Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians – Part 4

I. Exposition of Chapter One (continued).

A. **Verse 17 (continued) – "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."**

1. Grant Richison makes an important point when he writes:

"Paul transitions from explicitly dealing with divisions in the church to explaining what causes divisions—lack of focus on the central message of the cross."[1]

2. **"…to preach the gospel,…"** – The words, **"…preach the gospel…"** are one word in the Greek and mean; **"*to proclaim as good tidings, to announce good tidings*,"[2]** It's also translated at times as **"glad tidings."** Eugene Carpenter and Philip Comfort write:

"Interestingly, the Greek word for 'gospel,' *euangelion*, was originally used to describe the 'good news' of military victory brought from a messenger to his commander."[3]

a. The basic message of the Gospel is;

1) **All people have sinned - Romans 3:23.**
2) **The penalty for our sin is death - Romans 6:23.**
3) **Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins - Romans 5:8.**
4) **Those who repent and receive Christ as their Lord, believing that, after having died, He rose from the dead, are forgiven and given new life. – Acts 2:38; 3:19; Romans 10:9-10.**

3. **"…not with wisdom of words…" –** In other words, not with human wisdom. It could also be translated as **"…not with cleverness of speech."** It's important to understand that many of the Corinthians had been steeped in Greek philosophy which exalted the intellect. **(cf. Colossians 2:8).** William Barclay wrote:

"The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and, to them, a Christian preacher with a blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected."[4]

4. **"…lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."** The expression **"cross of Christ"** is a figure of speech used often by Paul to refer to the redemption provided for in the death of Christ. The phrase, **"…should be made of no effect"** is one word in the Greek and means; **"cause to lose power, be emptied, formally, be vain, come to nothing."[5]** Dr. Bob Utley writes;

"'so that the cross of Christ would not be made void' If humans could save themselves through their actions or intellect, then Christ's death would not have been necessary! But, they could not! The power of the cross is God's complete provision through Christ. Everything that needs to be done for the whole world to be saved is finished, complete, and available in the life, teachings, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again of Christ, to which humans can only respond/receive by faith."[6]

B. **Verses 18-19 - 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, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'"***

1. The **"message of the cross"** is synonymous with the **"preach the gospel"** of **verse 17.**

a. **"…is foolishness to those who are perishing…"** – The word **"perishing"** means; **"*to be put to death, to die*; *to be lost, to stray*,"[7]** Obviously, it is referring to those who are lost in their sins due to never having received Christ as their Lord. The word **"foolishness"** means exactly that, with the added thoughts of; **"*silliness*,…*absurdity*"[8]**

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1 Grant Richison, *Verse by Verse through the Book of 1 Corinthians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2007), 1 Co 1:17.
2 William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1159.
3 Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 294.
4 William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, 3rd Ed. (Louisville, KY: Saint Andrew Press, 2002)
5 James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
6 Robert James Utley, *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians*, vol. Volume 6, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2002), 20.
7 Mounce, 1093.
8 James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 49.

b. Dr. Stanley Horton writes:

"To those who are perishing—on their way to hell, spiritually dead and thus controlled by the sinful nature (Rom. 8:8), blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4)—the message of the cross (and therefore, the whole doctrine of the atonement) is absurd. They think it foolish to believe that the Roman execution of one declared to be a guilty criminal and enemy of the state could be used by God to bring salvation."[9]

c. **"…but to us who are being saved…" –** The idea of **"being saved"** is simply conveying the idea that the complete consummation of our salvation is yet to come when Jesus comes again and our bodies are changed. Herbert Lockyer explains there are different ***"Grades of Salvation"*** when he writes;

"Did we not receive salvation when we believed? Yes! Do we not receive salvation as we keep on believing? Yes! Then what brand of salvation did Paul refer to when he said it is "nearer" (Romans 13:11) than it was in the initial hour of faith? It is a salvation from the *presence* of sin, just as the past salvation delivered us from the *penalty* of sin, and a present salvation delivers us from the *power* of sin. We need salvation from the presence of sin within, and from the presence of sin around us in the world. When will this salvation take place? Why, when Jesus comes. He is our 'Salvation,' and as such is nearer than when we believed."[10]

d. "…**it is the power of God." –** The word power is the Greek word ***"dunamis"*** which means; **"miraculous *power* (a *miracle* itself)"**[11] For those of us who have believed in the **"message of the cross",** we have experienced the miracle of salvation. We have experienced a new life by being regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit **(Titus 3:5). Also see Romans 1:16.** Again, Stanley Horton writes;

"The cross of Christ is full of God's power, for it was the means by which Jesus accomplished our salvation when He shed His blood and died for us. To try to explain the Cross or deduce its importance in terms of human wisdom and philosophy would rob it of its power, that is, of its ability to transform sinners into saints. That is exactly what liberal theologians are doing today. But Paul proclaimed its power to save, to deliver from sin and Satan, to heal, to restore fellowship with God—and so must we. The Holy Spirit will make the Cross and its power real to hungry hearts."[12]

e. **Verse 19 - . For it is written: *'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'"*** This is a quote from **Isaiah 29:14.** Ralph Harris explains the use of this passage when he writes;

"God rendered useless the imagined wisdom of Jerusalem, and as it happened then so it will happen again. When God spoke to Jerusalem, she refused to hear Him, considering herself too high to respond to God. Exalted by God, she discovered what it was to be brought low by God.
Paul tells us that men of this world professed themselves to be wise, and in pride lifted themselves up. That very act was the beginning of their downfall (Romans 1:22). James tells us that true wisdom cannot be manufactured on this earth. It must come from above (James 3:17). Repeatedly Proverbs reminds us that real understanding and applicable knowledge is found in a proper attitude toward and fellowship with God."[13]

C. **Verses 20-21 –"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? 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."** Verlyn Verbrugge states;

"These questions are designed to drive home his point that when one thinks of what God has done in Christ, the world has no 'wise man,' no 'scholar,' no 'philosopher of this age,' who can offer a true wisdom that can compete with this message."[14]

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9 Stanley M. Horton, *I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1999), 27.
10 Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible*, The All Series (Zondervan, 2013), 162.
11 James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* 24.
12 Horton, 27.
13 Ralph W. Harris, ed., *Romans–Corinthians*, The Complete Biblical Library: Study Bible (WORDsearch, 2009), 269.
14 Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 269.