

INTRODUCTION

1. Please take God's Word and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1.
2. We are looking this morning at verses 18-31.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.
4. We are looking today at "the foolishness of God."
5. None of us can imagine God being foolish or weak, yet we hear in verse 25 those two terms.
6. But they don't mean what you're thinking.

7. Paul is contrasting the wisdom of man with the wisdom of God.
8. In the wisdom of man, he sees the message of the Gospel as foolish.
9. But in the wisdom of God, it's the foolishness of the message itself that confounds the wise.
10. Man, in all his wisdom, cannot save Himself.
11. In fact, he never sees the problem of his sin or the need for forgiveness.
12. So Paul shows the Corinthians a little foolishness.

13. Foolishness on God's part for the simplicity of the Gospel.
14. And foolishness on man's part for not believing it.
15. This message that one can be saved by believing the message of the cross is moronic to unbelievers.
16. Because they refuse to believe the message of a crucified Christ, they place their wisdom above God's.
17. Notice in verse 18, Paul begins with the conjunction "for."
18. This ties verses 17 and 18 together.

19. In verse 17 Paul mentions his call to “preach the gospel.”
20. Then in verses 18-31 he elaborates on the gospel itself and shows how it is seen in their calling to salvation.

First, Paul begins with...

LESSON

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

“For the word of the cross” (NASB) or “the preaching of the cross” (KJV)

The “word of the cross” is “the doctrine of the cross; or the doctrine which proclaims salvation only through the atonement which

the Lord Jesus Christ made on the cross.”¹

Another way to say this is “the word of the cross” is “the doctrine of salvation by a crucified Christ.”²

The term “word” in verse 18 which is translated “preaching” in the KJV is from the same Greek term (*logos*) translated as “speech” or “word” in verse 17.

Paul is contrasting man’s word, which reflects man’s wisdom, and God’s Word, which reflects God’s wisdom.

The word of the cross includes the entire gospel message and work, God’s plan and

¹ Barnes, Albert. [Notes on the New Testament: I Corinthians](#). Ed. Robert Frew. London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885. Print.

² Gill, John. [An Exposition of the New Testament](#). Vol. 2. London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809. Print. The Baptist Commentary Series.

provision for man's redemption.³

Paul says the message of the cross is...

A. It is Foolishness to Those Who Are Perishing (v.18a)

1. "Foolish" (Gr.moria from which we get our English word moron. It means "stupid, absolute nonsense")
2. It occurs 5 times in the NT. All 5 occurrences occur in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor.1:18, 21, 23; 2:14; 3:19)
3. To the Jews "the cross" was the tree of shame and horror; and a crucified person was "accursed of God"

³ MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

4. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (NASB) “If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.
5. Galatians 3:13 (NASB) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on A tree.”
6. There was not a single association connected with the cross except

those of shame and agony.

7. The thought of “a crucified Messiah” seemed to the Jews a revolting folly; the worship of a crucified malefactor seemed to the Greeks “an execrable (extremely bad or unpleasant) superstition” (Tacitus, ‘Ann.,’ xv. 44; Pliny, ‘Epp.’ x. 97).⁴

8. Lenski says “People hear this ‘word’ of the cross. They look at it only with the eyes of their human wisdom and thus deem it to be only moria, ‘foolishness.’ They see no sense in it.”⁵

⁴ Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. [1 Corinthians](#). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909. Print. The Pulpit Commentary.

⁵ Lenski, R. C. H. [The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians](#). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963. Print.

9. Paul says the consequences of their unbelief is destruction
10. They are “those who are perishing”
11. The KJV has “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish.”
12. The word “Perish” (Gr.apollymi) is in the present tense indicating continuous action. The NASB has the correct rendering (“perishing”).
13. This present participle is descriptive.
14. This is describing unbelievers as they are when they hear about the cross and think it’s all foolishness.

15. Some of them may later on still be won for the cross although Paul intimates nothing on that point.
16. It is altogether evident that they are on the road to perdition for the reason that the one means able to save them, “the word of the cross,” sounds like “silliness” to them.⁶
17. One of the things that keeps many people away from Christ, away from the Bible, and away from salvation is their disagreement with the gospel.
18. It just does not fit their way of thinking.

⁶ Ibid., Lenski.

19. Even when they know their own philosophy or their own religion is shaky, they often would rather put their heads in the sand and hope for the best than simply take God at His word.
20. This is the willful ignorance of unbelief described by Paul in Romans 1:18–23.
21. Pretending to be wise, such men are fools.⁷
22. Those who refuse the message of the cross are in a state of perishing in hell without Christ.

⁷ MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

- a) Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 (NASB) Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

- b) In Luke 13:3 (NASB) Jesus said, “...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

- c) John 3:16 (NASB) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

- d) John 10:27-28 (NASB) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28

and I give eternal life to them,
and they will never perish; and
no one will snatch them out of
My hand.

The message of the cross is foolishness to
those who are perishing but...

B. It is the Power of God to those Who Are
Being Saved (v.18b)

1. “Saved” (Gr. sozo) is also in the
present tense but it is also in the
passive voice
2. In the present tense it is ongoing
action
3. In the passive voice is it means they
received salvation as opposed to it

being earned

4. Instead of the cross being foolishness to the believer it is the power of God
5. It is the power of God in the sense that God's intention to defeat evil, to make himself known, and to save those who believe will certainly be brought to completion.⁸
6. "Those that are being saved" is the proper opposite to "those that are perishing."
7. Also notice that there are only two classes of people, those who perish and those who are saved.

⁸ Taylor, Mark. [1 Corinthians](#). Ed. E. Ray Clendenen. Vol. 28. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014. Print. The New American Commentary.

8. There is no in-between class.
9. Men may love their human wisdom but only the gospel leads to salvation.⁹

Paul now begins to elaborate on...

II. The Wisdom of the Wise (vv.19-20)

He says, “For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.’ 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

Verse 19 is a quotation of Isaiah 29:14.

⁹ MacDonald, William. [*Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*](#). Ed. Arthur Farstad. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995. Print.

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 it would not fail because of the strength of Judah's army or because of the strategy of King Hezekiah and his advisors.

“The wisdom of their wise men [would] perish, and the discernment of their discerning men [would] be concealed” (Isa. 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 (37:36).

The full account is given in 2 Kings 18–19.¹⁰

Isaiah's prophecy will have its ultimate fulfillment in the last days when Christ sets up His kingdom (cf. Rev. 17:14) and all of human wisdom dies.¹¹

So...

A. God will Destroy (v.19) (the wisdom of the wise)

And...

B. God Made Foolish (v.20) (the wisdom of the world)

¹⁰ Ibid., MacArthur. 1 Corinthians.

¹¹ MacArthur, John, Jr., ed. [The MacArthur Study Bible](#). electronic ed. Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997. Print.

Notice his sarcasm. You hear it clearly in the NLT which says, “So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters?”

So...

C. Where are they now? (v.20)

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?”

These words most manifestly refer to the Jews; as the places (Isa. 29:14; 33:18; and 44:25) to which he refers cannot be understood of any but the *Jews*.¹²

¹² Clarke, Adam. [The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes](#). New Edition. Vol. 6. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife Corporation, 2014. Print.

These questions would come home to the Jews, who regarded their rabbis and the “pupils of the wise” as exalted beings who could look down on all poor ignorant persons (*amharatsim*, or “people of the land”); and to the Greeks, who regarded none but the philosophers as “wise.”¹³

1. Where is the wise man?

Paul paraphrased Is. 19:12, where the prophet was referring to the wise men of Egypt who promised, but never produced wisdom.

2. Where is the scribe?

Probably Paul has in mind the

¹³ Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. [1 Corinthians](#). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909. Print. The Pulpit Commentary.

Assyrians, who sent scribes along with their soldiers to record the booty taken in battle. God saw to it they had nothing to record (Is. 33:18).

3. Where is the debater of this age?

This was a Gr. word with no OT counterpart, identifying those who were adept at arguing philosophy.

4. “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (v.20)

He has silenced them all!

Jesus said in Matthew 11:25-26 (NASB) At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden

these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

That's...

III. The Wisdom of God (vv.21-25)

He says, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of

God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

A. God Chose in His Wisdom to Save Through the Message of the Cross (v.21a)

“For since in the wisdom of God.”

B. Human Wisdom Does Not Save (v.21b)

“The world through its wisdom did not come to know God.”

These words might be written as an epitaph on the tomb of ancient philosophy, and of modern philosophy and science so far as it assumes an anti-Christian form (Luke 10:21).

Human wisdom, when it relies solely on itself, may “feel after God,” but hardly find him (Acts. 17:26, 27).¹⁴

C. Because they trusted in their humanistic wisdom rather than the wisdom of God, they forfeited their salvation (v.21c)

“The world through its wisdom did not come to know God.”

“Know” (Gr.ginosko) refers to intimate knowledge. (aor.act.ind.)

D. God Saves Through the Message Preached (v.21d)

“God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to

¹⁴ Ibid., Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. [1 Corinthians](#).

save those who believe.”

E. Jews Ask for Signs (v.22a)

“For indeed Jews ask for signs”

“Ask” (Gr.aiteo) “ask for” (pres.act.ind.)

“Signs” (Gr.semeia) noun, sign miracle

Unbelieving Jews still wanted supernatural signs.

Matthew 12:38-40 (NASB) Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” 39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of

Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The Jews refused to accept the most glorious of all the supernatural sign-works of God, namely providing salvation through a virgin-born, crucified, and risen Messiah.

In fact, the sign was a stumbling block to them.

Romans 9:31-33 (NASB) but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled

over the stumbling stone, 33 just as it is written, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

F. Gentiles Search for Wisdom (v.22b)

“Greeks search for wisdom”

“Search” (Gr.zeteo), seek, look, desire
(pres.act.ind.)

“Wisdom” (Gr.sophia), noun

Gentiles wanted proof by means of human reason, through ideas they could set forth, discuss, and debate. Like the Athenian philosophers, they were not sincere, with no interest in divine truth,

but merely wanting to argue intellectual novelty (Acts 17:21).

G. Christ is Preached Crucified (v.23)

“But we preach Christ crucified.”

“Preach” (Gr.kerusso), “proclaim, preach” (pres.act.ind.)

“Crucified” (Gr.stauroo), “to be or become executed by being nailed to a cross” (perf.pass.part.)

This is the only true sign and the only true wisdom.

This alone was the message Paul would preach (2:2) because it alone had the

power to save all who believed.

1. Stumbling block to the Jews (v.23)

They looked for a mighty military leader to deliver them from the oppression of Rome. Instead of that, the gospel offered them a Savior nailed to a cross of shame.¹⁵

a) Matthew 11:2-6 (NASB) Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to Him, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” 4 Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear

¹⁵ MacDonald, William. [*Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*](#). Ed. Arthur Farstad. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995. Print.

and see: 5 the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. 6 And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

b) Matthew 13:55-56 (NASB) Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.”

2. Foolishness to Gentiles (v.23)

To the Greeks, Christ crucified was foolishness. They could not understand how One who died in such seeming weakness and failure could ever solve their problems.¹⁶

H. Christ is the Power and Wisdom of God (vv.24-25)

“But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

“Called” (Gr.keltos), adj. An effectual call

¹⁶ Ibid., MacDonald. 1 Corinthians.

“Power” (Gr.dunamis), noun

“Wisdom” (Gr.sophia), noun

IV. Consider Your Calling (vv.26-31)

“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and

sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

A. Not Many Wise (v.26a)

B. Not Many Mighty (v.26b)

C. Not Many Noble (v.26c)

D. What God Chose (vv.27-31)

1. The foolish things of the world (v.27)

“Foolish” (Gr.moros), adj. “stupid”

To “shame” (Gr.kataischuno), “to bring to shame or dishonor upon or fail to respect” (pres.act.subj.)

2. The weak things of the world (v.27)

“Weak” (Gr.asthenes), adj. “Weak, sick”

3. The base things of the world (v.28)

“Base” (Gr.agenes), “insignificant”

4. The despised of the world (v.28)

“Despised” (Gr.exoutheneo) “to be or become treated contemptuously as if completely worthless or despicable.”

5. The things that are not (v.28)

E. Why God Chose (vv.29-31)

1. So no man may boast before God
(v.29)

“Boast” (Gr.kauchaomai),
(aor.mid.subj.) “to display or proclaim
publicly a satisfied contentment with
one’s own or another’s achievement.

2. So man may boast in the Lord
(vv.30-31)
3. It is by God’s doing you are in Christ
Jesus (salvation is a work of God)
4. Jesus became to us wisdom from
God, righteousness, sanctification,
and redemption” (v.30)

5. Since salvation is a work and the wisdom of God, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (quote Jer.9:23)

CONCLUSION

1. What really matters are not the categories of the wise, the influential, and those of noble birth acclaimed by the world (1:27), but rather God’s saving power in the gospel (recall 1:18, 21, 24).¹⁷
2. We are in Christ Jesus because God put us there!
3. We believed the message preached and didn’t count it as foolishness but as the power of God transforming us from darkness to light.

¹⁷ Taylor, Mark. [1 Corinthians](#). Ed. E. Ray Clendenen. Vol. 28. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014. Print. The New American Commentary.

4. In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)
Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away;
behold, new things have come.

5. If you are here today and think all of this is foolishness, then you have indicated to yourself and to others that you are “perishing” and I call you to repent and believe in the crucified Christ.

6. Let’s pray.