

1 Corinthians 1:17-31

Verses 17-18:

--Paul has set up a contrast in these verses. He is putting the **wisdom of words** in contrast with **the message of the cross**.

--So called wisdom was a central ingredient in the divisions and contentions in the church. So from here till the end of chapter 3 Paul is going to use the Greek *Sophia* for “wisdom” 16 times.

--The clear contrast is the wisdom of words (*logos*) and the message (*logos*) of the Cross. Paul wants to make it clear that the **message of the cross** is not a new type of wisdom or philosophy of life and therefore could not be treated as such.

--The **wisdom of words** relates to human reason and intellect. The **message of the cross** remains an act of divine revelation. It relates to all the truth the cross contains.

--The **wisdom of words** hears the **message of the cross** and considers it to be **foolishness**—which is really something stronger like *absurdity or madness*. Paul knows that to one group—**those who are perishing**—it is a message in word only and therefore crazy. But to others, it is the truth of God, and comes to them in word and the **power of God**.

1 Thessalonians 1:5: For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

Verses 19-21:

--(19) Here Paul quotes from **Isaiah 29:14** (which is in context a warning not to try and match wits with God) and makes it clear that the folly of the cross is how God brings about what He predicted He would do: Bring to nothing human wisdom.

--(20) Paul then calls out some of the learned individuals of their day and age as the **wise** (philosopher); the **scribe** (learned in the law); the **disputer** (eloquent debater). His question is where had all their wisdom brought humanity? To God? No! To salvation? No!

--And, where was all their learning now in light of the **message of the cross**? What was their contribution in the light of what God has done by sending His only Son to die on the cross?

--This is the point. The **message of the cross** is a message about God from God. Not how it would be good for us to act but how God has already acted in human history. It is divine revelation—not something that can be debated or scrutinized or held under exam by human intellect. *Reason Vs. Revelation—**2:1: the testimony of God**.*

--Notice this as well: **it pleased God** through the foolishness of the message to save those who believe *God's message*—not our message.

--The word for preach is *kerygma* and is referring not mainly to the art of preaching itself but to the *message* of a crucified Messiah.

--The early Christians were swept off their feet by the *revelation* of the message they heard. They went out and set the world on fire saying God had come as the Son of Man, died as the Lamb of God, and was returning as the King of Kings!

--It had nothing to do with reason per say. Human reason would see—and still does see—the central things of the gospel as foolishness—Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Miracles, Propitiation, Resurrection, Second Coming, etc.

--This is important for us—especially if we fear our message to the unsaved *might be* heard and considered absurdity or madness.

-God tells us first: The wise worldling *will* consider this message crazy and foolish.

-God tells us second: That is actually part of what has pleased Me to do and it is My message about Me and not your message about you.

--Sharing His message about Him—the **message of the cross**—is where the power of God resides. What are we told of Peter's sermon in the Book of Acts? Where was its power displayed? **Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart (2:37)**—in the human heart! God has secret allies in the human heart and that is where His message enters and where His message works in power.

*Hallesby (Religious or Christian?): *"The Bible does not say a great deal by way of explaining the cross. And what it does say does not tend to solve the mystery of the cross; it shows both Jews and Gentiles that the cross is not only in harmony with God's previous revelation, but that it is the fulfillment and completion thereof (Romans 3:21-26).*

*It can, however, scarcely be said that it is this Biblical explanation of the cross which gives the helpless sinner consolation and peace. It is not the explanation of the cross but the cross as a fact which is so decisive in its importance. For man cannot be comforted and helped by anything else or less than entering into fellowship with God and living in His presence. We cannot be helped either by explanation or enlightenment or by the words or works of God, but only by God Himself: only by meeting God and being permitted to live in fellowship with Him."**

--I don't have to reason my way into meeting someone. I just believe they exist and meet them.

Verses 22-24:

--Here Paul points out the two bastions of human reason in his world. The Jews desired a miraculous supernatural sign or experience (**Mt. 12:39; Mk. 8:11; Jn. 6:30**).

Matthew 16:4: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

--The Greeks loved and valued human eloquence and reason and philosophy. Both demanded that the message God spoke came to them on their terms or they would not believe.

--Yet God would not change or accommodate what He had done. So the **message of the cross** became a **stumbling block** (*scandal*) to the Jews and **foolishness** (*absurdity*) to the Greeks. As it still is. This is the reason why so many still want to change, or accommodate, or save Jesus from His own message. *The mistake of Peter trying to save Jesus from Himself!*

--It is hard for us who have heard this message so often to realize how crazy and offensive it was back then for these early believing Jews and Gentiles. Even so, it is becoming scandalous and madness in our culture as well!

--Here is the question: Is the **message of the cross** divine? Then it doesn't need your help. To change it is an offense to God and the desire of Satan.

Proverbs 30:5-6: Every word of God is pure; He is shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

--We simply speak the truth. It is not prideful or presumptive to claim salvation or new birth. Some would rather say they would like to be changed, or would like to know God, or believe but it is too far to claim it. But it would be untrue to ourselves to be falsely dishonest. *Are you married? Yes. Have you repented? Yes. Are you saved? Yes.*

Verse 25:

--Here there are only two options.

Stott (The Cross of Christ): "Powerless wisdom or foolish power: it was (and still is) a fateful choice. The one combination that is not an option is the wisdom of the world plus the power of God."

--God is still wiser and stronger than men—yet in His own way. Do we trust Him or ourselves? Will we believe and trust His foolish message or the words of the worldly wise? *The Christian message is not unreasonable but it is conflicting with worldly reasoning.*

Verses 26-29:

--First, Paul explained how the **message of the cross** was an offense. Now, he is showing them that the *recipients of the message* (them as believers!) were also an offense to the world. This was evident in their **calling**.

--In this world it is so often the wise, mighty and noble that win. In the basic outcome of human nature—in regular old cause and effect—fisherman and tax collectors would not get the better of the philosophers and the wealthy and those of noble blood. What happened in the early church was only possible through the grace and power of God!

--Even today, we still feel the pressure of this and that is why the Church caters so much to the "gifted" of this world. We can easily be tricked into thinking our fellowships and God's message would be better off if we had more wise, mighty, and noble (actors, sports stars, politicians, and CEO's) speaking our message. *Campbell Morgan saying he can remember when churches were judged by how many carriages were outside 10, 15, 20...!*

--We can personally fall into the same trap wishing that we were more wise, mighty, and noble. *Beauty, Money, Fame, Intellect, etc. When to be so would truly be our ruin!*

--Again, Paul doesn't say not *any* but simply not *many*. When you have strength it is much easier to trust in your own intellect, money, or power than in God. Jesus Christ Himself was clear that not many rich men would enter into the kingdom of God.

*Chesterton (Orthodoxy): *“Only the Christian Church can offer any rational objection to a complete confidence in the rich. For she has maintained from the beginning that the danger was not in man’s environment, but in man. Further, she has maintained that if we come to talk of a dangerous environment, the most dangerous environment of all is the commodious environment.”**

--If the message of the cross is not true, and man is not a sinner deserving of judgment, then why aren’t the wisest, strongest, wealthiest, and most noble better than others?

--God wants to be seen and so He did not choose to manifest Himself through the world’s glories! God is actively working to put to shame the unregenerate wisdom of the world. So don’t get caught up in it.

Luke 10:21: *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and 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.”*

--(29) What is the summation of this? God desires that no flesh would **glory** or **boast** in His presence. Everything in us that might be good is due to Him.

--The **message of the cross** will never be popular because it removes all human pride. Instead Satan will try to twist it to include human pride on any level.

--It is reality, and it is *the* reality to which all other so-called realities will be forced to conform to and be judged by. That is why it is rejected by prideful men and women!

Verses 30-31:

--God’s wisdom works all of these ends in Christ Jesus. The world has its own versions of wisdom (Education); righteousness (Societal morals); sanctification (Self-defined life purposes); redemption (die full of money, sex, degrees).

--Yet for the believer who has come to know the power of God. Christ is our fullness.

John 1:16: *And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.*

Colossians 1:19: *For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.*

--What does that mean for us personally and practically?

--It means , Why would I trust in my own wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, or redemption when God has already sent Christ to be these for me? I can have His wisdom instead of my own. His righteousness instead of my own. His sanctification instead of my own. His redemption instead of my own.

--Where does that leave me? Not boasting in myself! It leaves me glorying in Christ Jesus!