

## 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

It will help us to understand this passage if we remember that the Corinthians, being Gentile Greeks, were great lovers of human wisdom. They regarded their philosophers as national heroes. This attitude had apparently crept into the church at Corinth. Some wanted to make the Gospel more acceptable to the academic, intellectual, upper crust. They did not feel that the Gospel had enough status among scholars. Efforts to make the gospel more acceptable are completely misguided. There is a vast difference between God's wisdom and man's wisdom, and there is no use trying to reconcile them.<sup>1</sup>

**How does Paul describe the message of the Cross (v. 18)?** As *"foolishness to those who are perishing."* But to those who are being saved, the gospel is *"the power of God."* They hear the message, they accept it by faith, and the miracle of regeneration takes place in their lives. Notice the solemn fact in this verse that there are only two classes of people, those who perish and those who are saved. There is no in-between class.

**What is the point of Paul's quoting Isaiah 29:14 (v. 19)?** it has always been God's method to expose the foolishness of merely human wisdom. Paul illustrated his point by an example of Israel, who, following humanly wise counsel, formed an alliance with Egypt as a defense against Assyria, when in fact only the miraculous intervention of God was able to save them (2 Kings 18:17-19:37).<sup>2</sup>

**What are the implications of Paul's rhetorical questions (v. 20)?** Paul is hurling out a defiant challenge: **"Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?"** Did God consult them when He devised His plan of salvation? Could they ever have worked out such a plan of redemption if left to their own wisdom? Can they rise to disprove anything that God ever said? The answer is an emphatic "No!" They are all fools! God has made foolish the wisdom of this world.<sup>3</sup>

The brilliance of man cannot appreciate the plan of God (Isaiah. 55:8-9). It is not self-confident intellect but humble faith that allows one to enter the narrow way.

**What does Paul have to say about worldly wisdom (v. 21)?** Human wisdom, in and of itself, does not enable people to know God. Man cannot, by his own common sense, come to the saving knowledge of God. For centuries God gave the human race this opportunity, and the result was failure. Then, God introduced the Savior, and by the preaching of the Gospel message, that seems foolish to men, those who believed were saved. Of course, we know the Gospel is not foolishness, but it seems foolish to the unenlightened mind of man.

**What was the differing perspective of Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) (v. 22)?** The Jews characteristically asked for *"miraculous signs"* as demonstrations of God's power (Matthew 16:1-4; John 2:18). Their attitude was that they would believe if some miracle were shown to them.

The Greeks typically respected "wisdom"—an explanation of things that was logical and made sense to them. The message of the Cross did not appear to make sense. How could anyone believe in someone who was apparently not smart enough to save Himself from suffering execution as a criminal—when He was not a criminal? The Greeks were lovers of human wisdom, but there was nothing in the gospel message to appeal to their pride of knowledge. Note that Paul uses the terms "Greeks" (v. 22) and "Gentiles" (v. 23) interchangeably.

**How was Paul's message of the crucifixion received (v. 23)?** A crucified Messiah was "a stumbling block" to the Jews, because they looked for a mighty military leader to deliver them from the oppression of Rome. Instead of that, the gospel offered them a Savior nailed to a cross of shame. To the Greeks, Christ crucified was foolishness. They could not understand how One who died in such seeming weakness and failure could ever solve their problems.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1749). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 509). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>3</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1750). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**What is the role of Christ to those who have been called (v. 24)?** To the called/saved, both Jews and Gentiles (Greeks), Christ is the instrument of God's "*power*" in conquering the forces of evil and delivering people from their control. He is also the instrument of God's "*wisdom*" in solving the problem that human reasoning could not unravel, namely: how people can know God and come to God.<sup>5</sup>

**What are the contrasts of v. 25?** The "foolishness" of God, represented by the gospel of the Cross, is "wiser" than human wisdom, and the "weakness" of God in the eyes of unbelievers, is "stronger" than human strength.

**What did Paul remind the Corinthians of (v. 26)?** He reminded them of their earthly heritage. They were not exactly members of the upper crust of society. God had chosen the "nobodies" rather than the "beautiful people" of Corinth.

**Who did God choose and why (v. 27)?** He chose the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong. He loves to take up people who are of no esteem in the eyes of the world and use them to glorify Himself. These verses should serve as a rebuke to Christians who curry the favor of prominent and well-known people and show little or no regard for the more humble saints of God.<sup>6</sup>

**Why did God choose the lowly and despised things of this world (vv. 28-29)** So the glory might be His and His alone. When God called, He turned the world's standards upside down, and chose the ordinary rather than the outstanding in order that no one could brag before Him (v. 29). The ones He calls are not generally the ones the world considers great. The Bible is full of illustrations of God choosing less than promising material as His instruments. That ensures that He alone gets the glory.

**Who is the source ("because of Him") of the believer's life "in Christ" (v. 30)?** God the Father. It is because of His calling that we are in a relationship with Christ (John 6:44, 65).

**What has Christ become for us (v. 30)?** He has become our **wisdom** (1 Corinthians 2:16), our **righteousness**, i.e. our right standing in the sight of God (Romans 4:24-25), our **holiness**, i.e. transformed from one degree of sanctification to another (2 Corinthians 3:18), and our **redemption**, i.e. our ultimate liberation from sin (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 4:30). In the wisdom of God, the plan of salvation was accomplished by a crucified Christ hidden from the "wise and learned" but revealed to simple believers (Matthew 11:25-26).<sup>7</sup> Because of our position as a child of God, His attributes became ours by inheritance/imputation. We are now spiritually united with Christ....one in heart, mind and spirit.

**What is the point of the quotation from Jeremiah 9:24 (v. 31)?** "*Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord*" summarizes Paul's point. Instead of emphasizing the Lord's servants and what they have done, we should focus on what the Lord Himself has done in providing wisdom and power in Christ. Paul's argument therefore is, "Why glory in men? They cannot do any one of these things for you."

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Corinthians, 2019 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 36

<sup>6</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1751). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 509). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.