

Although the world calls it foolishness, the gospel of Christ crucified is the fount of true wisdom: through the lens of the cross, the mystery of reality comes powerfully into focus for those whom the Spirit reveals it. Therefore reject as foolish what the world calls wisdom and believe the gospel to gain true wisdom.

Introduction – Let’s play a round of word association. “David Hume.”

I. The Wisdom We Want: A Reality-Based Worldview

A. Sophia and Logos (v. 1:17; cf. Jn 1:1-3)

1. The words for “wisdom” and “word” are the Greek words *sophia* and *logos*. In the classical Greek era *sophia* and *logos* were worldview words. Different philosophical schools had their various explanations of how ultimate reality exists in something called the “Logos”—an idea a little bit like “The Force” in Star Wars mythology—a mystical energy or supernatural law that controls all things, eternally binding together all of reality in balance, harmony, love, and justice. (The apostle John begins his gospel playing on this idea and reinterpreting it for Christian theology.) To carry the Star Wars analogy further, the way a person shaped their life according to the Logos was the art of “Sophia.” And as it was, many diverse schools, like non-combat Jedi orders, arose teaching their doctrine on how to live wisely according to reality. Or how the Greeks might say it, “how to live in Sophia according to the Logos.

2. In popular culture, *logos* was essentially understood as speech defined by wisdom—in this case the secular rhetorical “wisdom” of the orators. By the first century, we know that Greco-Roman literature and classical education used the philosophical terms *sophia* and *logos* to employ the rhetorical art of persuasion in public speaking—appealing to a person’s mind, emotions, and ethical instincts. Even though the practice of wisdom in relation to the word (*sophia* and *logos*) was originally associated more with the form of speaking than the content of the message, we should admit the pursuit of a reality-based worldview grounded in wisdom was noble. Yet problems arose because some were better suited for the pursuit than others. And so the “wise” elites came to despise the “foolish” nobodies.

B. Wise Man vs. Fool (vv. 1:18-19; cf. 1:22)

To the unbeliever the *logos* of the cross is nonsense. No ancient orator would even think to speak with eloquence about a man dying on a cross. Crucifixion was too crude to mention in polite or public company. Also, to the unbeliever the crucifixion of Jesus, a condemned criminal, proves his dismal failure as a prophet and messiah, and therefore the foolishness of his disciples. But God’s wisdom is not like natural human wisdom. Paul quotes Isaiah as biblical proof (Isa 29:14; Mk 7:6-7).

II. The “Wisdom” We Get: A Self-Promotional Game

A. Ability to sell yourself (vv. 2:1-3; cf. 1:20-25)

We sense a need for a reality-based worldview. It’s a noble pursuit, but our fallen human nature expressed in sinful, idolatrous actions can’t prevent us from selfish corruption. The postmodernists have accurately discerned an underlying power-play that is present whenever a person, group, or society attempts to arrange the clues of reality into a grand story that makes sense of everything. The accepted human wisdom, whatever form it takes, can be explained by pulling back the curtain where you’ll find no

one but salesmen and dictators. This critique has a lot to commend it. The professional speech salesmen in Corinth certainly fit the description. It was custom for an orator, when he came to a city, to offer a scheduled oration. If this speech won him some fans and attention to garner a reputation of expertise, he would begin teaching student rhetoric and settle down in that city to make it his home. When Paul came proclaiming the gospel as the testimony of God, he didn't come with eloquence (rhetorical competence) or human wisdom (clever, skillful, manipulative argumentation), or to win students to make a living and a name for himself. Instead Paul sought to honor Christ, and to rely on God's power to convert the human heart with the gospel (Rom 1:16; Gal 6:14).

B. Power to manipulate others (vv. 2:4-5; cf. 1:17-18, 26-31)

Corinth's speech salesmen were not honest, humble folks just trying to offer a valuable service. Learning how to speak according to human wisdom with skilled rhetoric harnesses the raw power of leadership. To what end? To manipulate people for your purposes and according to your whims. These were the professional orators of Corinth, enemies of Christ and his lowly people, powerfully wielding human wisdom. Contrast these manipulative power-mongers with Paul, who did not rely on wise and persuasive words with rhetorical flourish to wow his hearers—although Paul was capable of using rhetoric in service to Christ (cf. Acts 17:22-31; 19:8; 1 Cor 13).

III. The Wisdom We Need: A Divinely-Revealed Mystery

A. The wisdom of God is Jesus Christ crucified (vv. 2:6-10; cf. 1:23-25)

The wisdom of this age is all forms of wisdom that are not from God, i.e., purely human wisdom. Especially science, philosophy, humanities, and mathematics are fields that preoccupied Greek society as rulers looked to these as the fountain of wisdom and insight. These fields of knowledge are able to teach us much about people and how God's world operates. But they will certainly lead us into what is falsely called knowledge if God doesn't reveal the mystery of his hidden wisdom (1 Tim 6:20). In the biblical sense, a mystery is something hidden that only God by his grace can reveal to a person. The wisdom of God is incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ the crucified Savior. How is God's wisdom a "mystery"? Its message, meaning, and significance had been hidden from Jews (who consider it a scandalous stumbling block) and from Greeks (who consider it foolishness). The gospel is still hidden—something like a secret—from unbelievers because they either refuse to accept it, choose to ignore it, or haven't actually heard it (Rom 16:25-26; Eph 3:3-5, 9; 6:19; Col 4:3; 1 Tim 3:9, 16). The gospel mystery is the scandalous and foolish message that the public execution of the final Jewish king is the climax of God's plan to save the world.

B. The wisdom of Christians is revealed by God's Spirit (vv. 2:11-16; cf. 1:21, 30-31)

No one knows a person like that person knows himself because no one can see inside the mind of that person except the person thinking his thoughts. Since this is indisputably true, it follows that no one knows God's thoughts except God's Spirit. So how does God's Spirit reveal his wisdom to a person? By giving him the "mind of Christ." The things God reveals by his Spirit to Christians are the things that make Jesus significant. Only believers have the "mind of Christ" which allows them to understand by revelation the deep truths of God's wisdom. Having a cruciform mind means you crucify selfish ambitions, humble yourself to the point of sacrificing yourself for others, and you exercise power through weakness. Christians are thus enabled to think God's thoughts after him.

Conclusion – You can spend a lifetime accumulating natural human wisdom, consuming facts and informed opinions, and becoming adept at impressing others with our knowledge. But all of that acquired learning and

mastered expertise can never ever get you God's wisdom. To get the kind of wisdom that corresponds to the world as God made it and sees it—as reality really is—you need to believe in God's logos and shape your life according to God's sophia. In other words, recognizing Jesus Christ crucified is the key to unlocking a true understanding of reality. When you view everything through the lens of the cross, it will necessarily shape you into a fool for Christ. Realize the world's wise ones will not affirm you, but neither will they have a hold on you. Because you will know Jesus who is the Truth, and the truth will set you free.