

1 CORINTHIANS 1:22-31

INTRODUCTION

Paul has been giving us reasons why God's wisdom is superior to the wisdom of this world. Last time we looked at two of those reasons. We considered the permanence of God's wisdom and the power of God's wisdom. Only the gospel has the power to deal with man's basic need, which is a sinful heart. Only the gospel can truly change people from within yet so many do not accept God's wisdom.

Unbelief is always the basic reason for not accepting God's wisdom but unbelief is expressed in various ways. The Jews in Paul's day wanted a sign before they would believe the gospel (v 22). The Greeks however wanted proof through human wisdom through ideas that they could propound and debate. The truth is that a desire for proof most frequently is an excuse for not believing.

Jesus performed many miracles yet most that witnessed his miracles did not believe in him as a result of what they witnessed. The truth is that most of the Jews of Jesus day could not accept a crucified Messiah no matter how many miracles he did. That was a stumbling block to them they just could not accept a suffering Messiah when they longed for a triumphant and victorious one (v 23). As far as the Greeks or Gentiles were concerned they needed intellectual proof something they could mull over and figure out in their minds.

But once again they did not really want the truth they were just making excuses. For the Greeks a god who becomes man and dies on their behalf is simply foolish in the extreme. Their thinking just would just not allow such an idea.

However those who truly believe in God's Son as Saviour discover that Christ is both the power of God and the wisdom of God (v 24). He who is a stumbling block to the unbeliever is the Saviour to those who believe. The One who is foolish to the unbelieving person is redeemer to the believer. For God is wiser than mankind, his wisdom is on a different level and even if God had any weaknesses his weakness would still be stronger than man's strength (v 25).

Therefore it is those who refuse to accept Christ who are foolish and weak not those who believe in Christ. You see with God's wisdom everything is turned on its head. What the world considers weakness, believing in Christ; is really strength and what the world considers foolish (the gospel) is really wise. Therefore let us look at the other reasons for God's wisdom being superior to the world's wisdom.

1. ANOTHER TWO REASONS WHY GOD'S WISDOM IS SUPERIOR TO THE WORLD'S WISDOM

a) **The Paradox Of God's Wisdom (v 26)** – Paul possibly went over the membership of the Corinthian church in his mind as he wrote verse 26. He reminded himself and the church that not many of the current membership were famous, wealthy, highly educated, powerful influential, or from noble families when they believed in Christ. He reminds the church that they only became believers in Christ because God had called them to saving faith.

Just think says Paul about the sort of people that you were when God by his grace called you to salvation. You were not accepted by God because of your background or position in life, not many had any great influence in society. They were just normal everyday people. When they walked down the street nobody looked twice at them, nobody asked for their autograph and nobody pointed at them and said look who it is! But that is the type of people that God often saves. We are glad that he does save some who are famous, influential and wealthy but most of the people who

make up God's church are nobodies, just normal individuals who by the grace of God have come to understand and admit their need of salvation. Now you see God's wisdom is a kind of paradox. In human thinking strength and influence and power is important.

In society in general strength is strength and weakness is weakness. But in God's wisdom those who appear weak by needing to believe in Christ are strong and those who view themselves as strong are weak according to God's wisdom. Likewise those considered foolish by the world's wisdom are wise according to God's wisdom and vice versa.

You see according to God's wisdom a simple uneducated untalented person who has trusted in Christ as Saviour and is faithfully and humbly following him is immeasurably wiser than the brilliant Ph.D. scholar who scoffs at the gospel. The simple believer knows forgiveness, love, grace, life, hope and God himself. He sees life from an eternal perspective. However the unbelieving Ph.D. scholar knows nothing of these things and can see nothing beyond this life. In this world this man is considered wise and even brilliant but according to God's wisdom he is seen as foolish in the extreme. Sometimes I think wouldn't it be great if such and such a sports person was saved wouldn't they be influential for God. But that is not right thinking, it is the normal nobodies that God often uses to build his church and to be his witnesses.

Yes we thank God that a few who are influential etc. are saved but the majority of the church is made up of everyday people who have no great influence but yet this is God's wisdom and this is how best God is glorified. When Jesus chose his disciples he chose normal everyday nobodies, which seemed foolishness to the world but this is how God's wisdom works.

If you want to influence the world then the world thinks that you need influential people but God's wisdom says that you need everyday people submitted to Christ and living for him to influence our world for Christ. Christians may never make the headlines with the latest idea for solving society's problems but Christians living for Christ are very influential for they are salt in a decaying society and they are light in a world of darkness.

But this is exactly how God planned it to be (vs. 27-29). It is interesting to note that the word translated 'despised' (v 28) means to be considered nothing and the tense of the Greek here (perfect tense) means that what once was considered to be despised will continue to be despised. So these Corinthians who have come to know Christ were considered as nobodies before they were saved and they will continue to be viewed by the world as nobodies.

The phrase translated "things that are not" (v 28) is a very contemptible expression in the Greek language. Being something was everything to the Greek world and therefore to be called 'nothing' or 'non-existent' was the worst possible insult. The phrase was probably used of slaves who were often regarded as things rather than people. But In God's great wisdom God turns everything upside down.

What the world considers being a measure of importance and influence like wealth, prestige and position God places at the bottom of his list of importance. God instead takes what the world considers to be nobodies and makes them into his somebody's; people of value and worth to God through Christ if not to the world.

b) The Purpose Of God's Wisdom (vs. 27-31) – One of the purposes behind God's wisdom of salvation is so that these nobodies that God through his electing grace makes into his people live for God in this world. In doing so they are putting to shame those who consider themselves to be wise. He does this by exposing to the wise the foolishness of their wisdom and showing them the value of God's wisdom.

This is constantly happening in our world and every time someone becomes a believer in Christ they feel ashamed of the fact that once what they now know to be wise they considered foolish.

What they once considered to be something only for weak people they now realise to be the very wisdom and strength of God. They now realise that true strength is found through faith in Christ and true weakness is found in refusing to believe in Christ.

People who become Christians who once thought that their life was the effective way to live now realise that their life without God was ineffective or 'nullified' by God's better way of wisdom. So you see as Christian people we might be seen as nobodies in the eyes of the world but we are actually shaming those who will trust in Christ by our lives. This is why your Christian witness at work, home and in society in general is very important. We need to be showing God's wisdom in salvation by living consistently for Him. We need to show the world what God can do with nobodies and how he can make us into people of real influence within our world.

Of course we can never live consistently without God's grace and His Spirit and so everyday we need to be submitting ourselves to God's word and seeking the help of the Spirit to live for Christ so that the unbelieving world will feel ashamed of living without him.

The second and most important purpose behind God's wisdom is to glorify God (vs. 29-31). God wisdom in salvation means that no one will have a reason to boast before God. Foolish weak non-existent people can do nothing for themselves it is God who has done it all. Therefore, all we can do is to give God all the praise and all the glory for our salvation. Our salvation in Christ is God's doing and Christ has become for us the wisdom of God.

When we are saved we are not only saved by the wisdom of God but we receive Christ who is the wisdom of God. This means that God's wisdom replaces our own wisdom so that the truly wise people in this world are those who have the wisdom of God through Christ. We can all say if we are believers that we have become truly wise in Jesus Christ. Therefore as we demonstrate God's wisdom in our world through our God centred lives; it is not us who receives the praise but God who is given all the glory as the world sees how God has made foolish people, wise in Christ.

This wisdom of God grows in us as we grow in Christ and as we get to know him better and as His Spirit works this wisdom out in our everyday lives. Therefore as our world struggles to find purpose in life and a hope for the future the simple uneducated believer already knows the purpose of life and already has hope for the future because they have received the wisdom of God in Christ.

As our world struggles with actual guilt and feelings of guilt the simple believer knows that he has received forgiveness and complete removal of guilt because of Christ. Believers know these things to be true because they have received the wisdom of God.

Paul goes on to explain what he means when he says Christ has become for us the wisdom of God. He means that he has become our righteousness. We are made right with God through Christ. He takes our sin and he grants to us his righteousness. When God looks at his believing people he sees his Son and his Son's righteousness. By believing in Christ our sin is exchanged for His righteousness. So to have Christ is to have his righteousness no wonder he is considered to be the wisdom of God.

Paul also means by this phrase (that Christ has become for us the wisdom of God) that he has become our holiness. We are set apart in Christ; we are made holy in Him. Christ is holy so when we receive Christ we receive his holiness. Therefore our lives must be marked by holiness and God's wisdom in salvation is seen when his people live holy lives in this unholy world.

Finally Christ has become for us the wisdom of God in that he has become our redemption. To 'redeem' means to buy back and God in Christ has bought us back through his death and

resurrection on our behalf. He has paid the redemption price with his own precious blood so that we could be redeemed.

Therefore how should we respond to these marvellous truths? Verse 31 tells us. We cannot boast about our own achievements because we have achieved nothing but we can in the right sense 'boast in the Lord.' He has saved us through Christ so that we receive His righteousness, His holiness and His redemption and ultimately in receiving Christ we are receiving the wisdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

So let us 'boast in the Lord' and proclaim his wonderful name and glorify Him so that men and women might see in Christ the wisdom of God and experience for themselves the righteousness holiness and redemption that is found in Christ Jesus.

Amen