the message.

The Power of God

“Power” is the Greek word δυναμις (*dunamin*). We get our English word “dynamite” from its Greek root. *Dunamis* is first mentioned in the **Matthew 7:22** and translated “mighty works” or “wonderful works,”

“Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Dunamin is also used to describe the power believers will have when the Holy Spirit comes upon them:

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

These passages, among others, fulfill God’s prophetic promise from the Hebrew Scriptures:

“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

Might and Power are the Hebrew words **כַּיִל** (*Chayil*) and **קוֹחַ** (*Koach*) respectively. *Chayil* (might) means “wealth,” “strength,” “virtue,” or “valor.” *Koach* (power) means “ability,” “capacity,” “force,” “substance,” or “fruit.”

Both of these Hebrew words convey Jewish thinking upon the Law of Moses. Through one’s ability, capacity, substance, and strength in order to keep the commandments of the Law, one will receive wealth and valor while these acts produce fruit and virtue.

The Wisdom of God

“Wisdom” is the Greek word σοφία (*sofian*). *Sofia* is first mentioned in the **Matthew 11:19**,

“The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”

This entire passage, **Matthew 11:1-30**, speaks greatly of the Lord's view of wisdom, and is its own study all by itself.

Wiser and Stronger Than Men

The Hebrew Scriptures tell us that the LORD God is transcendent; that is, the being of the infinite God rises far above our all things, including our limited knowledge. It is written,

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The New Testament Scriptures echo this same sentiment in **Romans 11:33-35**:

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again?”

This doesn't mean that we can't know ANYTHING about God. We certainly can know whatever God has revealed about Himself through Scripture by the Holy Spirit, as it is written,

“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (1 John 2:20).

Even the Lord Jesus says that we can know things about the truth of God:

“Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come” (John 16:13).

What it means, then, is that we can't know EVERYTHING about God. In other words, the most loft intelligence, aspirations, and achievements of man cannot compare with the least of the things of God and the least of heaven's majesty.

Therefore, the Spirit of God makes the reading of God’s holy Word, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convicting and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith to salvation. This may give us an interesting insight into the Lord’s words,

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall He do also; and greater works than these shall He do; because I go unto My Father” (John 14:12).

The preaching of Christ crucified is the greater work... because the Cross of Jesus Christ is the greatest, most precious work that the universe has ever witnessed. In fact, we really should go as far as to say that the Cross of Jesus Christ is the only truly great work there is, ever was, or ever will be; as the apostle Paul exclaims,

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

For any work of our hands, the fruit of our labors, the righteous acts of our intent, if they do not spring forth from the truth of the Cross of Jesus Christ, then these things are nothing.

The preaching of the Cross is a stumblingblock to the Jews who are not called. The Jews are offended that their efforts to keep the venerated Law of Moses would amount to nothing, as the preaching of the Christ crucified is the power of God through the Holy Spirit.

The preaching of the Cross is foolishness to the Greeks who are not called. The critical thinking Greeks would think it utterly moronic to forsake their intellects for the preaching of Christ crucified.

NOT MANY WISE, MIGHTY, NOBLE

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26).

Calling, κλησιν (*klesin*), means, “invitation;” however, its origin is related to the “called” of v.24. The first time this is used in the New Testament is in **Romans 11:29**, “For the gifts and **calling** of God are without repentance.” This, therefore, is addressed to those of us whom God has saved, those He is saving, and those He will save.

Wise Men, σοφοι (*sofoi*), is first seen in the New Testament from our

Lord's prayer to the Father in **Matthew 11:25**, "*I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*"

Mighty, δυνατοι (*dunatoi*), means, "able," "capable," or "possible." We first encounter this word in **Matthew 19:26** when the Lord says, "*With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*"

Noble, ευγενεις (*eugeneis*), means, "generous," or "high rank," or "well born." This word is first used in the New Testament when Jesus tells the parable of the "**nobleman**" that had ten servants and ten pounds in **Luke 19:12**.

I remember reading a long time ago of an event where several men in England were speaking. One prominent intellectual (from Oxford or Cambridge or some such institution) encouraged the audience to evangelize the scholars and great academics because, he said, these will be able to effectively witness and minister to those of like station.

Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones arose next to speak. He stated that, although he admired the previous speaker's zeal and enthusiasm, the speaker was terribly wrong. Dr. Lloyd-Jones quoted **1 Corinthians 1:26**.

The man rebuked by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones expressed the same sentiments as many church leaders today. They believe that efficient means, creative methods, and ingenious devices from inspired men will produce inspired results. Please don't think that I desire to degrade these men. I readily admit that these men are much better than I. This is so glaringly obvious because many men of this ilk have devised and implemented means, methods, and programs far more spectacular, and with far more ingenuity, than I could ever conceive of mustering within myself. In this, I do esteem these men with greater honor than myself, as it is written,

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

FOOLISH AND WEAK THINGS

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Foolish Things, μωρα (*moora*), means, "dull," "stupid," or "absurd." It is very closely related to *moorian* in **v.23**.

Wise, σοφους (*sofous*), is basically the same word in a different tense as *sofoi* (wise men) from **v.26**.

Weak Things, ασθενη (*asthenee*), means, “sick,” “feeble,” “impotent,” or “without strength.” The first time this word is used in the New Testament is when our Lord speaks of His indictment upon the goats in His judgment in that day: “*I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not*” (**Matthew 25:43**).

Mighty, ισχυρα (*ischura*), means, “strong,” “valiant,” or “powerful.”

God’s not redeeming the best of mankind, the strong and the wise, in order that He might use them because they have something to offer. That would express a need, a deficiency, in God; yet, that cannot be for there is nothing lacking in God. God is sufficient in Himself.

This is awesome and encouraging news. God saves totally depraved human beings, just like you and I, and uses them to proclaim the gospel because there is no way that we could get the glory in doing so. Except for the virtue that He has placed in us, there is nothing good in us whatsoever... and from our lips the everlasting gospel is proclaimed. This amazes the angels in heaven:

“To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven— things which angels desire to look into” (**1 Peter 1:21**, NKJV).

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (**Ephesians 3:10**, NIV).

It’s interesting to note that as μωρα (*moora*) also means dull, stupid, and absurd, the idea of making our worship services more exciting, interesting, or acceptable may just be violating Scripture, and hence, the very will of God.

God not only uses what is foolish, but it seems He takes pleasure in using those who are sick for His glory. Let’s just take a look at a very short list of the sick servants of the Lord:

- David Brainerd suffered and finally succumbed to tuberculosis after only a few years of ministry to the American Indians.
- Jonathan Edwards died of typhus fever.

- Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University and grandson of Jonathan Edwards, died of cancer.
- Robert Murray McCheyne died before his 30th birthday.
- Asahel Nettleton never fully recovered after being stricken with typhus fever.
- Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the “prince of preachers” suffered excruciating pain from gout and arthritis for most of the latter years of his adult life.

And let’s not forget the young pastor, Timothy, who suffered from stomach trouble:

*“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often **infirmities**” (1 Timothy 5:23).*

Not only was the apostle Paul sick, he was glad for the Lord’s sake and for the glory of God:

*“And [God] said unto [Paul], My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in **weakness**. [Then Paul remarks, M]ost gladly therefore will I rather glory in my **infirmities** that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

THE LOWLY AND DESPISED

“And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are” (1 Corinthians 1:28).

Not only are the sick, weak, dull, absurd, feeble, foolish, and infirmed called of God and used by God rather than the wise and mighty, He also uses the base and despised things of the world.

Base Things, αγενη (*agene*), only appears here in this verse of the New Testament. It means, “lowly,” “humble,” or “humiliated.”

Despised, εξουθενημενα (*exoutheneemena*), means, “nothing,” “despised,” “contemptible,” or “least esteemed.”

God confounds the pride of man’s efforts (“bring to nought”) through His use of the lowliest, most humiliated, and least esteemed people...

Why?

NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY

“That no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:29).

The New International Version reads, “...*that no one may boast before Him.*”

Should Glory, καυχησηται (*kaucheeseetai*), means, “may boast,” “may take joy in,” or “may rejoice in.”

When we simply preach the Biblical truths of the gospel, using...

- No flashy gimmicks
- No man-made methods
- No feel-good philosophy
- No over-zealous emotionalism
- No flattery
- No fanaticism

...then God receives all the glory because it is only by His power; that is, by His Holy Spirit effectually saving human souls by God’s sovereign grace. When the weak, foolish, lowly, and despised are empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach and proclaim the everlasting gospel, we who are weak, foolish, lowly, and despised are built up in faith as we see the wisdom and strength of God to seek and to save the is lost.

GLORY IN THE LORD

“But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31-32).

What do we have to give that we haven’t received from the Lord first? Our true stewardship consists in realizing that, indeed, *“For in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).*

It is not what I have, but Christ who has me
It is not what I can give, but in Christ who gave Himself upon the Tree
It is who He is, and only for His glory
That we may have the honor and blessing to proclaim His story

