

1 Corinthians

Chapter 1:18-31

February 18, 1996

- **1 Corinthians Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Ungodly divisions result from man's wisdom.

- **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

- **Introduction & Review**

In the first section of this letter, Paul has confirmed to the recipients his belief that if they are set apart by God, that they would be held firm to the end such that they would be blameless before Him. With that confidence granted, he moved on to address what appears to be the primary sin at Corinth, sectarianism.

Having pleaded for unity he admonishes them for dividing into groups around those who baptized them. Knowing the particular temptation toward division, Paul spends a great deal of time in this letter correcting the behavior which proceeds from division.

- **Exposition**

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.¹⁹ For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

- God has built His kingdom in such a way that the Saints have been entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel. In our proclamation, Paul here teaches us that we need not "decorate" the gospel with any earthly wisdom or technique so as to make it more acceptable. This is not to say that presenting the Gospel is contrary to wisdom; it does mean that the power of the message rests in the message not the messenger. There is nothing we can do to make the Gospel more palatable to a hard heart. Only if the Spirit of God goes forth first and makes dead people alive will our proclamation be effectual. Therefore, we rely on God's good purposes in regeneration, not our oratory skill.
- It should not surprise us when the world sees our message as foolish; Jesus and Paul both tell us this will be the case. A common response that the world has to the Gospel is that they "intellectually have a problem" with the message of the cross. Yes, there is a problem but it is not intellect that causes the problem; it is sin. People have a sin problem with the Gospel.
- A thinking person will naturally ask, "what is the message of the cross?" Christians should be experts at this answer. Unfortunately this frequently is not the case. If we can't articulate the message of the cross, how can we be sure that we have responded to it? The message of the cross is one regarding death to life. Not from sickness to health; death to life. God is in the business of saving sinners.
 1. God created man.
 2. Adam rebelled against God, therefore all rebelled.
 3. There was nothing that man could do to restore fellowship with God.
 4. God provided His Son (the Christ) as a sacrificial atonement for the sins of the Elect.
 5. God rose His son from the dead according to the Scriptures so that the Elect might live.
 6. God regenerates the Elect and they cry out for forgiveness and they receive the righteousness of Christ.
 7. Those who have Christ's righteousness will live forever in the presence of God.
 8. Those who do not have the righteousness of Christ will live forever in Hell.

²⁰ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

- God did not come down to the universities of the world and seek the counsel of professors and philosophers. Nor did He require that we be worldly scholars in order to know Him. The world believes that it is getting smarter and smarter. The more that the world gains of the worldly wisdom, the further it gets away from knowing God. The sad thing is when the Christian community holds in high regard the wisdom of the world. We cower from strong thinkers and succumb to their reasoning all the time forgetting that their wisdom is foolishness to God.

22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks 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.

- To the world, we have a childish, simplistic message which can't compete with the likes of wisdom and revelation. But in truth, we have a message which demolishes worldly wisdom and renders useless ungodly revelation.
- To the Jews, the crucifixion of the Christ was a stumbling block-not because He died, but rather because He was *crucified*. The Jews had believed that their messiah would be a great military leader. Dying in battle would have been honorable. But for the messiah to die on a cross was an unthinkable disgrace because the scriptures say that cursed is anyone who dies on a tree (Galatians 3:13-14). It was the manner of death that stumbled the Jews, not the fact of death.
- For the Elect, Christ is the power and wisdom of God. Is this because they just think differently? Yes and No. Yes, the Elect do think differently but not because the issues relate to a matter of opinion. As Paul will reveal later, we think the way we do because our minds and hearts have been renewed by the washing of the Word of God and by His Spirit.

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence. ³⁰ But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-³¹ that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." NKJV

- God did not come looking for the wise; He came to give wisdom. The superior intellect, training, experience and education of the worldly wise will stand as a condemnation against them because God has used a simple message to call in the Elect.
- We glory not in ourselves but in the goodness, kindness and mercy of our Lord. We should rejoice and be filled with humble thanksgiving in the response to the great riches that God has given to us in Christ.