

## 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

### "Christ Crucified"

Divided, defiled, disgraced... That was the condition of the congregation of Corinthian church when Paul wrote this letter. It seems as though one sin situation after another was plaguing the people & Paul was writing to put out the forest fires blazing in their midst.

After his initial introduction & words of encouragement, he immediately began to address the divisions among them. Different people, aligning themselves w/different teachers, each thinking that they were more spiritual than the other for their actions. Truth be told; in dividing into little cliques (regardless of who it rallies around) is in no way spiritual & is in every way *carnal*. – So Paul tells them, "Look, you need to share the same mind, the same heart, the same judgment. It's not about the mind of Paul, or the mind of Peter, or the mind of Apollos. We're to have the mind of *Christ*. *He's* the One Who was crucified for you, *He's* the One into Whom we're baptized. & *He's* the One Whom we preach."

& Listen, it's not that the pastor/preacher shouldn't do his due diligence to craft his words in such a way as to articulate/communicate his point to the very best of his ability God's glory... But we don't attach ourselves to the eloquence of the individual. Rather we're to be mindful of the message. & The message is the gospel. We're to draw those who hear us to the cross of J.C.

You see, the wisdom of words will actually neutralize & sterilize the cross of Christ. That's what Paul was pointing out as we came to a close in our last gathering. That worldly wisdom, human philosophy is actually opposed *to* & works *against* the message of the cross. – In Vs 17 he states plainly that Christ sent him to preach the gospel (notice) *not w/the wisdom of words*, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

### Vs 18

I'm not sure that a more telling statement could be uttered w/regard to where a person is at w/God. Where do you stand on the message of the cross? It's about as black & white, straight & simple, for or against as they come. It divides humanity & separates the saved from the unsaved. It's either the most beautiful thing you've ever discovered or the stupidest thing you've ever heard (if you were to honestly evaluate it).

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." To those who reject J.C., the idea of a man who apparently couldn't save *himself* saving *them* is about as ridiculous as it gets.

“You want me to believe that a man who was tortured, beaten, nailed to a cross in open shame & humiliation & left there to die can somehow save my soul? How stupid do you think I am? & How stupid *are you* for even suggesting it? All the more for believing it *yourself!*”

*Now; over 2,000 yrs removed... we can speak of the cross & to us it can seem almost noble, & certainly sound religious to our ears. We place the cross on steeples, put it on our walls, wear it around our necks or on our ears as jewelry. (Perhaps tattoo it on our body). Time & sentiment has completely sanitized its cultural impact.*

Ladies and Gentlemen: the cross, in the ancient Roman world was *anything but* sanitary & it *certainly* wasn't religious. It wasn't perceived as some sentimental means of salvation any more than perhaps an electric chair today... or a noose, or a gas chamber or lethal injection.

*If you went to a jewelry store & started looking for a little gold or diamond studded electric chair to wear around your neck, people would think you were a bit morbid, or macabre... maybe even a bit deranged! ☺ But the cross in the ancient Roman world was an instrument of death well beyond the apparent cruelty of *any* of those means.* – Paul was preaching a message of salvation through the means of a man's death penalty execution! & Not a “dignified death” such as beheading. But the shameful, humiliating, disgraceful death of the cross! – What message could a cruel, degrading, unrelenting instrument of death *possibly* have? It's no wonder that such a message is *foolishness* to those who are perishing!

*“...but to us who are being saved... it is the power of God.” Notice that the gospel (or the message of the cross, they're one & the same as noted in Vs 17) doesn't teach us *about* the power of God, or somehow simply *demonstrate* the power of God, but rather it is the power of God. God has somehow & in some way caused the gospel (the message of the cross) to have intrinsic or inherent power when it's received in faith. It will literally take you from being dead in sin to alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. – To the Romans Paul put it like this, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,”**<sup>1</sup> If you want to experience the power of God in your life, believe on the Lord J.C. & what He's done for you upon the cross.*

Believe the message of the gospel. Listen, preaching a high moral standard isn't the message of the gospel, preaching principles of a strong marriage, or the universal brotherhood of man, isn't the message of the gospel. The *gospel* is the message of the cross.

<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ro 1:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& To those who are being saved, it's a message that's both beautiful & brilliant. That God would become a Man, & as a Man lead a perfect life, yet lay down His life on behalf of His creation as a sinless, spotless sacrifice for our sins. He didn't die for any fault of His own, but for you & for Me... out of His great love for us. You've heard it before. He paid a debt He did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay...

& Before we move on let's notice the verb tenses found in these 2 groups of people. You're either *perishing* or *being saved*. It's not that you *will perish* (though that's a true statement) or that you *will be saved* (though that's true as well). Paul is pointing out here that we're all already on one of those two roads. You're either alive in Christ, or dead in sin. On the narrow road leading to life, or the broad road headed for destruction. Perishing or being saved. – & It all hinges on where you stand w/respect to the message of the cross.

### Vs 19-21

He's bringing into focus for us the comparison/contrast between man's wisdom & the message of God's word. & Since they're in opposition to one another, the warning (coming out of Vs 17) is not to intermingle the two when presenting the gospel.

The gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation. We don't need to "help it out" through our ability to entertain the masses. Because when we try to "help it out" we're actually hurting & hindering what only God can do through the message of the cross.

It's no wonder God says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise & bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent (the scholar)." Listen, God stands in opposition to the wisdom of this world... Now: when we speak of those who are "wise" in this world, understand that we're not speaking along the lines of academic achievements. As if God is somehow against people who want to learn. Or He's somehow angered when a scientist or mathematician draws out a complex problem on the board & at some point in his/her career they solve a problem or draw a conclusion previously unknown to man. I think God enjoys such accomplishments... The simple (or perhaps not so simple) discovering of objective truth.

Paul is speaking more along the lines of human philosophy, humanistic psychology & psychiatry... those who try to solve the deep pains & problems of man through human wisdom & reasoning rather than turning people to His word. – God will *destroy* the wisdom of this world. It stands apart *from* Him & opposed *to* Him.

So Paul says (in light of Isaiah 29), "Where is the wise? The scribe? The disputer (or debater) of this age? Let's line your wisdom up beside God's & see how it measures up."

“What has it done *for* you, how has it truly (eternally) *helped or transformed* you?” It hasn’t. How do I know that? Because God has purposed (in *His* wisdom) that the world through *its* wisdom cannot know God. Again, that’s not to say that being educated is a bad thing. It’s a good thing. But we’re to recognize that we can’t grow in a context that’s *spiritual* through a means that is *natural*. We’re not going to gain *spiritual* wisdom through natural means.

“God has made foolish the wisdom of this world.” Friends; we need to recognize that when Paul is speaking of the wisdom of God & the wisdom of man that he’s speaking of two totally different things. Sometimes people can have the tendency to perceive the wisdom of God as nothing more than the wisdom of man simply multiplied to the highest degree. As if man is as the little child playing Tee Ball & God holds every record in the major leagues. But we need to realize that the wisdom of God is of another order altogether than the wisdom of man. They’re not even on the same scale... As God has said in Isa 55, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says 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.”*<sup>2</sup>

So it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. Notice it’s not foolish preaching that saves, but the message that *seems* foolish to the wise of this world. That’s what Paul means when he speaks of the “foolishness” of God, or the message. That’s how it appears to the perishing. Salvation through a crucified man simply sounds foolish & God was well pleased to accomplish our salvation in a way that no one would’ve expected, in a manner that offends the height of human wisdom. – As Jesus said, *“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”*<sup>3</sup>

Vs 22-25

Let’s understand that when Paul speaks of the “foolishness” & “weakness” of God that he’s speaking in a manner that helps us get a grip on his point. The fact is that there is no “foolishness” or “weakness” of God. But if the cross is the epitome of both... Even in that, the “base” level of His wisdom & weakness transcends anything man could every comprehend or accomplish...

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 55:8–9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 10:21]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“For the Jews request a sign”. In Paul’s day, the Jewish nation was living w/a certain anticipation of the appearance, the coming of the Christ... their Messiah. (& It was an appropriate expectation because He *came!*) But they missed Him, they didn’t acknowledge nor receive Him. Why?

They were looking for a sign. But not just *any* sign. Listen, Jesus fed thousands upon thousands on more than one occasion from just a handful of loaves of bread & a few little fish. He opened the eyes of the blind, made the lame to walk, He healed/cleansed lepers, walked on water, calmed the raging wind & sea w/a word. He raised the dead! More than once! But family (I say it regularly) the flesh is never satisfied. It’s never enough, miracles (contrary to popular opinion) won’t manifest faith!

They were looking for *one* specific sign. They wanted miraculous Messianic deliverance. They wanted their Messiah to lead a military charge, conquer the known world (via crushing their Roman oppressors) & place Israel at the top of the global food chain. Now, the desire for deliverance *isn’t* a bad thing. But their rejection of the deliverance that God was bringing to them was. They weren’t looking for the message of the cross. They didn’t believe they needed deliverance from sin. They were looking for deliverance from political oppression.

They were looking *not* for humility, One to save humanity through suffering & dying... They wanted to see (what we might consider) stereotypical power & great glory (again from a conquering King, not the spotless Lamb). How could anyone put their faith in an unemployed carpenter from Nazareth who died a shameful criminals humiliating death?

They didn’t understand that the message of the cross *is* the power of God. It *does* bring deliverance. Not politically, eternally. Strong enough to do something no man could ever do. Bring salvation to all of mankind.

“The Greeks seek after wisdom.” That is, they valued learning. Typically expressed in high, academic, philosophical terms, logical conclusions & such... Someone has defined philosophy as a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn’t there. – And man is still searching for some theory or formula, that maybe through science or philosophy he will get the answers to some of the questions of life. – It’s grasping for wind. You’ll never obtain it. & Again, the desire for wisdom isn’t bad, the rejection of *God’s* wisdom (however), is.

“But we preach Christ crucified.” (May it always be).

Not a powerful political leader, not one who would disperse wisdom according to the ways of this world. Something altogether unexpected... A crucified Christ.

The ultimate oxymoron (contradiction in terms; awful good, found missing, jumbo shrimp) "Christ crucified". The word "Christ" embodies power, splendor & triumph. "Crucified" points to weakness, defeat, humiliation... It truly is (when carefully considered) a strange message. & If you can't see that, then you either don't understand the cross as it was seen in Paul's day. Or you don't understand who Jesus is. There is a necessary tension that exists between the words, "Christ crucified". But this is the message Paul preached & by the grace of God we'll always be true to it as well.

To the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness. – If you know anything about Greek Mythology at all, then you know that the idea of God leaving His throne, take the form of a servant to save His creation by dying for them would seem absolutely absurd. Zeus would *never* lower himself to serve & save his creation.

But God doesn't work on the basis of popular opinion, He doesn't respond to the polling data. He stays true to His purpose & His plan through the means of the cross. Because to those who are called (both Jews & Greeks/Gentiles), Christ, the *power* of God & the *wisdom* of God. Salvation isn't the achievement of human wisdom; it's the embrace of God's dramatic, unexpected act of love at Calvary.

So... Exhibit "A" is God's "foolish wisdom", Christ crucified. Exhibit "B"? He called you & me... ☺

Vs 26-29

So Paul points out that God has a pattern of doing things in a way that's counterintuitive to worldly rationale. Of course, he doesn't say that not "any" wise or noble are called. Paul himself was a scholar, trained under one of the most renowned Rabbis of his day. But not *many*.

& Again, it's not saying that God typically calls dummies (though I'd certainly qualify in that context), but that He doesn't generally move in a way that's typical or predicable according to the standards of this world. When you look back through scripture & consider guys like Abraham or Joseph, Moses or David, Gideon... or even the 12 that Jesus called. None of them were exactly the "Who's who" of their day. They were the, "Who's he?" Nobodies, runts, shackled in fear, day laborers... People like you & me that God took & raised up & made incredible men out of them.

Guys, we like to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, we're no great find...



We think things we shouldn't, we say things we shouldn't, we do things we shouldn't... & It confounds the wisdom of this world. People can't figure out how God can take sinners, transform their lives & turns them to saints. You were so self centered, now you're serving others. You had a foul mouth, now you don't cuss. You drank all the time, or got high now & then (or all time), now you're clean, you don't drink... God has done an incredible work & everyone knows that it wasn't you, they *know* you. It had to be *Jesus in you*... & That's exactly what God is aiming for, so that He alone gets the glory.

If at the end of the day people think that what you've done (in your life change) is great, then we've erred. If people think, "If God can do it for him/her, then surely He can do it for me." Now we're on point. You see, it's not that God is egocentric & needs the attention. It's that people shouldn't look to me for the answer because I can't help you, He can. Turn to Him... Salvation is of the Lord.

To keep the context (going back to the previous portion of the Ch) it's not of Paul, or Peter, or Apollos. No flesh will glory in His sight. To God be the glory, great things *He* has done.

### Vs 30-31

You see, the wisdom of the world won't get you to God. Jesus became for us *wisdom from God*. He is the way, the truth & the life, & no one comes to the Father except through Him.

But not only wisdom; Jesus is righteousness – for you. That is, in Christ God hasn't only said (to the negative), "Not guilty". To the positive He said, you *are* righteous. All the righteousness of Christ has been accredited to your account.

Jesus is *sanctification* for you. This speaks of our behavior, set apart *from* the world *unto* God. Sanctification isn't achieved by focusing on self, but through abiding in Christ who *is for you* sanctification. It's Christ *in* you.

& Redemption. Purchased to permanent freedom. Freedom isn't found in somehow focusing on self, simply trying harder. You may stop a bad habit, but you won't be free. True freedom is found in Christ. Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed. – Guys, the path leading to God's glory, is Christ crucified.

What's your boast today? Your studies? The letters behind your name? Your athletic accomplishments or trade work? Your wealth or how you pour into your family? ... Are those things bad? No. But they're not even in the same spectrum of Christ crucified... He is everything, our all in all. If we're going to glory, let's glory in the Lord. – We'll close w/this.

*“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; 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.”<sup>4</sup>*

### Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the ready reminder of Your holy word. Shake us out of the cobwebs of religion. Renew in our hearts the wonder of the cross. Christ crucified, may it always be our clarion call. That we be diligent about steering away from worldly wisdom, crafty techniques, entertainment based ideologies & stay true to the message of the cross. Father, we thank You for Your love, salvation found only by grace through faith in J.C. our Lord.

Don't try to figure it out. Don't think that you can somehow obtain it or if you're good enough achieve or merit it. Just humbly receive it, the work of J.C. upon the cross for you... God loves you, Jesus laid down His life for you & if you will turn from your sin & trust in Him today, the power of God will go to work in you. From death to life, washed clean in Jesus name...

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<sup>4</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Je 9:23-24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.