

## 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-21

### INTRODUCTION

These verses are a contrast between the foolishness of the world, which they think is wisdom and the wisdom of God, which the world thinks, is foolishness. It is a contrast between God's true wisdom and the world's supposed wisdom between supposed foolishness and the world's true foolishness.

The Greeks were in love with human wisdom they had over 50 philosophical parties giving their views on life and death and a host of other things.

The Greeks loved debating and discussing everyone's ideas and so human wisdom was very important to them. With no absolute standard of truth ideas of right and wrong were based entirely upon human opinion. Unfortunately many of the Corinthian converts would have carried this worldly idea into the church and this may have been the reason why party factions had developed in Corinth with some liking Paul's teaching and others Peter's etc.

If the Christians at Corinth continue to think like unbelievers then division in the church will continue for it is only the gospel that truly unites. This is why Paul now focuses on the gospel. He wants to show the wisdom of the gospel compared to the foolishness of man's wisdom. When Paul preached to the Corinthians he did not use human wisdom, he was not giving his own philosophy of life but he preached the gospel because human wisdom takes away from the gospel, it empties the gospel of its power (v 17).

Our society is just like the society of Corinth. O we may not be into philosophy in such a big way but our society is full of worldly wisdom. There are no absolutes in people's minds if you think something is right then that is fine for you but don't expect anyone else to believe exactly the same thing. This is why all religions are seen as equal there is simply no absolute truth so two religious groups can both be right even though they might contradict on another.

But the gospel is not another idea thought up by someone to explain religion or life and death. No! The gospel is the power of God unto salvation it is true wisdom because it is God's wisdom

### 1. THE SUPERIORITY OF GOD'S WISDOM (v 18)

Now when the world elevates its own wisdom then it automatically attempts to lower God's wisdom which looks to him like foolishness because it conflicts with his own thinking and understanding. That God would become man be crucified and raised in order to provide for man's forgiveness and entrance into heaven is an idea far too simple or foolish for the natural man to accept.

That Christ could die on behalf of others so that the destiny of every person who ever lived in decided depending on what they do with this truth concerning Christ is simply stupid to natural man. It allows no place for man's ability to do something to save himself. It goes against human pride.

Paul recognises this; he knows that the message of the cross is foolishness to the unbelieving world that relies upon their wisdom and ideas. The unbelieving world is perishing now, because they reject God's wisdom and accept their own human wisdom.

Now the cross is the pinnacle of God's wisdom and message and so Paul highlights that aspect of God's work but he really means every aspect of God's work in saving sinners is seen as foolish to the perishing world in which we live. The fact that God is loving and wrathful is foolishness to our world. The fact that God became man seems foolish that he lived as the God man in our world and

lived sinless is foolish to those who are perishing. That he should die rise again and ascend into heaven and today intercedes for his people is simply foolish to a world that accepts no absolute truth. This is seen in our own day. Try to explain the gospel message to your friends or work colleagues and they look at you as if you are from outer space.

It is so bizarre to them, so unbelievable, so stupid that they think we are weird for believing such things. We ought not to be surprised by such a view for it is simply foolishness to those who are perishing yet it is the only means by which the perishing can be saved. So we must not be put off presenting the gospel by the responses that we receive we must not feel embarrassed to present the gospel for it is mankind's only hope of salvation.

Paul didn't change his message because it was seen as foolishness to the people he preached too; he knew that the people had all the philosophies that they needed but what they really needed was the gospel even though they did not know it or appreciate it. Our world and our society have all the opinions that they need about religion and life in general what it needs is the gospel of God it needs the power of the gospel. It does not know it and it does not appreciate it and it does not want it but it is exactly what it needs. As Parents we don't give our children what they want or don't want we give them what they need what is for their good. Likewise we must not give this society in which we live what they want; we must give them what they need even though they do not know that they need it.

People of Wensleydale do not know how good God is to them. He has placed here in Leyburn an Evangelical Church that preaches the gospel. Yet so few come in and listen and the few who do might even dismiss the message. If only they could understand that what they need more than anything else is salvation and that salvation comes to them through the hearing and receiving of the gospel.

It is only after God opens our eyes to the truth that we really appreciate and understand the power of the gospel. The gospel is God's "dynamite" it has the power to change lives, to save sinners and transform them and if you are a Christian this evening; then you know that this is true. We are no longer perishing but are being saved. Notice that salvation is not yet complete until we reach our heavenly home just as perishing is not complete until hell is reached. Yes we are saved, God has rescued us from our sin and saved us from hell and nothing can change our status. But at the same time we are being saved in the sense that all God grants to us in salvation we have not yet received. We only enjoy the full benefits of salvation when we reach heaven.

## 2. REASONS WHY GOD'S WISDOM IS SUPERIOR TO THE WORLD'S WISDOM (vs. 19-21)

Paul now proceeds to give five reasons (1:19-2:5) why God's wisdom is superior to the worlds but we will only deal with two now and deal with the rest in future weeks.

**a) The Permanence Of God's Wisdom. (vs. 19-20)** – Paul uses a quotation from Isaiah 29:14 to emphasise that the wisdom of mankind will be destroyed but God's wisdom will remain standing. Of course Isaiah's ultimate fulfilment comes at the end of time when everyone will see clearly that God's gospel was wise and their own beliefs and ways were foolish but by then it will be too late for many.

But Isaiah's prophecy also had a more immediate fulfilment for when Isaiah made this prophecy Sennacherib, the King of Assyria was planning to conquer Judah. The Lord told Isaiah not to worry because the King's plan would fail. But it would not fail because of the strength of Judah's army or because of the strategy of King Hezekiah and his advisors but Judah would be saved solely by God's power (Isaiah 29:14).

God destroyed 185,000 men of the Assyrian army with just one angel (Isaiah 37:36). The full account is given in 2 Kings 17 if you want to read it later. God continually told Israel he would fight for her; all they had to do was to trust Him and obey. People today are inclined to try to solve their problems and fight their battles by their own ability and in their own power.

Even Christian people are guilty of this, but our own ability and our own power can often simply get in the way of God's ability and power. When we try to solve our own problems we get in the way of God. This is true of salvation isn't it? If we think we can save ourselves by our good works and our church attendance then we are simply a hindrance to God working in our lives.

We are getting in God's way and He will not save us while we continue to think and act as if we can save ourselves. Salvation comes when we realise that we cannot save ourselves that we do not have any power to save our souls and we simply plead that God by his power will do it. That is when salvation comes to us and that is how we must live our Christian lives as well.

Depending not upon our own gifts and abilities and power but depending totally on the power of God to act on our behalf just as he did it in Isaiah's time. Our own way will ultimately frustrate us and will ultimately be destroyed by the power of God.

Paul asks three questions to show just how unreliable and impermanent human wisdom is (v 20). The first question he asks is where are all the wise people that have all the answers? Paul is really paraphrasing Isaiah (Isaiah 19:12) where the prophet was asking about all the wise men of Egypt who always promised but never produced good counsel. Instead they simply led people astray (Isaiah 19:14).

Paul's point is where are all the wise people who are going to make our nation better. Who have all the answers to our difficulties? Are we any closer to peace than say 1000 years ago? Are we any closer to eliminating poverty or hunger or crime or immorality from our world? We have made many advances in our world in technology and communication and in a host of other ways but are we any better than those who did not have these things. Are we less selfish than previous generations? Are we more moral?

The truth is that in spite of all our advances we are no better except we are better at finding ways of expressing our sinful human nature. If human wisdom is so wise then why have all our wise men and women not been able to solve the problems of our world? But the gospel can and does solve those problems because the gospel deals with the cause of the problem, which is the human heart, and only God through the gospel can change human nature.

What about the scholars of our day? Have they any answers? Have they come up with the secret to dealing with society's problems? What about the Philosophers of our day? Have they managed to solve all our problems with their theories and ideas about human nature? Is our society better because we now have more philosophers willing to express their opinion of the various problems that our society faces?

Where has all the clever ideas and arguments really brought us as a nation? Are we any better have we solved the problem of hatred in our society. Is violence now non-existent because of the latest ideas and arguments?

Do you see what Paul is doing here? He is saying to the Corinthians do you not see that you have all these so called wise and clever people offering opinions and advice but ask yourself are you any better off as a result. Is society improving because of all your knowledge? The answer is obvious no we are not. Nothing really changes; life continues to have the same problems it has always had.

People have the same struggles that they always have had; they just might be a bit more sophisticated today. Could Paul have written anything more appropriate for our own generation? We have some great thinkers in our day.

But ask ourselves have all our great thinkers, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, scientists and Politicians really been able to deal with the common problems of selfishness, hunger, crime, violence, unemployment and so on. The answer surely is no. I am not saying such people are no good at all they clearly are and do help in various areas but they do not deal with man's basic problem of the human heart; only the gospel can do that. This latest idea comes and goes but the gospel stays the same and has the same power as it always had to change hearts and lives.

Human wisdom can see the cause of something but only the gospel of God sees the root of the problem, which is sin. This is why God's wisdom is superior over all the wisdom of this world.

**b) The Power of God's Wisdom (vs. 21-25)** -With all the wisdom that this world claims to have there is one problem that they have never been able to solve. It's the problem of knowing God. How can men and women come to know God personally, the God who created them? Of course it's not a problem that the world is trying to resolve; because they don't even realise it is a problem. But it is mankind's greatest problem and no human wisdom can provide the answer to it.

I know a lady who was seeking for God; she tried all the religions she knew and even asked so-called Christian Ministers and none provided her with any solution to what she saw as a major problem. I am glad to say that someone told her the gospel, and her eyes were opened to the truth and her problem was resolved, she came to know God. Knowing God can never be found by consulting the wisdom of this world and that is how God has planned it (v 21) He has planned it so that mankind could not come to know him through worldly wisdom. The world cannot solve its own problems because it will not recognise its source, which is sin.

The world will not recognise the solution to its problem of sin, which is salvation. Worldly wisdom will not and is unable to see the real problem and the real solution to its problem. But thank God that he was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe (v 21). God in his supreme wisdom chooses to use what this world in its wisdom considers foolishness to save those in this world who will simply believe.

Believing in this context means assenting to the truth of the gospel. For those in this world who will exchange their worldly wisdom for God's wisdom they will receive salvation. God offers to sinners' regeneration of the soul, new birth and new life through the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. This so-called 'foolishness' is mankind's only hope of knowing God and of dealing with the root cause of all their problems sin.

This message of salvation comes to us through preaching and when anyone recognises the truth of the message of the cross and turns to Jesus Christ in faith then they will receive salvation, they will receive spiritual life. Of course because of our own spiritual blindness the world suppresses the truth of the gospel and continues to follow after their so-called wise ways.

Now Paul is not talking about foolish preaching here, he is not saying through foolish preaching are men and women saved. The emphasis is on the content here; it is through the message of what is preached. Now this means that every preacher must make sure that the message that we preach is God's message. What we preach is the message of the cross because it is only through the message of the cross that sinners are saved.

This message of the cross is viewed as foolish by the people of the world, they much prefer to continue to follow their own ways which they consider to be wise but which God declares to be

foolish. This is why gospel churches will never be popular in any society, no one wants to go to church and listen to a man preach the message of the cross; a message that the world considers to be foolish. Many churches have succumbed to this pressure and to the thinking of the world and have ceased to preach the simple message of the cross that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But this is God's means of saving sinners it is through the biblical proclamation of the message of the cross that sinners are saved. That proclamation might come in the form personal witnessing or through preaching or through a Christian epilogue that is given after some evangelistic event.

That preaching must be centred on the cross for that is how Jesus saves sinners. As a result all that believe are saved. All that realise that God can't be known through our own endeavour but simply through acceptance of Jesus Christ are saved. It is by faith in Jesus Christ that one is saved.

Could there be one here today that needs to accept this message of the cross. Perhaps you have been trying to save yourself by your good works or religious attendance or some other means. Well perhaps God in his wisdom is talking to you and calling you to repent and believe this gospel message.

My dear friends I urge you in faith to trust Jesus Christ, as your Saviour and you will be saved. No question about it you **will** not you **might** but you **will** for it is those who believe that are saved. Will you believe?

Amen