

URGENT

1st
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CIRCA ROM



1 Corinthians



1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Paul's Appeal to the Corinthians for Unity

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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. For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 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. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Outline of 1 Corinthians

- I. Introduction (1:1-9).
 - A. Salutation (1:1-3).
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:4-9).
- II. Response to Received Reliable Oral Reports from the Corinthians (1:10-6:20).
 - A. The Problem of Factionalism within the Church (1:10-4:21).
 - 1. Identifying the Problem: Factions Centered on Baptismal Rites (1:10-17).
 - 2. **Resolving the Problem (1:18-4:21).**
 - a. **Clarifying the Message of Divine Wisdom (1:18-2:16).**
 - b. Correcting the Factional Human Wisdom (3:1-4:21).
 - B. The Problem of Incestuous Immorality within the Church (5:1-13).
 - C. The Problem of Civil Litigations within the Church (6:1-11).
 - D. The Problem of Sexual Immorality within the Church (6:12-20).

a. Clarifying the Message of Divine Wisdom (1:18-2:16).

- What does Paul mean by “the cross” when he states, “lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power”?
- He uses “the cross” as a figure of speech for “the gospel.”
- “The cross” is used as a *synecdoche* for the gospel, the good news. The cross, a central element of the gospel, is representative of the whole of the gospel—Christ’s incarnation, life, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and reign.
- Synecdoche—a figure of speech, representing a part for the whole or the whole for a part: *Bread* for food; *Boots* for soldiers; *Wheels* for a vehicle; *Hand* as in “request her hand in marriage.”
 - “But that is not the way you learned *Christ!*—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:20-21).

- a. **Clarifying the Message of Divine Wisdom (1:18-2:16).**
- Paul mentions “the cross” no fewer than 10 times in his letters.
 - **1 Corinthians 1:17-18**—lest *the cross of Christ* be emptied of its power. . . . 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.
 - **Galatians 5:11; 6:12, 14**—Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, *the offense of the cross* has been abolished. . . . Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being *persecuted for the cross of Christ*. . . . *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

a. Clarifying the Message of Divine Wisdom (1:18-2:16).

- Paul mentions “the cross” no fewer than 10 times in his letters.
 - **Ephesians 2:16**—His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body **to reconcile both of them to God through the cross**, by which he put to death their hostility.
 - **Philippians 2:8; 3:18**—And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—**even death on a cross!** . . . For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as **enemies of the cross of Christ**.
 - **Colossians 1:20; 2:14**—For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace **through his blood, shed on the cross**. . . . God forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, **nailing it to the cross**.

a. Clarifying the Message of Divine Wisdom (1:18-2:16).

- Three crucial contexts where Paul develops his theology of “the cross.”
 - The cross and *wisdom* (1 Cor 1:17-18, 23; 2:2, 8).
 - The cross and *the law* (Gal 2:20; 3:1; 5:11; 6:14).
 - The cross and *new creation* (Gal 5:24; 6:14; Rom 6:6).

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.

- Why does Paul call the content of the Christian gospel “foolishness?”
- Paul expands upon 1:17—“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”
- His calling is not to preach with rhetorical skill—*sophia* [σοφία]—and eloquence.
- The gospel is foolishness [*moria*; μωρία] to those who are perishing.
- Notice “to those who are being saved” / “to those who are perishing.”

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.

- Paul distinguishes between two groups of people: (1) “those who are perishing” and (2) “those who are being saved.”
- Take note! He does not say, “those who are *lost*” and “those who are *saved*.”
- Paul does not view these two groups as *static*, as if we can know with decisiveness who is in which group.
- Rather, he uses *dynamic wording* to emphasize the present and continuing process: “those who are on the way to destruction” and “those who are on the way to salvation.”
- Compare 2 Cor. 2:15-16—“For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among *those who are being saved* and *those who are perishing*. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life.”

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.

- Destruction and salvation are primarily Last Day expressions. Both entail processes taking place now that will be consummated in the Last Day.
- “Those who are on the way to destruction” regard the gospel to be foolishness and thus reject it.
- “Those who are on the way to salvation” receive the gospel as “the power of God.”

Christ's First Advent Brings Forward Last Day Judgment and the Age to Come to Overlap with The Present Evil Age Jesus Christ Inaugurates "The Last Days"

The Age to Come [Invades the Present Evil Age]



The Last Days

Resurrection &
Judgment
Second Advent

Judgment &
Resurrection

The Present Evil Age

All People { 1. "are being saved"
or
2. "are perishing."

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 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. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

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- Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14.
- When NT writers cite the OT, they frequently intend for readers to recognize that the context cited should be understood as included.
- Observe the preceding words in Isaiah: **“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 based on merely human rules they have been taught. Therefore, once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder”** (Isaiah 29:13-14a).
- So, Paul rhetorically inquires, “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is *the power of God* that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Romans 1:16

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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Herein is the source of the world's hatred and mockery but also of divine irony, satire, and parody.

God's Wisdom Turns the World's Hateful Mockery into Ironic Fulfillment

- Consider Jesus, **the Righteous One**, condemned by the Sanhedrin—judged the supremely unrighteous one.
- Consider Jesus, **the King of kings**, mocked by the Roman soldiers—crowned as King of the Jews.
- Consider Jesus, **the Guiltless One**, crucified as a criminal under a placard inscribed with his crime—Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

Herein is the heart of the Gospel.

Herein is the scandal of the cross.

The wisdom of God (1:21-25)

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. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Wisdom & Foolishness

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

Paul unpacks this summary in verse 21 in two parts.

- **The message of the gospel (1:22-25).**
- **The beneficiaries of the gospel (1:26-31).**

The World's Wisdom & God's Wisdom

- By “the world’s wisdom,” Paul means two things:
 - “Jews demand signs.”
 - “Greeks look for wisdom” (1:22).
- By “God’s wisdom” Paul means “the cross,” “the gospel,” “Christ crucified” (1:23-24).

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

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- Fascination with celebrity, whether focused on rhetorical skills or the hands of baptism, prompted some, likely many in Corinth, to become boastful concerning human wisdom.
- Celebrity plagues the contemporary church, threatening the eternal salvation of both the celebrated and the celebrants.
- It is not a popular megachurch celebrity pastor with lucrative book deals and a jet-setting preaching itinerary, who is the greatest preacher today.
 - Rather, Andrew Sandlin properly observes, “America’s greatest preacher is likely a man nobody has ever heard of. He probably pastors a small, rural or semi-rural congregation that gives him the time to study intensely, pray extensively, and shepherd lovingly. The nation’s greatest preachers are small-church pastors.”

The Beneficiaries of the Gospel (1:26-31)

- People regard the gospel to be foolish when they base their judgment of the people God calls on outward and superficial appearances.
- Paul speaks of the divine initiative—**God's calling=God's election** (1:27). God's calling is rooted in his own purposes, not in human standards.
- Paul calls upon church members to review their church's membership rolls—God has not called many wise, many influential, many of noble birth. God shows no partiality.
- Churches are filled with people who cannot claim a privilege of any kind, of partiality, or rank. Even those of rank and influence—Crispus, Erastus, Stephanas, Chloe, Aquila and Priscilla—cannot boast that rank or influence brought them to Christ Jesus. Even these are gifts from God.
- No one can boast at all. All glory belongs to Christ.

1:26 makes it obvious that Paul is speaking of God's choosing of people not of inanimate objects.

But

- God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;
- God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
- God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Paul Cites Jeremiah 9:24

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
or the strong boast of their strength
or the rich boast of their riches,
but let the one who boasts boast about this:
that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,”
declares the LORD.

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