

1 Corinthians 1:20-31 – “Glorying In God’s Wisdom”

[Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-19 for a bit of background]

1. The Response to Godly Wisdom – 1:20-25

1:20 - *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

Paul is most likely alluding to Isaiah 19:12 (*“Where are they? Where are your wise men? Let them tell you now, And let them know what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt.”*) which was in reference to the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem. When that was going down, instead of calling out to God for help, the Israelites were calling out to Egypt for help. In this passage God is calling out to those in Egypt and asking, *“Where are your wise men? Can they reveal to you the things that God has and will do?”*

Paul takes his cue from these Old Testament passages, and he now calls out to the wise, the scribe, and the disputer of this age.

- ***The wise*** would speak of the Greek philosophers in Corinth known for their ability to grasp the deep wonders of this world.
- ***The scribe*** was a term used to speak of the Jewish scholar trained in the Mosaic law and having the ability to carry it out in its right way.
- ***The disputer*** was the debators; most likely referencing the Greek philosophers again who spoke convincingly and were able to win most arguments with logic and rhetoric.

These were the ones that people often put up on a pedestal and thought they had all the answers to their problems or questions. These were the intellectuals that appeared as though they had it all together. But their wisdom was a worldly wisdom and next to God they came across as foolish.

- These days that we live in, as people move themselves further away from God, we’ve all the more been able to witness the futility of the world’s wisdom and scientific observation (and not just the futility of it, but the stupidity of it.)
- We’ve seen the stupidity with the handling of Covid and the very arbitrary decisions made from the so called scientists. Follow the science they will say, while also saying men can have babies.

- We see the foolishness of this worlds wisdom when people try and explain away Creation with evolution.
- Chuck Smith says this: *Do you know how it is that you can see? You say, well, God created our eyes, the optic nerve. They are able to take eighteen impressions per second. They are able to project them into this vitreous kind of a jelly, that creates vibrations, goes up into your brain and you get this sense of movement and all because of the eighteen frames per second that are coming into the brain. You can discern the colors and you can see. It's a brilliant design, infinite wisdom. He set them in a socket, put little ten thumbs so they can move back and forth and up and down. They track together. Now, those who say there is no God, that man is the result of millions upon millions of years of fortuitous occurrences of accidental circumstances. You know how he explains how you got your eyes? One day when the worm emerged out of the ooze and came into the sunlight, it developed a freckle on the top of his front part, it wasn't yet a head. And through mutations of that freckle, gradually over a long period time, it mutated into an eye. Scraping across the coral and the barnacles and all, created abrasions on the lower part that turned into sort of warts or calluses, that ultimately became legs, the salamander was able to now see and walk. Where is the wise? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? I don't read comic books anymore. I read evolution books.*

“Did you know that when bathtubs were first introduced, that the scientists were warning about the use of bathtubs, how dangerous they were to the health? And the men of science actually had many cities in the United States form ordinances forbidding bathtubs in houses. Oh, my, a person has all kinds of chronic illnesses and all and they start taking baths. There were cities that actually outlawed the use of bathtubs because the scientists warned them about the dangers that could come to man because of their use.”¹

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So against the obvious foolishness that gets passed off for wisdom in this world, Paul calls out, *where is the wise?* When they begin to try and explain away the things of God by some random fairy tale explanation, and pass it off as logical, scientific, and wise, it only reveals their foolishness in greater ways.

¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/smith_chuck/c2000_1Cr/1Cr_001.cfm?a=1063020

- **Romans 1:21–23**, *"because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."*

1:21 - For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

No matter how intellectual you became, no matter how much studying you've done, or theories learned, it won't bring you into a closer realization or understanding of God. Your wisdom does not lead to salvation.

In fact it seems it's the agenda of universities and places of higher education to attempt to snuff out the credibility of God. Many people have had their faith flipped upside down by the inaccuracies and lies of professors looking to assault Christianity.

- Now this isn't to say that wisdom is of no value. We can certainly know things about God through observation of our world and this creation (cf. Romans 1). But our human wisdom will never be adequate to bring us into the fullness of life God has for us.
- God, rather, was pleased to bring people to salvation through a foolish means – the cross! This is the message that was preached, as Paul states.

1:22-23 - For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

Jews were always looking for some kind of validation of Jesus.

- **Matthew 12:38**, *"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.""*
- **Matthew 16:1**, *"Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven."*

Greeks wanted something logical, some great majestic wisdom that would just make sense to them.

To the Jews seeking a sign, to the Greeks seeking wisdom, Paul seemed to give them neither. But he gave them something better, he gave them the wisdom of God, he gave them the gospel, he presented to them Christ crucified.

To the Jews it was a **stumbling block** because they could never imagine their Messiah, the Promised and Anointed One of God, to be put on a cross and die such a brutal, humiliating death. Their Messiah was expected to be a political deliverer to free them from Roman bondage. But to see Jesus die by a Roman crucifixion seemed like such a wrong outcome – it was a stumbling block.

- The term **stumbling block** is the Greek word *skandalon*, where we get our word scandalous. It truly was a scandalous scene to the Jew to see Jesus hanging on such an offensive means of execution.
- In fact the Bible says that cursed is anyone who is hung on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:23). Since Jesus hung on a cross made from a tree, this showed He was actually cursed of God in their view.

The Greeks were all about wisdom, but in their minds there was nothing wise about a God dying – especially dying as a so-called criminal? Their gods were powerful and mighty, but this Jesus on a cross looked like the epitome of weakness. It certainly looked foolish in their eyes.

Paul used the term Greeks and Gentiles often interchangeably. They represented those who weren't Jews, they have not been brought up in the things of God in the same way the Jews were. They were the natural thinkers. And of them Paul would say in **1 Corinthians 2:14**, *"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."*

- That was certainly the case with these Greeks.

And yet as much as the simplicity and foolishness of the message of the cross was preached, some were open to hear it and receive it. To them they saw the reality of the power of Jesus...

1:24-25 - *but to those who are 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.*

To those who are called of God – that yield themselves to these glorious truths – they begin to see that what Christ accomplished on the cross was actually the power of God and the wisdom of God.

What might be considered ***the foolishness of God*** is still greater than all the wisdom of men. What might be considered ***the weakness of God*** is still stronger than anything man can produce.

It must be fun to be God. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. When there's something to be done, I can just see the Lord looking to do it in the most obscure, inconceivable way just to cause us to go, *I didn't see that coming*.

I mean look at the examples we have from the Word. God tells Abraham that he's going to be the one that He will essentially bring the Messiah through. Yet Abraham has no kids, and they get older and older. Sarah ends up being 90 and Abraham 100 before Isaac is born. Yet, it became abundantly clear that God was doing something special.

Joseph was marked out for being a special person in God's plan. God wanted to get His people Israel out of Canaan and the wickedness there into a place they could be protected from all this. So he has Joseph betrayed by his brothers, sold as a slave, sent to Potiphar's house, falsely accused by his wife, imprisoned, forgotten in prison, released and elevated to second in command over all Egypt. Why? So God could get His people to Egypt. You see, to many it would seem like such a foolish way to do it. But oh, it's so wise, we can barely fathom it.

March around the walls of Jericho for 6 days, on the 7th day march around it 7 times, and then have the priests blow their trumpets while the rest of you shout



. Would you have done that??

And the weakness of God is stronger than men. God takes a man named Gideon to lead a charge against the Midianites (Judges 7). Yet there's a problem, God said you have too many people. *What? Too many!?* The Midianites were already outnumbering them 4 to 1. So God showed Gideon how to downsize. Now they were outnumbered 14 to 1. God said, still too many. Another downsizing brought them to 450 to 1. Could you imagine this? How many would like to go into battle with these odds? Yet God brought about a great victory, because what seems like the weakness of God in the world's eyes, is still stronger than anything they could muster.

God used a small little shepherd boy to bring down a giant. And David even refused the armor that would have seemed necessary for victory. He goes and faces Goliath with a sling and some stones.

- You see God loves to do things that make it abundantly clear that He's doing it. Nobody could take credit for those things. The world may mock His tactics, but they will find out that He will always come out on top.

And it's this way with our salvation...

2. The Reason for Godly Wisdom – 1:26-31

1:26-27 - *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;*

Paul has the Corinthian church do a little self-examining. *Check all this out for yourselves, is anyone among you here because your credentials dictate that?*

“By using such methods God is overthrowing one of the false standards of the world, *i.e.* the notion that those who matter to Him are the wise, the well-bred, the articulate, the gifted, the wealthy, the wielders of power and influence. Such standards die very hard even in the Christian church. They were a powerful force at Corinth; they stifle the glory of God today. James had a stinging rebuke for Christians adopting such standards in his day,²¹ by giving special treatment to influential people in church gatherings.”²

- Remember our context from last week, people were aligning with different leaders and were glorying in them.

Keep in mind it doesn't say any wise according to the flesh are called, or any mighty. It says not **many**. There are some wonderfully wise and mighty people that are servants of God. I am not one of them, but that's besides the point. The point is that God has still saved and used people who are wise and mighty, and people born into wealth. But it's not these things that separate them to God. Their salvation is still a matter of what Christ did on the cross.

- “The Queen of England was once asked how she was converted to Christ. She replied, “by an '*m*'.” When asked what she meant, she said, “I'm thankful God said '*Not many noble,*' rather than '*not any noble!*'” (S. Adams)

God loves to choose the ***foolish things*** to ***put to shame the wise***.

Sometimes, like maybe every few years, someone will come and give a really nice encouraging word to me. Like saying: ‘*That was a really good message*’, or, ‘*It's clear that God has called you.*’ And guess what, none of that can go to my head at all because it only confirms that I'm just a weak and foolish person. It's

²¹ Jas. 2:1–9.

² Prior, D. (1985). *The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church* (p. 46). InterVarsity Press.

these people He calls! Why? Because when anything good happens through them, it's so clearly evident that it was a work of God. No-one else can boast in it, but we can only glory in the Lord!

1:28 - *and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,*

We all are proof positive of God's way of working. I mean, He brings His only begotten Son into the world and has Him born in a stable. He grows up in obscurity. What kind of logic is that? But it's through those foolish things that He uses by which the wise are confounded.

Why does God do those things that seem so contrary to what we would do?

1:29 - *That no flesh should glory in His presence.*

When we see the people that God uses to fulfill his purposes, and the way he works to fulfill His purposes, nobody can take the credit for it. God must get the glory! If God allowed people to figure out a plan of salvation or the path to God in their own wisdom, then all of us would be welling up with pride and patting ourselves on the back for how spiritual and smart we were. But God works through foolish means, so that it is plainly evident it's a work of God. He gets all the glory for it!

1:30-31 - *But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—³¹ that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”*

Now don't think that you're missing out on wisdom. Don't think God's keeping you in a place of denseness. In Christ we experience the true wisdom; wisdom from God. Not only that, but in Christ we gained **righteousness, sanctification and redemption**. There is no worldly wisdom that can offer that!

The only path to salvation, life and blessing is found in Jesus.

If you're going to glory or boast in something, then glory or boast in the Lord. Man is an unfit person to glory in (as this church was doing). Anything that you've accomplished is because God was giving you the grace to accomplish it. This is how God works. To which we give Him alone the glory!

Paul quotes from Jeremiah and I think it's a great way to end this message:

Jeremiah 9:23–24, *"Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; ²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord."*