Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians – Part 5

I. Exposition of Chapter One (continued).

A. **Verses 20-21 (continued) –"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."**

1. Regarding the questions given by Paul, Dr. Stanley Horton writes;

"When Paul asks where is the wise man, the scholar (the expert teacher of the law of Moses), or the philosopher of this age, he is emphasizing the futility of human wisdom. It has no ability to meet the real needs of people or to help them find God and salvation. We can see this in the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers that Paul must have read, since he was educated as a Roman citizen before he came under Gamaliel. (Gamaliel did not forbid the reading of Greek authors, and Paul refers to Greek writers in Acts 17:28.)"[1]

2. **"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" –** The so-called wisdom of this world, or human wisdom, attempts to exclude a knowledge of God. The Bible states; **"The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding." – Proverbs 9:10.** This makes it clear that without an acknowledgement of God, there is no true, pure wisdom **(James 3:13-18).** The mind, or thinking of the unbeliever is described the following ways in Scripture:

a. **"Fleshly"** or **"Carnal"** Mind. **Colossians 2:18; Romans 8:5-13; Galatians 5:19-21.**

This word means; "pertaining to the flesh"; "bodily"; "temporal". Refers to a mind set on temporal things.

b. **"Debased"** Mind. **Romans 1:28; (KJV – "reprobate".)** The meaning of this word is; **"unapproved"; "rejected"; "worthless".** Thus this is a mind that God does not approve and therefore must be rejected by Him. Those with this kind of mind have chosen not to retain God in their knowledge. Take note that their mindset led to corresponding action.

c. **"Futile"** Mind. **Ephesians 4:17; (KJV – "vain".)** The meaning of this word is; **"transientness"; "passing from one place to another"; "moral depravity".**

d. **"Corrupt"** Mind. **II Timothy 3:8.** The meaning of this word is; **"To spoil entirely"; "to destroy"; "to deprave".** We could say this describes people who have **"minds to destroy" and "minds to spoil".**

e. **"Defiled"** Mind. **Titus 1:15.** This means; **"to be sullied or tainted"** The world contaminates our minds.

f. **"Blinded"** Mind. **II Corinthians 4:4.** This means **"to obscure".** This refers to those who do not believe.

3. Donald Stamps in the Fire Bible writes:

"Worldly wisdom excludes God because it emphasizes self-sufficiency and makes human knowledge the highest authority. It refuses to recognize God's revelation in Jesus Christ. (1) God calls this wisdom foolishness (3:19-20), because it has kept humans from finding and believing the truth so that they may come to know their Creator (v. 21). (2) A Christian's worldview must be firmly based on God's Word and its message of Christ, which will show the secular worldview as a rejection of God and His truth (see vv. 18-31; 2:1-16; Ac 17:18; Ro 1:20-32; Col 2:8, note; 2Th 2:10-12; 2Ti 3:1-9; 2Pe 2:1-3, 7; Jude 4-19). The original and true message of 'the cross of Christ (v. 17) must never be compromised or twisted to accommodate worldly philosophy, science or any other wisdom that man proclaims as great. The gospel and the message of the cross must never be accommodated to philosophy, science or any other so-called human wisdom (2:4-5; Gal 6:14)."[2]

4. **"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God,…" –** It is impossible to know God through man's philosophies. Man's mind is limited in understanding a limitless God. Grant Richison states;

"All human philosophy operates in the realm of the finite soul, not in the realm of an infinitely wise

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1 Stanley M. Horton, *I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1999), 28.

2 *Fire Bible: English Standard Version*, Donald C. Stamps, Gen. Ed. (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers Int'l, 2011), 1931.

God—an omniscient God. Both philosophy and science rest on man's capacity to understand with his finite brain. God's wisdom is omniscient encompassing both time and eternity, both space and beyond space (that which is transcendent). God's wisdom demands that man depend on God for knowing eternity and everything transcendent (beyond time and space). This is humbling for man. Most men do not want to submit to the wisdom of God."[3]

5. "…**it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." –** Of course this, **"…foolishness…"** is the perspective of those who are lost and who have minds which are blind to truth. The **"message preached"** goes back to **verse 17 "preach the gospel"** and **verse 18 "the message of the cross."** Dr. Stanley Horton writes;

"God, however, knows that human wisdom could not know Him. Therefore, in His wisdom, He was pleased to use the preaching of what the world called foolishness in order to save those who believe. The preaching of the Cross, along with the declaration that the crucified and resurrected Jesus is Lord and Savior, is still the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, that is, who keeps on believing and obeying the gospel (Rom. 1:16)."[4]

B. **Verses 22-24 – "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."**

1. **"For the Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom…"** – The word **"sign"** means; **"*a sign, wonder, remarkable event, wonderful appearance, extraordinary phenomenon*"**[5] The Pharisees came to Jesus one day demanding to see a sign from Jesus in order to confirm He was their Messiah and Jesus rebuked them **(see Matthew 12:38-40).**
2. **"…and the Greeks seek after wisdom…" –** Again, this is referring to human philosophies which the Greeks were known for. Ralph Harris writes;

"These verses point to actual demonstrations of man's foolishness. One example is the Jews. They sought God in tradition, in the letter of the Law. They demanded evidence and visible positive affirmation and were interested in the practical. Yet they framed God in and offered Jesus only one pattern to fit. They stumbled over the fact of a crucified Messiah because it was not a 'good sign'. The other example is the Greeks. They were absorbed in speculative philosophy, as Acts 17:21 points out. They were intellectual beings and proud of their reasoning which did not allow true faith; consequently, they considered the Cross ridiculous."[6]

3. **"…but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." –** The words **"stumbling block"** mean; **"*a trap-spring*;*…anything against which one stumbles, an impediment*; met. *a cause of ruin, destruction, misery*"**[7] It's the same word often translated as **"offense."** Dr. Thomas Constable writes;

"Christ' is the instrument of God's 'power' in conquering the forces of evil and delivering people from their control. He is also the instrument of God's 'wisdom' in solving the problem that human reasoning could not unravel, namely, how people can know God and be reconciled to God. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament personified wisdom as God's agent in revelation, creation, and redemption. Jesus Christ personally is that wisdom, because He is God's instrument of power for the salvation of everyone who believes in Him (Rom. 1:16; cf. v. 30)."[8]

C. **Verse 25 – "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."** Ralph Harris in another commentary of his, writes;

"It is difficult, even impossible, to believe God could do anything foolish or weak. That is not the point. The point is twofold. If God ever did anything foolish or weak, it would still far exceed man's capabilities. Yet even that falls somewhat short of Paul's point. Man often views something that God does as foolish or weak because he is too frail to understand God, too weak to see the power of His purposes. Thus, even though God appears foolish and weak in the eyes of men, it is because God's work is so much higher and better than men can grasp with their limited perception. So, in pride and weakness, they reject the program of God."[9]

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3 Grant Richison, *Verse by Verse through the Book of 1 Corinthians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2007), 1 Co 1:21.
4 Stanley M. Horton, *I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1999), 28.
5 William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1268.
6 *The Complete Biblical Library: Acts – Revelation, Volume 2,* (Empowered Life, Tulsa, OK, 2016.), 503-504.
7 Mounce, 1270.
8 Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 Corinthians* (http://www.soniclight.com: Sonic Light Publication, 2025), 37.
9 Ralph W. Harris, ed., *Romans–Corinthians*, The Complete Biblical Library: Study Bible (WORDsearch, 2009), 273.