

1Corinthians 1:19-25 "Is God's Wisdom Enough?"

1 Corinthians 1:19-25 ¹⁹ For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

I remember back in my college days when I sat in an anthropology class and was inundated with all of the supposed factual information in support of evolution. All sorts of numbers, usually in the millions and billions, were being touted as the measure of how old our universe is, together with the age of our earth and man himself.

I was a relatively new Christian, just two years or so in the Lord, and what was being taught just didn't sit well with me because I knew that the Scriptures clearly said that God created the world in the span of a literal six days.

But, I was also attending a bible study in Ft. Lauderdale at the same time where the teacher was very knowledgeable, not only in the Scriptures, but also in scientific information which supported the creationist position.

He gave me a series of tapes from some sort of conference on the issue of evolution vs. creationism, and I went back to my dorm and ate those tapes up. Every extra moment I had I would listen and take notes and learn some very interesting facts on why the evidence of a young earth pointed to a Creator.

So, now I go to class ready to help my instructor and the rest of my classmates get a different perspective on this whole issue. I certainly didn't expect the warmest reception from the instructor, but I also didn't expect that he wouldn't be willing to at least listen to scientific facts.

I thought that since college was supposed to be a place of higher learning that maybe, just maybe, some real dialogue could take place. He basically shut me off and said that most of what I shared was speculation at best.

But, what really floored me was what happened after class when a number of students approached me and asked me why I would bring such stupid information to a college classroom. They thought of me as some sort of idiot who didn't have a clue, or wasn't willing to consider evolution as the only logical answer.

And so, for the rest of that semester I was viewed as a fool because I didn't stop raising my hand and trying to give an alternative explanation to the evidence which was found in the fossils or the earth.

It's interesting that Christians are often seen by the world in this light of being fools who have some sort of blind faith and never consider any other evidence than a book which was written by men supposedly under the inspiration of God.

Those in the world are the one's who are considered wise and knowledgeable because they deal only in those things which can be seen and proved; or so it would seem. The fact is that evolution can neither be seen or proved.

How many scientists have actually seen one species of animal or plant transform into an entirely new and different species? They haven't. How many scientists have actually proved that there are evidences which show that life can decide to spring forth from non-life, as is the case in evolution? They haven't.

In fact, it takes more faith to believe in a mindless, random, non-life begetting life approach to the universe, than it does to believe that God spoke the universe into existence in the span of six days.

But that doesn't make any difference to the world because these wise and knowledgeable critics of God and His word are not interested in the truth, they're only interested in their own agenda which doesn't include God whom they can't see.

Paul was always running up against those who thought themselves to be wise in their own eyes but that didn't stop him from sharing the truth in love. But in our text we see how this supposed wisdom of the world is nothing in the eyes of God since none of that type

of wisdom could ever bring anyone closer to being reconciled with the Creator. This is what we saw last week.

1CO 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

I might add that there is a great deal of wisdom and knowledge in this world among men as it relates to certain aspects of life. I just heard on the radio how a baby was operated on in the womb of his mother to open the passage ways of his throat which had closed during the pregnancy.

No one would dispute that there is a great deal of wisdom and knowledge among men in many of these types of areas of life. But what has happened is that men have puffed themselves up on this wisdom thinking that they are autonomous and not in need of their creator who gave them this wisdom and knowledge.

But more important, this type of wisdom and knowledge is at best temporal because as is the case with all men, they must die. The wisdom may be passed on to the next generation, but they also will die.

I'm sure there are those in this world who think science will one day get it right and muster up enough wisdom and knowledge so that some generation in the future won't have to die and that man will somehow live forever.

And that's really the crux of the matter; living forever. But there's only one answer to that problem and it's not found in any wisdom which man can conceive. As we come to our text this morning we get God's perspective on the wisdom of the world as it relates to finding our maker and Lord and living with Him forever.

1CO 1:19-21 "For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." (Isaiah 29:14) 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

Let's take verse 19 first. "For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

Notice that Paul is quoting something which has already been written. The implication is that God has already spoken on this issue of wisdom and there is a final word on the matter as God has revealed it.

In fact, what Paul is quoting is Isa.29:14. There in the context of Isaiah God is speaking to Judah, a part of the nation of Israel, and more directly to the leaders of Israel who have led the nation away from God. And yet, these same people have presumed to have a wisdom which qualifies them for leadership.

God says this: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." (ISA 29:13)

The rules taught by men are the rules they have established to promote themselves while looking religious. This is the case of men today who don't know God. They espouse wisdom in the guise of looking religious. But their religion excludes the one true God while trying to meet that most deep-seated need of belonging to something or someone higher than themselves.

God says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

This is a prophecy which will find its ultimate fulfillment at the end of the age when after having tried to come against God mankind will finally bend the knee to Christ.

REV 17:14 "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Back in our text Paul asks four questions. 1CO 1:20 "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

Again, Paul alludes to the written word which is taken from the book of Isaiah. But, his intention here is to bring to light how men of that age, including some of those in the Corinthian church, have tried to use the wisdom of men to advance the Kingdom of God.

And God's question to the church in Corinth and to the church today is, "where is the wise man?"

Is there anyone who can claim to have an edge on promoting the Kingdom by using the wisdom of this world? This again, does not mean to suggest that there is no wisdom found in this world which cannot be used by the church, but it simply means to put into perspective that when we rely on that exclusively to the exclusion of God, or wisdom which is contrary to the word, it is no wisdom at all.

Where is the wise man who can claim to have an answer for enlarging a local church simply through human means? Where is the wise man who tries to market a local church through tactics devised in the board rooms of Wall Street? Where is the wise man who can guarantee 25% growth exclusively through discovering and manipulating the demographics of any particular region?

I get this stuff in the mail all the time. Church growth seminars which will guarantee to produce results in the first 90 days if you'll just follow their pattern for success. Of course, just so as not to exclude God, they want you to pray about it and see if this might not benefit your church.

Obviously, Paul didn't have a clue as to what he should have been doing. This poor man must have been lost and in turmoil continually as he prayed that God might put some of these church growth experts in his path.

This poor guy was extremely limited because the only thing he knew was Christ crucified and risen from the dead. You talk about being at a disadvantage. I'm surprised the church ever got off the ground. Where is the wise man indeed!

ROM 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

GAL 3:3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

"Where is the scholar?" Where is the book smart man? Where is the man who has all sorts of head knowledge? Certainly he can save us and he can give us the wisdom and knowledge we need to advance in our walk with Christ.

Is there anything wrong with head knowledge? Is there anything wrong with having studied things to help others learn? Of course

not. But, that is not an end in itself. There are lots of smart people out there who have studied the Scriptures, for example.

Look at institutions like Harvard and Princeton. Did you know that these schools were originally designed to train men to be pastors and ministers of the gospel? Go to their schools of theology today and you'll find a lot of smart professors who can quote verse and chapter of any book of the bible, but most couldn't and wouldn't give you the truth of how to be saved from the penalty of your sins.

Yes, God rightly asks the question where is the scholar who can spew forth those things which are written down but can't lead a blind man to the truth because of his own blindness.

"Where is the philosopher of this age?" Philosophy is nothing more than someone's opinion on any particular subject that deals with life. Opinions are like belly-buttons; everyone's got one. But when it comes to life and death in the spiritual realm you better not place your eternal destiny on someone's opinion, or their philosophical view on eternal life.

I've talked with scores of people who think they're going to heaven and yet when I confronted them with the reason they're going to heaven they usually give me answers like: "God would never send anyone to hell", or "I'm good enough because I've never killed or raped anyone."

But when you press them as to what they ultimately use to back those statements up they will always look at you with this perplexed look on their face and wonder why you need anything to refer to. Simply because they make the statement obviously qualifies that statement to be true.

Now, they won't use that logic when you ask them why they can't steal their neighbor's car. Obviously there are laws which prohibit me from doing that. What about jumping off of a 10 story building? Give me your philosophical perspective as to why you can do that without bringing any bodily harm.

Well, that's a stupid question. Everyone knows that gravity wins the day in that case. Yes, we know these things because of the laws associated with nature. Well, if there are laws of nature and laws of the land, how can anyone reason that there aren't laws of the spiritual realm?

If you're falling off of a 10 story building what makes you think you can avoid certain death simply because you theorize at that moment that concrete has the consistency of marshmallows?

All of the philosophizing in the world doesn't change the fact that simply because you think that God won't judge men for their sin doesn't mean He won't. But unlike those philosophers who dream these thoughts up in their own minds, we have a final authority that deals with these spiritual issues.

When someone asks us about the truth we can say, "here's what the Creator of this world says on the matter, it's not my opinion." And so, we can say with Paul, "has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

It would be like someone saying concrete is made of marshmallows. But in the case we just stated concrete proves the foolishness of that person. All men will stand before God one day and none of their attempts to bring their philosophy, their wisdom, their learning will, in and of itself, be acceptable to get them into heaven.

That's why we must continue to bring God's wisdom to the table and not worry about the wisdom of men that would try to prove us to be fools. This is why Paul says later in this letter:

1CO 3:18-20 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness" (Job 5:13) 20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

The world may view the gospel as foolishness, but we don't have any other message to bring them. If we would become wise we must be fools for the sake of Christ as we bring His message of foolishness, as the world perceives it. But we know that there is nothing foolish in the truth of the One who created all things.

1CO 1:21 "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

No matter how foolish the world views the truth of the gospel, when it is preached and taught and shared it is still the power of God unto salvation to those who believe. There's nothing foolish

about giving people hope even if they don't want it. You never know how the Lord may use that truth in their lives down the road.

Again, this is exactly what Paul is saying to these Corinthians who may have been intimidated by the supposed wisdom of their peers connected with the world.

1CO 1:22-24 "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

According to verse 22 the Jews demand miraculous signs. This is certainly in reference to what our Lord encountered during His earthly ministry.

MAT 12:38-39 "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." 39 He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

JOH 2:18-19 "Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

JOH 6:29-32,34-35 "Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." 30 So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 31 Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 34 "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." 35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

The Jews continually asked for a sign and yet they missed the real thing when He stood before them, and people continually do it today as well. They want a bolt from heaven to open their eyes. "If I see it then I'll believe it."

Jesus would say, you have seen it and yet not perceived it because of the hardness of your hearts which wants to go your own way. It's not an intellectual problem with people, it's a heart problem which wants only to please self.

And by the way, the Jews didn't have a corner on this problem. We're told the "Greeks look for wisdom,..."

What Paul means by this is that, unlike the Jews, the Greeks were more interested in explaining the universe and the future in naturalistic non-miraculous ways. This is still continuing today in the Western world when it comes to the origins of this world in the form of evolution, for example.

This is what Paul ran into when he went to Athens, Greece.

ACT 17:21-23,32 "(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) 22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you." 32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

If this new religion couldn't be explained with a naturalistic rationalization then it was deemed foolish. But, even with this group at Athens, the foolishness of the gospel was being received by men as the Holy Spirit opened their eyes.

But the point Paul is making is that all of the wisdom of men being used to try and explain away the gospel does not make the gospel ineffectual, or any less true. It doesn't make any difference that people may reject it because when the Lord gets a hold of a person's heart that person will see his need for what it is.

1CO 1:23-24 "but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Christ crucified is another expression which defines the gospel. The gospel is the death of an innocent sacrifice on behalf of the

sins of others. The wages of sin is death for mankind and therefore if we would be forgiven then the death of an innocent man must take place.

But there are no innocent men. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And yet, there is one who is not only a sinless man but is also God in the flesh who came to take away sin.

He's a stumbling block to the Jews because they expected a King to deliver them from the yoke of Rome. It is foolishness to the Gentiles because the resurrection is nothing more than a fairy tale to them.

But God is true to Himself and He will bring those to Himself whom He has called, and give them life as they embrace Him by faith. This is why we give the truth in love because you never know how God is going to touch someone with His Spirit.

We never need to fear that someone might consider our message to be foolishness because God Himself tells us different.

1CO 1:25 "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

Does this mean that God is foolish and that God has weaknesses? Not at all. Paul is simply making the point that if it were possible for God to be foolish or if it were possible that God had weaknesses that those weaknesses would still be infinitely more wise than the best man has to offer.

In other words, we are not on the short end of the stick when it comes to wisdom as we follow God and His message of hope. No matter how many people tell you that concrete will cushion your fall from 10 stories up, that kind of wisdom will always come up short to the truth.

Jesus Christ builds His church on the truth of what He accomplished on our behalf and if we are serving Him in that capacity then there is no failure. We are always tempted to want to give up at times because of what appears to be apathy towards the gospel, not only among the world, but even among Christians at times. And yet, what does Paul say?

GAL 6:9 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

There is no giving up because God will never give up on us. His Spirit will enable us to go forward as He undergirds us with the strength which only He can supply. We have begun with the Spirit, and we know that we cannot attain our goal by human effort.

ZEC 4:6 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.

We'll never go wrong depending on God for wisdom and knowledge and strength. We just need to consider the Almighty God that He is and trust that He knows what He's doing and that He will bring us through to the very end.

ROM 11:33-36 "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Isaiah 40:13) 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" (Job 41:11) 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."