

Christ, the Power & Wisdom of God

(I Cor. 1:17-29)

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction ó

- A. In our text today, I Cor. 1:17-29, the Apostle Paul describes the Gospel, referring to the preaching of it as the òpreaching of the crossö in vs. 18 and then in verse 23, as the preaching of òChrist crucified.ö And in verse 24, he gives us a description that summarizes for us what this message of the Gospel, of Christ and Him crucified is unto those whom God calls unto Himself, calling it, ***“Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”*** And so Iøve chosen that summation there in verse 24 of what the Gospel means to those whom God saves as the title of todayø message, òChrist, the Power & Wisdom of God.ö
- B. Cite plan to cover vss. 30-31 next week.
- C. Background leading into to text for today:
Note how in the first part of the chapter, Paul is directing men away from looking to him (read vss. 12-13).

II. Reading and Commentary on Text (I Cor. 1:17-29)

A. Vss.17 ó

And so here in verse 17 Paul emphasizes that his primary mission was to preach the gospel and that, not with the wisdom of words that might direct you to the preacher rather than the object of what is being preached (Read vs. 17).

1. That is ó not by the art of my debating skills, my deep theological exegesis, with human eloquence and oratory etc., but to present the simplicity of Christ and Him crucified.
2. And this, lest the cross should be of none effect:
 - (a) That is ó lest we be so entranced with the eloquence, or the logical reasoning of men, or of their oratorical skills (in other words with the manner of preaching rather than this specific subject of the cross).
 - (b) And now we see the reaction to this message, when preached aright, as we move on into verse 18í

B. Vss. 18:

1. 2 classes are described in this verse: (1) Those who are being saved & (2) those who are perishing. These 2 classes are distinguished by their attitude towards the message of the cross.

Vs.18 (Con't.)

2. **“Preaching of the cross”** is another way of describing the message of Christ and the merits of His whole work of redemption, His very righteousness, on behalf of His sheep. In other words, it is the preaching of what Christ accomplished fully and completely at the cross in perfect satisfaction to God’s justice.
3. And to **“them that are perishing”**, this message of grace is foolishness. But to those who are being saved (the literal translation) it is the power of God.
4. Ref. Rom. 1:16-17 ó **“...the gospel... is the power of God unto salvation... for therein is the righteousness of God revealed”** In other words this specific message is the instrument God uses to reveal Christ to each and everyone for whom He lived and died as He makes them wise unto salvation in each and every generation. So we see that we cannot know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent (which is life eternal per John 17:3) apart from this righteousness revealed.

C. Verses 19-20:

1. Vs. 19 is quoted from Isaiah 29:14 where the people of Judah were threatened by an attack from the king of Syria. God's wisdom had shown them that they were to depend solely upon His faithfulness and power to protect them, to keep them, and to defeat their enemies so that they would continue in that land.
2. God had promised this to the nation Israel and God had proved over and over again His faithfulness and power to do so. The wisdom of men urged the nation to move towards Egypt, a heathen, idolatrous nation, and make an alliance with Egypt to help them against the foreign invaders. God had forbidden them to make alliances with ungodly nations in order to seek deliverance from enemies.
3. This is a picture of human wisdom and reasoning when it comes to eternal salvation. It typifies sinners who, rather than seeking God and coming His way upon the one ground which glorifies Him, they trust in their own deeds ó in something other than or in addition to the one righteousness Christ established on the cross.
4. And so in vs. 20 we see what becomes of these who consider this message as foolishness ó they perish in their foolishness. As Acts 13:41 proclaims, **“Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”** This New Testament quote from Habakkuk should serve as a warning and encourage all to strive to rightly understand just what this preaching of the Cross consists of and to find their rest therein rather in the way that seems right to us ó that is, the way of our own wisdom.

D. Verse 21:

1. “...*after that in the wisdom of God...*” means by God’s counsel or His purpose derived from His infinite wisdom í
2. By the wisdom of the world ó none would know Him.
3. But “...*it pleased God...*” That is, it was of His sovereign good will and pleasure to determine that sinners would be saved by what the world calls foolishness ó the preaching of the Gospel.
4. And those to whom He reveals Himself by this very word of regeneration in the hands of the Holy Spirit are those who believe that which remains foolishness to the rest of the world.

E. Verses 22 ó 23:

1. “*Christ crucified*” ó This is another way of referring to the preaching of the cross. (Ref. I Cor. 2:2).
2. Now this message and the Christ revealed therein is a òstumblingblockö or cause of offence to the Jews. They expected a different Christ ó certainly not one who should die. This can be likened to those who name Christ today, but do not go for the One revealed in this message wherein the offense of the cross is set forth. No, many protest, òDon’t tell me that He didn’t die for all, etc.ö
3. To those to whom God has graciously called by His Spirit to believe this message of Christ and Him crucified, bask in the words of blessing from our Lord as recorded in Matt. 11:6 when He said, “*And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*” – to whom this message and this Christ is not a cause of offence ó a stumbling block.
4. And to the Greeks, this message and the Christ revealed therein is òfoolishness.ö This reminds us of the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill who reveled in all their many gods but who couldn’t tolerate it when Paul set forth Christ as the God-man who died and rose again. How can it be that riches should come through His poverty, that the Son of God should be crucified and that justification should be by One upon whom God’s wrath was poured out? This certainly would not fit with man’s natural notions. They considered it foolishness because it was not the product of human wisdom and understanding.

F. Verse 24 (A verse that is the focus of this message and so one we will consider further, but initially not)

1. òcalledö = appointed from all nations (Jews and Greeks) ó chosen from among all of fallen humanity to whom Christ and the Gospel message naturally would remain a stumblingblock and amount to foolishness apart from God’s calling.
2. This message of Christ crucified and the Christ revealed therein is the power of God and the wisdom of God to God’s appointed ones ó those whom He also calls in each generation by His Spirit.

G. Verse 25:

1. Not that there is any such thing as *foolishness* in God nor the least degree of *weakness* but here Paul sets forth the irony as we first consider that those who remain blind in spiritual darkness consider the message of the cross (of salvation's conditions being fully met by Christ alone) as foolishness or folly, and / or view Christ and His work as so weak as to be insufficient to save them apart from their own work of faith.
2. And consider the irony in realizing that the reality of their blindness has them casting dispersion on both the message and the Savior that is higher in wisdom and greater in power than all that human knowledge can conceive. So what men call foolishness is, in God's esteem, a rich manifestation of his wisdom and power in conquering sin, death, hell, and the grave in complete and total victory for all whom He represented in His life and death on the cross.

H. Verses 26 -28:

1. *oi* after the flesh is understood to accompany each phrase and so it should be because the reality is that in Christ, men are made wise unto salvation, mighty and victorious in Christ and noble as children of the king, princes, heirs of all the eternal riches that the precious blood of Christ could and did earn for them.
 2. Ref. Jer. 9:23-24 (Quote).
 3. *confound* means to *put to shame*.
 4. Paul is not calling God's people *fools* and *weaklings* but rather he is expressing how the world perceives them. He does this to confound and bring to nothing (or set aside and thereby expose) the real value of all that men by nature hold in high esteem as it concerns spiritual matters. The very things men think by nature will recommend them unto God are proven to be nothing in light of the only thing that will remove God's wrath and gain His favor in the blood and righteousness of Christ.
 5. ***“...to bring to nought things that are.”*** This means to annul things that are. That is, those who imagine that within themselves they can acquire (or can contribute to) some merit before God, who thought themselves something in will ultimately discover that it all will be abolished and will find that when weighed against the standard of God's righteousness in all of that shall serve nothing other than to manifest how they are found lacking.
- I. Verse 29 in And what is the ultimate reason? That no flesh should glory (or boast) in God's presence. God will not share His glory.

III. Closing Comments on Christ, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God (vs. 24):

Now remember that to all except those who ðare being savedö (as described in vs. 18) ó i.e. ó all except those who are described in verse 24 as ðthe calledö ó that to these Christ remains either a stumbling block (a cause of offence) or foolishness, if not both.

But in accordance with God's design (His wisdom), even those being saved must be divinely called by this Gospel. Otherwise it would be of the wisdom or power of man and the flesh could thereby boast in His presence. So keep in mind the scriptural description of how we all begin in spiritual darkness, as children of wrath by nature. We must be made wise unto salvation.

Next week as we consider verses 30-31, we'll see even more details of how totally salvation is conditioned on Christ alone as we see how all we need for acceptance before a holy God is based exclusively upon what Christ accomplished in His life and death. And I hope you've seen that truth even today.

With that in mind, I now direct your attention back to verse 24 and encourage you to appreciate in what sense that those whom God has called (through the message of Christ and Him crucified) are brought to see Christ and embrace the message of Him crucified, no longer seeing it as a stumblingblock, nor as foolishness, but Christ as both the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Consider what wisdom in contriving such a great salvation! Only by God's way of salvation, by Christ and Him crucified, is all boasting excluded & God receives all the glory.

Consider what power in accomplishing what only the God-man could and did accomplish so as to reconcile ungodly, otherwise hell deserving sinners, unto a holy God.

Nowhere can the wisdom and power of God be seen more than in the truth of the gospel message that proclaims how eternal salvation and final glory is conditioned on Christ alone, based solely upon His finished work at the cross alone, His righteousness, and that appropriated to the sinner solely by God's judicial imputation or reckoning of it to them. That is, it is all of grace ó not even procured or appropriated by any act of the sinner's hand.

And here the wisdom and power of God is manifested for only in this message of Christ and Him crucified, based upon this way of salvation and it alone do we see how

- (1) God is glorified, receiving all the glory
- (2) Christ alone is exalted
- and
- (3) All ground of boasting is excluded in the sinner.

While many do glory in many different things, this passage clearly teaches that we have no basis for doing so ó for glorying (taking confidence) in anything that proceeds from us.

There is no basis whatsoever for us as sinners to glory, or boast in (to find any source of confidence whatsoever) before a holy God other than this ó to glory in the Lord, seeing God's glory (the revelation of who He is) in our salvation, based solely on the imputed righteousness of our Lord and Savior, for there alone can we know Him in His redemptive character as a both a just God and a Savior.

Oh, the wisdom of God in contriving such a great salvation! Oh, the power of God in accomplishing such a great salvation. Behold that ó the power and wisdom of God, in the Gospel of Christ & Him Crucified!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.

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