

# 1<sup>st</sup> Cor 1:18-31

“The Power Of God And The Wisdom Of God”

The church there in Corinth was contaminated with contentions, people dividing over menial, non-essential issues thinking that one was more spiritual than the other because they followed under a certain teacher or preacher of God’s Word. and The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul is seeking to take the time here to place these problems back into their proper perspective. Christ is not divided, Paul was not crucified for you, nor was you baptized in the name of Paul. and It’s not that it’s wrong to make *distinctions*, or to acknowledge that you’re able to glean and grow more under a certain individual, and the way that God has chosen to move through them as opposed to another. I believe that God calls us to a specific fellowship, and that’s the place that’s going to be the most conducive to your spiritual growth, health and well-being. But the problem comes in when I begin to make *divisions*, I think that I’m more spiritual, or you’re less spiritual due to the fact that you fellowship where you do and not where I do. and I begin to divide the body of Christ under the banner of Baptist, or Methodist, or Christ’s Church, or Calvary Chapel. and I attach various levels of spiritual maturity to each of those areas as though what makes me right in God’s sight, or a little more favored before the Lord is the fact that I go here. But the point that Paul is making here is that you’re either apart of the body of Christ or you’re not, there aren’t different parts (that is divisions) of the body of Christ, Christ is one and we are one in Him regardless of what local assembly you call home.

Paul says, “I thank God that I didn’t *baptize* any of you (except a few) lest there be something else for you to fight over or divide because of.” Notice Vs 17 (read).

This is the Vs that makes for the transitional topic (if you will) of the rest of the Ch. The pivotal point being this phrase, “Wisdom of words,” Paul says, “Christ has sent me to preach the gospel, but not with the wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.” and What he’s communicating is that the message of the cross needs to be shot straight with people, not danced around, dazzled about, and sprinkled over with eloquent oratory. Because in sprinkling the gospel about with eloquent oratory you might wow people with your words but what have you gained if they completely miss the message? Because it’s in the message of the gospel that the power of salvation lies; so if you aren’t clear about the fact that Jesus was crucified for our transgression and raised for our justification, and that salvation is exclusively through faith in Him, then it doesn’t matter how impressed people may be with your words. They walk away as lost as they came in, now if people hear the message and choose to reject it that’s one thing, but if they were never even able to put the pieces of the puzzle together then we have a problem. “Well, I don’t know what he said, but he sure was a good speaker.” God help us.

But this idea of the wisdom of words seems to spin Paul into this thought process of true wisdom Vs what is in reality foolishness. The foolishness of man (which man thinks is wisdom) Vs the wisdom of God (which man thinks is foolish).

Really that mentality shouldn’t be a surprise to us, it’s typical in the pattern of fallen man. Man thinks greatness is in exalting himself, showing everyone how great he is, God says true greatness is found in humility, not drawing attention to yourself.

Man thinks he's great when he has everybody serving him, God says a man is great when he becomes the servant of all. So should it really surprise us to see that what man considers wise is foolish and that what man considers foolish is wise?

and Really over this whole section we could hang this scripture, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Isa 55:8-9 Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> case in point; the cross itself.

### Vs18

So the primary point of this Vs is to portray 2 different perspectives of the cross, how the perishing perceive it, and how the saved see it. and The message of the cross is *foolishness* to those who are perishing, no matter how eloquently you may try to articulate it, the fact is that the idea of being saved today through the work of a crucified man over 2,000 yrs ago seems absurd and ridiculous to those who are lost. You can’t rationalize it, or make sense of it, it just seems ludicrous when you think about it. and Not just the culmination of the cross, but in reality the entire account, that word, “Message” there is literally simply, “The Word.” It’s the same word that was used in John 1:1 when John said, “In the beginning was the *Word*, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” So that when Paul is speaking of the “Word,” of the cross, he’s speaking of the full embodiment of the gospel message. and It all seems quite foolish to the natural; that is “unsaved” man. Think about it, from a natural perspective if you were God would you have chosen to have Your Son come into the world, born in a barn, by the means of a young girl that was suspected to be an adulterous? Then as He grew to be a Man He would walk the earth in poverty as a humble servant ultimately to be put to death at the hands of those who despised and rejected Him?

and When we speak of the “Message of the *cross*,” understand that though it sounds almost *noble* and religious to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, in Paul’s day there was nothing noble about it. You see today we carry crosses on our necks for jewelry, or in our ears as earrings, and I’m not saying that we shouldn’t remember the cross but that in so doing ultimately we’ve really sanitized the cross. I notice that I don’t really see anyone with little lethal injection earrings, or electric chair pendulums hung around their neck, gas chamber anklets. “Of course not, that’s vile, disgusting and offensive! Those things are instruments of cruel or painful deaths.” Now you’re beginning to track with Paul’s audience except for the fact that the cross was of way greater pain and crueler measure than *anything* we’d utilize today in the act of capital punishment. and So the mindset of Paul’s day was, “What message could there possibly be in a cruel, humiliating, unrelenting instrument of torturous death?” and Nothing has really changed in the mind of man 2,000 yrs later, it’s foolishness to those who are perishing.

But to those who are being saved it’s the very power of God. Now I want you to understand what this is saying, it’s not saying that the message of the cross teaches us *about* the power of God, or *brings to us* the power of God, or sets you on the right track *towards* the power of God, but that it *is* the power of God. In other words there is inherent *power* in the gospel message. The good news that Jesus became sin for you that you might become the righteousness of God in Him, that He died for our sins according to the scriptures, was buried, and that He rose again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day according to the scriptures.

There is power inherent with in that message, and when you receive that message by faith, it releases the very life changing/soul saving power of God into your life. Remember what Paul told the Romans? He said, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,*” Rom 1:16

So to put it real bluntly everyone here is in 1 of 2 categories today, the bible doesn't allow for a 3<sup>rd</sup>. You're either perishing, or you're being saved and it's real easy for you to discern which category you fit into, how do you perceive the message of the cross?

If you're sitting there going, “Well, I'm hearing what you're saying preacher but are you trying to tell me that you really *believe* this stuff, I mean doesn't it seem a bit far fetched to you?”

Then you're presently perishing, I know that sounds harsh but I don't know how else to say it, there's no other category. We like to think of loved ones who don't know Jesus in a not really being saved but not really perishing either type of a position before God. But unfortunately that's not the truth, now that's not to say there's no hope. Notice it says it's foolishness to those who *are* perishing, it doesn't say, “to those who *will* perish,” this is simply saying that those who are rejecting Jesus Christ are presently on the slippery slope that dead ends at destruction and eternal separation from God. **and This word, “Perishing” is in the middle voice which means that the subject performs the action. In other words the only reason people are perishing is because they are about the action of unbelief, they're bringing destruction upon themselves through unbelief.**

All you have to do to go from spiritual death to eternal life is believe, then God will save you (we'll see that in Vs 21). The verb translated “Being saved” is in the *passive* voice which means that the subject is not performing the action, but is being acted upon, meaning you can't save yourself, God does that for you, how? **Through faith, believing the message releases the power of God into your life unto salvation. So God in *His* wisdom chooses to do things in a manner that confounds man in *his* (what he would consider to be) wisdom.**

### Vs19

Quoting here from Isa 29 Paul points to a scenario when Israel trying to be wise joined league with Egypt to try and ward off an Assyrian attack and as long as they were looking *to* and trusting *in* the wisdom of man to make for their salvation it was to no avail. But in 1 night God sent an angel through in Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers and delivered Israel (Saved Israel) from certain destruction. and That's the difference between the mindset of man and the mindset of God, man's ability to deliver, and God's ability to deliver, to save from otherwise certain destruction.

### Vs20-21

You see there it is, all you have to do to reverse your direction off of the slippery slopes of certain destruction unto assurance of salvation is believe, believe the message preached. That Jesus died for your sins, and resurrected that 3<sup>rd</sup> day and that His sacrifice is sufficient for your salvation. But I want you to realize here that God is no condemning academic excellence, he's not saying that when man discovers objective truth ( $E=MC^2$ ) that that works against him.

He's speaking on the lines of the philosophies and strategies of man, the scribe, the disputer, the debater, the one who seeks to philosophize and rationalize everything. and The ultimate point here is that no amount of human wisdom or rationale, or philosophy or strategy can accomplish for you what Jesus has accomplished for upon the cross. You see, "In the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God." **You can't come to know God through brain power, as a matter of fact perhaps you've discovered that as a general rule those who think that they dwell on a higher plane of intelligence than the rest of us average mortals have a higher degree of accepting God than most everyone else. Their "intelligence" works against them, they think you're foolish for actually believing there's a God out there who's created all things and that salvation comes through His Son.**

They think that if you really had a clue you'd know that we went from cosmic goo, to the zoo, to you. Even though there's no transitional forms found anywhere in the geological column and there's no evidence anywhere to support evolution but all kinds of evidence that refutes it people still hang on to this "theory" because the only alternative is a Creator and they don't want to bow before a Creator God because that makes them accountable, and they don't like that.

Carl Sagan (an evolutionist before he died) claimed that the odds of life evolving on any single planet (like the earth) are 1 in 10 to the 2 billionth power. Which is 10 followed by 2 billion zeros. Now scientists agree that any # that goes beyond 1 in 10 to the 50<sup>th</sup> power becomes an impossible achievement, why? **Because there's only so much matter in the universe, only so much time the universe has existed, and only so many possible events that could have ever happened in the existence of the universe. I heard in one particular study that there are only (if you want to say "only") 1 in 10 to the 80<sup>th</sup> power electrons in the entire universe, now electrons are the smallest particle we know of. and 1 in 10 to the 80<sup>th</sup> power is a # that will fill the entire universe (not just our solar system) with electrons. Yet the odds of life evolving on a single planet are 1 in 10 followed by 2 billion zeros...**

and We obviously don't have time to really delve too into this, but you get the idea. Now some guys are honest, George Wald, who was a Nobel prize winner, professor of biology at Harvard. He said this (and I quote) "There are only two possibilities as to how life arose. One is spontaneous generation arising to evolution; the other is a supernatural creative act of God. There is no third possibility. Spontaneous generation, that life arose from non-living matter was scientifically disproved 120 years ago by Louis Pasteur and others. That leaves us with the only possible conclusion that life arose as a supernatural creative act of God. I will not accept that philosophically because I do not want to believe in God. Therefore, I choose to believe in that which I know is scientifically impossible; spontaneous generation arising to evolution." (Wald, George, "Innovation and Biology," *Scientific American*, Vol. 199, Sept. 1958, p. 100)

**Now that's where the vast majority of scientists are, they know there's only 2 choices, and that evolution is both a scientific and mathematical impossibility. But because they don't want to believe in God they choose to believe in something they know is untrue...** and As the bible says, "*Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.*" Rom 1:22-23 "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (Einstein's class)

On and on we could go, how Carl Sagan spoke of how if alien life was to find the voyager space craft that was launched to probe the universe, that just by the design of the craft they would know that we were exploratory in our intent, lofty in our ambitions, that we mean no harm, and that it's brilliant design will speak eloquently of us. So just by the shape of this space craft these aliens are supposed to know all about the heart of its creator... Think about how hypocritical a statement like that is. Here is the piece of metal flying through space, and once an alien discovers it, just by the design of the module itself they'll know we're kind, we mean no harm, that we have lofty ambitions, just by looking at this piece of metal! and Yet this same man could look at earth, the complexity of it, the diversity found in it, the delicate design of the human frame, things infinitely more complex in design than this space craft and simply say, "There's no God, we're just happenstance, the result of billions of years." Yet aliens will look at this hunk of metal hurling through space and see that that bears witness to a creator. Isn't that interesting? Why wouldn't they look at that spacecraft and say, "Oh another evolutionary process in order!" No, no no, they'll hear the sounds *in* it, take note of the design *of* it, and they'll know.

So the world through wisdom does not know God, we come to know God through faith in Jesus Christ It pleases God through what seems to be foolishness to man, to save those who believe.

#### Vs22-25

Now Paul obviously isn't saying that God is either foolish, or weak, but what he's saying here is that if the cross was to epitomize the weakest and most foolish attribute of God according to the reasoning of fallen sinful man, that it was still infinitely wiser and stronger in its resolve than anything man can do.

God in His "foolishness" enacted a plan that was able to forgive sinful man and not compromise His Holiness or justice through the cross. Through which there could be no hierarchy but we all gained approval before God in the same way and are co-equals in Him. At His weakest (if you want to use those terms) He sanctioned an act that contained the inherent/intrinsic power with in it to grant eternal life to all of mankind, forgiving the sin of all of mankind combined throughout all time, and that forgiveness would be imputed the moment that the individual would cry out to Him, call *upon* Him, and place their faith *in* Him. Neither of which man could accomplish on his own. So God at His weakest, at His *most* "foolish" is wiser and stronger than man.

and We see here 3 basic responses to the preaching of Christ crucified (which is the ultimate oxymoron) its like saying "jumbo shrimp" or "Icy hot" two things that go against each other in the same breath. "Christ Crucified" "Christ" is the Messiah, the Anointed One; the very word brings images of power, splendor and triumph. "Crucified" equates to weakness, defeat and humiliation. But yet this is the message, that God became a Man, and that Man willfully suffered at the hands of sinful humanity, He died our death that we might know His life.

There are 3 basic reactions people have to "Christ crucified" #1 (Vs 23) Some *stumble*, that is they're offended by it. Paul was in that group at one time, the law of Moses said that whoever was hanged on a tree was cursed of God.

There's no way he was going to consent to the Messiah having *ever* become accursed of God, that's an offense. and So he persecuted Christians vehemently to try and squelch out such blasphemies. Of course once he came to know Christ he realized that it was necessary for Christ to take upon Himself the curse of the law if he was to redeem us from it. But there are those who are stumbled. The Jews wanted a conquering King delivering them from the heavy handed rule of Rome, not a suffering servant, so they stumbled, were scandalized, offended.

#2 Also in Vs 23, others *scoff*, "To the Greeks, foolishness" we've spoken about this already, to the elite intelligentsia, "You humor me, you actually believe that stuff." It's foolishness.

and #3 Vs 24 some are *saved*, some stumble, some scoff, and others are saved, to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Now there's a lesson here for us today, as we live in a day and in an age when people say, "You know people just don't really relate to that message, you need to change your approach to winning friends and influencing people." Well #1 I'm not here to win friend and influence people and #2 They didn't relate to it in Paul's day either, the Jews were scandalized, and the Greeks scoffed, but to those who would respond, who would receive the message they found Christ... the power of God and the wisdom of God. and You guys that's the message Jesus Christ and Him crucified, nor is there any other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

So exhibit A in displaying the fact that God doesn't do things the way we do things, about our mentality not lining up with God's is found in the cross. Exhibit B (quickly) is displayed in those who He's called. Notice

### Vs26-29

So the 1<sup>st</sup> illustration given in what seems like foolishness to man's thinking in reality being wisdom according to God's thinking is the cross. The 2<sup>nd</sup> illustration Paul gives is found in those whom God calls. He says, "You know what else people think God was foolish to do?

To choose you." Paul is saying, "Take inventory among yourselves, there's not many mighty, many noble, or may wise according to the flesh among you." In other words, "You're not exactly the assembly of the 'who's who,' but rather you're the assembly of the, 'who's he?'" You see if we were God we'd be thinking, "Oh, I'm going to grab that celebrity, that famous musician, that influential millionaire and man I can really do some great things through them." How often we hear statements like that. But God says, "I'm not going to do that, I want that little southern boy over there, 'Billy Graham' no one has ever heard of him and I'm going to do a work the life of that man that's unmistakably Me."

Oh now and then God will grab a high profile individual and do a profound work, but generally that's not His style, He gravitates towards the lowly, the little people, people like you, people like me. Why? That no flesh should glory in His sight, so that when people see what's going on here they're able to say, "To God be the glory great things *He* has done." **Because the more people get to know me, the more disillusioned they become, I'm just a base, foolish, weak thing of the world, but God desires to use our lives. Now there in Vs 26 he didn't say that not *any* were called that were wise or noble according to the flesh, just not *many*.**

He's not willing that *any* should perish, the door is open to *all*, but not many generally respond who think they have it all, they don't see their need. Because they're rich or powerful, or influential, they can't see the fact that they're poor, naked, and needy, spiritually destitute before God. So not *many* will come.

### Vs30-31

Now this isn't really saying that Christ became 4 things (Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption) though I suppose if you wanted to dance around semantics we could go there. But what this is saying is that Christ became for us *wisdom* from God, and that's displayed, or explained in these 3 things in that He became for us righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, those things exemplify the wisdom of God in the work of Christ on our behalf. He became for us righteousness, what does that mean? If God were to display all our sins before us on judgment day and then declare "Not guilty" how would that make you feel? Pretty good, but righteousness goes beyond a declaration of "Not guilty" because you may not be guilty but that doesn't make you good. What this is saying is that to the negative we're not only "Not guilty" but to the positive we're accredited with the very righteousness of Christ. We're robed in His righteousness, white like snow, perfect before the Father. We can't be righteous by what we do, it's about what He's done, there on the cross.

Sanctification deals with our practical growth and behavior, being set apart *from* the world *unto* God, to lead holy lives. Positionally we're there, practically we've all got a long ways to go, but it doesn't come by trying, but by dying to self, letting Christ live in me and through me. He's become sanctification for me.

Redemption deals with the freedom from the bondage from sin and death that's ours in Christ. The one the Son sets free is free indeed, our freedom doesn't come through various programs and pursuits, but through a person, we've been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ set free from the snares of sin. You see the power and the wisdom of God is found in Christ crucified... that as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Prayer Points: God we praise You in Your wisdom, God Your thoughts aren't our thoughts, our ways aren't Your ways, You're infinitely beyond us. But we thank You for the righteousness, the sanctification, and the redemption that You've provided for us in Christ, Lord may You receive all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise, for the great things that *You* have done, Lord there's none like You. God reach out and reveal Yourself to the lost that they might come to know the power of the gospel.

Perhaps you're here and you've never received Jesus, you've thought the whole thing was kinda silly, perhaps not outwardly, you'd never say it publicly, but in reality you just didn't get it. But today something is stirring on your heart. Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart, let me encourage you to let Him in. Jesus died on the cross, was buried and 3 days later arose from the dead and if you'll believe and receive the fact that He did it for you, you'll be forgiven of your sin, experience the power of God and be granted everlasting life.