

The Foolishness Of God

Introduction. In 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5, Paul continues to deal with the problem of division in the church, focusing on what Paul calls the “foolishness of God.” It is a contrast between the foolishness of men, which they think is wisdom, and the wisdom of God, which they think is foolishness. Because the Corinthians misunderstood the nature of the gospel and viewed it as another philosophy, Paul commenced a discussion to show that the gospel was not just another human philosophy. This lesson will consider the wisdom of man and God.

I. *The Inferiority Of Human Wisdom*

- A. The ancient Greeks were in love with philosophy, or the “love of wisdom.” They had perhaps as many as fifty identifiable philosophical parties or movements, which vied for acceptance and influence.
- B. Unfortunately, many of the Corinthian converts carried their spirit of philosophical factionalism into the church. Some of them still held onto beliefs of their former pagan philosophy. Although it is true that men have recognized much that is true about life, a Christian has no need of human philosophy. It is unnecessary and, more often than not, misleading. By nature it is speculation, based on man’s limited and fallible insights and understanding.
- C. The world today, just as in Paul’s day, is caught up in the admiration and worship of human opinion, human wisdom and human desires.
 1. Modern man has made gods of education and human opinion. Some frantically look almost everywhere but to God and His word for values, meaning, guidance and help.
 2. God did not send Paul in “wisdom of words.” Paul came to preach God’s word, not men’s words.
 3. God’s word is the only true wisdom and is all the wisdom that is reliable and needed. Truth needs no addition of human wisdom because it often contradicts or distorts it. Scripture stands alone -- reliable, sufficient and complete.
 4. Without exception, man’s wisdom elevates himself and lowers God. It always, no matter how seemingly sincere, objective and scholarly, caters to man’s self-will, pride, fleshly inclinations and independence.
- D. Becoming a Christian does not give us all the answers to everything -- certainly not in the areas of science, mathematics or any other field of strictly human learning. But if we want answers to what life is about -- answers about where we came from, where we are going and why we are here, about what is right and wrong -- then human learning cannot help us. Man’s attempts to find such answers on his own are

doomed to fail.

II. ***The Superiority Of Divine Wisdom***

- A. When man elevates his own wisdom he automatically attempts to lower God's wisdom, which looks to him like foolishness because it conflicts with his own thinking.
- B. The word of the cross includes the entire gospel message and work, God's plan and provision for man's redemption. In its fullest sense it is God's total revelation, for His revelation centers in the cross.
- C. Paul never changed his message to suit his hearers. The Corinthians, like the Athenians and most other Greeks, had more than enough philosophy. He would give them nothing but God's profoundly simple, but historical and objective, truth -- not another man's complex and subjective speculations.
- D. All men are either in the process of being saved or of being destroyed. One's view of the cross determines which. In 1:19-2:5, Paul proceeds to give five reasons why God's wisdom is superior to man's.
 - 1. The permanence of God's wisdom (1:19-20).
 - a) Paul uses a quotation from Isaiah 29:14 to emphasize that the wisdom of men will be destroyed. Israel would be delivered because of God's might. God continually told Israel that He would fight for her. All she had to do was trust and obey.
 - b) Men are all inclined to try to solve their problems and fight their battles by their own ingenuity and in their own power. But the wisdom of man only gets in God's way (James 3:15-18).
 - c) Our advances in technology and communication have not really advanced us. In asking the rhetorical questions, Paul is asking them if they were better off because of the wise man, scribe and debater. Nothing really changes. Life has the same problems, and men have the same struggles.
 - d) Modern human wisdom has failed just as ancient human wisdom failed, except that its failures come faster and spread faster. The outer life improves in a material way, while the inner life seems to have correspondingly less meaning. The real issues in life are not solved.
 - e) Human wisdom can sometimes see the immediate cause of a problem but it cannot see the root, which always is sin. Human wisdom cannot see because it will not see. As long as it looks on God's wisdom as foolishness, its own wisdom will be foolish. In other words, human wisdom itself is a basic part of the problem.
 - 2. The power of God's wisdom (1:21-25).
 - a) With all their supposed wisdom men have never been able to know God. The more man looks to himself and depends on him-

self, the worse his situation becomes. As his dependence on his wisdom increases, so do his problems.

- b) Believing implies complete assent to all the truth of the saving gospel. For those who will exchange their wisdom for His, God offers transformation, regeneration, new birth and new life through the power of the cross of Jesus Christ.
 - c) God does not expect men to come to Him through their own wisdom; He knows they cannot. But they can come to Him through His wisdom, which is contained in the gospel. The wisdom, work and glory are all God's, but the blessing they give can be man's.
 - d) Desire for proof most frequently is an evasion, an excuse for not believing. Jesus performed miracle after miracle and yet those who witnessed them did not believe in Him (John 10:38). The Jews thought He would come in earthly power and splendor. The Greeks wanted intellectual proof and they were interested in only hearing and arguing about exciting new ideas and problems (Acts 17:21). They wanted intellectual novelty.
 - e) Ironically, the very part of God's plan and work that seems most ridiculous and useless from man's natural standpoint actually exhibits His greatest power and greatest wisdom.
3. The paradox of God's wisdom (1:26-28).
- a) It is likely that when the Corinthians became Christians they lost a great deal of the prestige, influence and income they did have. In fact, if more of them would have been wise, mighty or noble, it is likely that fewer of them would have been saved (Matthew 11:25).
 - b) Weakness and insufficiency are the climate in which God's strength is made manifest. The unbelieving Ph.D. knows nothing beyond his books, his own mind and his own experience and the simple Christian knows forgiveness, love, grace, life and hope.
 - c) The things which the world considers valuable and profitable God has chosen to make powerless and ineffective. The world has its values turned upside down as far as God is concerned. The world measures greatness by man's standards -- intelligence, wealth, prestige and position -- things which God has determined to put at the bottom. This fact is evidence that the gospel cannot be considered a humanly devised system of philosophy.
4. The purpose of God's wisdom (1:29-31).
- a) The truly wise of this world are those whose wisdom is not of this world but is from the Lord. Christians can say, without pride or boasting, that they have been wise in Jesus Christ.
 - b) No one can boast in the presence of God concerning their salvation because He has set in motion a plan. Viewing the gospel as

another philosophy and the preachers as competitive philosophers caused a tendency to boast in men. By exalting what men would reject, God has removed cause for boasting.

- c) The Corinthians are what they are because of God's grace. Jesus Christ is our wisdom from God. This wisdom incorporates righteousness (legal justification), sanctification (holiness of character or moral purity) and redemption (setting free through the payment of a ransom). The world casts Jesus off, but Paul states that He is the full embodiment of God's wisdom. As we begin to walk in the spirit, we are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).
5. The presentation of God's wisdom (2:1-5).
- a) Paul did not come to Corinth as a philosopher but as a witness. Paul was a witness only to God's revelation, not to his own human understanding or reason (2 Corinthians 4:2).
 - b) Paul did not preach Jesus simply as the perfect teacher or the perfect example or the perfect man -- though He was all of these. The foundation of all of his preaching was Jesus as the divine Savior. Until a person accepts God's revelation in the cross, no other revelation matters.
 - c) When Paul was with them, he did not trust his own powers and he was conscious of his own feebleness. He was with them in fear and trembling because he knew that he had many enemies and he knew how Greeks loved the elegant oratory. He delivered his message with a deep and anxious concern for its success. Whereas the Greek philosophers manifested arrogance and self-confidence, Paul did not manifest these attributes when he came to them.
 - d) Paul saw no place for calculated theatrics and techniques to manipulate response. Many have responded to an emotional appeal, without a true knowledge and conviction of God. Paul did not do that kind of preaching. We become disciples of Christ and not disciples of the preacher.
 - e) Paul did not want their faith to be sustained by the power or wisdom of man. God intended to furnish those in the first century with a firm and solid demonstration that the gospel was from heaven; and this could not have happened if it rested on man's eloquence or philosophy.

Conclusion. The church should not have divisions based on philosophy any more than it should have divisions based on individuals. We are to be united around God's wisdom, not human wisdom. We are one in Jesus Christ and should be one in His word and power, and in the fellowship of

those who are His. The power of God in the gospel has the ability to change the heart of man and overcome the desire to sin. If you are ready to take hold of that power today, then obey the gospel now.