

The Foolishness of God, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:21–28

Code: 1814

INTRODUCTION

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and we'll continue our study of this particular section of Scripture which we've entitled "The Foolishness of God." The world looks at what God has revealed in the Bible and what He has done in Christ's work on the cross as foolishness. The Apostle Paul, from chapter 1 to the end of chapter 3, contrasts the foolishness of God with the so-called wisdom of the world.

A. Human Wisdom Divides

Remember that Paul is dealing with problems in 1 Corinthians. The first problem that he deals with is disunity in the church. That is a very big problem. The reason there was division is twofold. One, the people were. . .

1. Identifying with Certain Teachers

The people were identifying themselves with human teachers and certain men: Paul wrote, ". . . every one of you saith, I am of Paul; or I, of Apollos; or I, of Cephas [Peter]; or I, of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). They were creating factions. The second cause of division was that the people were. . .

2. Identifying with Certain Philosophies

These people had been saved out of a very philosophically oriented society. They had all, prior to their conversion, been adherents to one philosophy or another. When they became Christians, they maintained their philosophical identities. They were all believers, but they couldn't get together in real unity because they were philosophically divided. Consequently, Paul attacks the idea of division on the basis of the world's wisdom from 1:18 to the end of the chapter. He shows them that they should never have division in the church based upon philosophy. They should never be divided over economics, social viewpoints, or perspectives that are propounded by man's wisdom, because all of it is vain. They are to be united around the wisdom of God. There was no reason for divisive philosophical disagreement in the church. It can still happen today--you can have people who have one philosophy arguing with other people who have a different philosophy. But it is in God's Word that we have the revelation of what is true and wise, and we need to adhere to that.

Now, what we really have in 1:18 to the end of the chapter is a contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of men. They are opposites. As previously mentioned, you don't need philosophy because when it's right, it agrees with the Bible. When it's wrong, you don't need it. You only need the Word of God. That's what Paul is saying: The world's philosophy is the opposite of God's wisdom, so don't let it divide the church. You don't need it; it only corrupts.

B. Human Wisdom Deceives

Colossians 2:8 says, "Beware. . . ." Now the Bible doesn't say that too many times, but when it does, it's very important. "Beware lest any man spoil you [corrupt you] through philosophy and vain deceit [i. e. , deceit based upon human vanity], after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Paul is saying, "Now watch out! Philosophy is built on human tradition; philosophy is the groundwork for the world's system. It is opposed to Christ, so watch out for it." Philosophy corrupts. Beware the corruption of philosophy and the deceit of human vanity that follows the traditions of men. Colossians 2 says, "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him. . . ." (vv. 9- 10a). The addition of human philosophy is unnecessary.

What can you add to completion? Nothing. It is finished; it is done. You do not need human philosophy.

That is the viewpoint Paul is presenting to the Corinthians. If you drag the wisdom of men into the assembly of believers, all it will do is corrupt and divide. That is precisely what it had done in the church at Corinth. It also had contributed to most of the other problems in the Corinthian assembly.

C. Human Wisdom Disappoints

The book of Ecclesiastes has some interesting things to say about human wisdom. This book was written by Solomon, and it chronicles human wisdom. The Lord put it in the Bible for a very special purpose: to show us the frustrations and the inabilities of human wisdom.

1. Solomon's Fervent Search

Now Solomon, who was a very intelligent man, said in 1:13, ". . . I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven. . . ." He's saying, "I decided that I would apply wisdom and figure out all the answers. " Continuing in verse 16, he said, "I spoke to mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge [I was so educated there wasn't anybody as educated as I was]. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly [which was the opposite of wisdom]; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (vv. 16-18).

2. Solomon's Futile Solution

Then, in 2:1 he said, "I said in mine heart, Come now, I will test thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure. . . ." In other words, "I looked for wisdom and I found it. When I summed up all my wisdom, I had nothing but a troubled spirit because the more I knew, the sadder I became. " If you're honest with yourself, you will find that the more you know, the less you really know. Solomon sought to cover up his troubled spirit by living it up: ". . . I will test thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure. . . ." But then he said, ". . . this also is vanity" (v. 1b). In verse 3, we find Solomon seeking satisfaction from wine. That didn't do him any good either.

Read what else he did: "I made for myself great works; I built houses; I planted vineyards; I made gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits; I made pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees; I got servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of herds and flocks above all that were in Jerusalem before me" (vv. 4-7). Those are the same things that the world does. The people of the world work hard for gain, possessions, and money. "I gathered also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got men and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts" (v. 8). Music is a pacifier for our world today, too. You can't go anywhere without hearing music. People don't want to live with their own thoughts. They've got to have somebody else putting other thoughts in their mind.

Continuing in verse 9, he said, "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me [whatever he learned, he remembered]. And whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly; for what can the man do that cometh after the king? [What could I do now? I've done everything there is to do.] . . . Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly [It's better to be smart than stupid.]. . . The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness; and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? . . ." (vv. 9-15a).

Isn't that amazing? When all that he did came to an end, the wisest man in the world said, "I was a

fool. " Human wisdom doesn't have anything good to offer us.

D. Human Wisdom Disintegrates

The whole world is busy building itself on human wisdom. Jesus said in Matthew 7, "A wise man builds his house on a rock" (v. 24). In this parable, God's Word is spoken of as a rock. Then in verse 25 we read that the rains descended, the floods came, and the wind blew, but the house on the rock stayed firm. But there was a foolish man who built his house on the shifting sands of human wisdom, and when the storm came, his house was washed away (vv. 26-27). It's a clear contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of men. All the wisdom of men ever does is change the truth of God into a lie. Review

First Corinthians 1:18 compares the wisdom of God with the wisdom of men. Paul then gives us five reasons why God's wisdom is superior to man's wisdom.

I. GOD'S WISDOM: ITS PERMANENCE (vv. 19-20)

In 1 Corinthians 1:19-20, Paul says that God's wisdom is superior to man's wisdom because God's wisdom is permanent. He doesn't say, "God's wisdom is permanent," but he shows man's wisdom to be impermanent, and therein is the contrast.

A. Paul's Quote (v. 19)

Paul writes in verse 19, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. " He says that human wisdom will be destroyed and brought to nothing.

B. Paul's Questions (v. 20)

In verse 20, Paul writes out a challenge for anybody who says otherwise: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" In other words, "Call out your philosophers and writers, and have them disprove that all of the philosophies of the past have come to nothing. Have them disprove that all of the wisdom of men has not resulted in change in the world. "

The same problems exist in a manifold sense. Where are the wise people, the writers, and the people who speak with great oratorical genius? God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. It runs to its limits and still comes to nothing. It's foolishness.

What do men need? Men need eternal life. Men need the forgiveness of sin. Men need to know God. Human wisdom can't forgive sin. It can't give eternal life and it can't bring men to God. It only makes comfortable the people who are sinning.

God allowed men to follow their own wisdom. He gave them that choice. In all the pursuits of their own wisdom they came up with no answers. And God stepped in and made their wisdom foolish by what He did. What did He do? He forgave sin. He granted eternal life. He ushered men into the knowledge of Himself. He did what men in all their wisdom couldn't do, and He did it by such a foolish thing: the cross of Jesus Christ. That's not a complex, philosophical theory; it's a simple, historical fact.

Men are wise only in their own eyes and only for a brief time. God's wisdom is permanent.

II. GOD'S WISDOM: ITS POWER (vv. 21-25)

God's wisdom is superior to man's wisdom in its power, in addition to its permanence. The problem with man's wisdom is that it doesn't transform people. It doesn't forgive sin. It doesn't usher people into the presence of God. Human wisdom merely gives people an intellectual satisfaction that they can say seemingly impressive things. Yet, the world looks at the gospel and says, "How foolish. "A. The Foolishness Of God Reaches To Men (v. 21)

"[Since], in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. "

What the men of the world couldn't do when all of their wisdom was put together, God did. He saved

men from their sins and their meaninglessness. He saved them from Satan and delivered them into His presence. He forgave their sin, and gave them eternal life. The world by all of its wisdom didn't know God and couldn't know Him. But God, "by the foolishness of preaching," through something as simple, objective, and uncomplicated as the cross, had the power to generate eternal life and forgive sin. God's wisdom is powerful; the wisdom of men could never do that.

At the end of verse 21, it says, ". . . the foolishness of preaching [saves] them that believe. " There is a human response required, and that is faith. Do you see how that militates against the idea of wisdom as a means of salvation? Paul didn't say in Romans 1:16, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all those who can figure out its nuances and complexities. " It's the power of God to all those who believe. One man came to Jesus and said, ". . . Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mk. 9:24). He was saying, "I believe a little bit; is that good enough?" Yes, it was good enough. When you start trying to figure out the mind of God and all the little nuances of the gospel, that's when you get into trouble. that's when you get into trouble. If you try to figure out all the little nuances of the gospel, you're going to be in a lot of trouble. Believe the gospel and accept it--that's the key.

So, God's wisdom is powerful. Paul continues this same thought in verses 22-23: B. The Foolishness Of God Is A Barrier To Men (vv. 22-23)

"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles [Greeks] foolishness"

Paul says, "Here we are in the world, preaching the simple message of the cross: God in human flesh came into the world, lived, did miracles, proved Himself to be God, died on a cross, shed His blood, bore the punishment for our sin, and rose from the dead. We keep preaching this message and telling people that it is the apex of history. We tell them that it is the theme of the universe, the salvation of men, and the wisdom of God. But they say that it is all ridiculous stupidity. "

Let's examine this rejection of the gospel.

1. The Seeking (v. 22)

a. By the Jews (v. 22a) "For the Jews require a sign. . . "This was a problem with the Jewish people: They had to have supernatural proof for everything. Their constant demand to Jesus was, "What sign will You show us?" (Mt. 12:38; Jn. 2:18). In other words, they were always asking, "Do a trick--do something magic. " If Jesus had executed a series of extraordinary signs, He would have begun something that He never could have stopped. He did His miracles only for His disciples, because miracles were only to solidify the faith of those who already believed. The people who don't believe Jesus will find a way to explain His miracles away. That is what the Pharisees did in the story of the blind man healed by Jesus in John 9. They questioned the man about the healing, and refused to believe what he said. They were convinced that he had never been blind in the first place. They then asked the man's parents if he indeed had been born blind. They said yes, but they didn't know how he had received his sight. The Pharisees then asked the man about Jesus. But in the end, they refused to believe the miracle. They didn't want to accept the sign that confirmed Jesus as coming from God. The world does not have the mentality to accept the supernatural, because "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him," and he will reason them away (1 Cor. 2:14a). That's why we don't need miracles all the time to convince people who don't believe. Jesus did miracles in front of the disciples to convince them of His power, which would be exhibited in their lives. In fact, He said, "Greater things shall you do than I have done" (Jn. 14:12). But when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus in Matthew 16, they said, "We want a sign" (v. 1). Jesus said, in verse 4, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet, Jonah [which meant that Jesus would die, be buried for three days, then arise]. . . . " When Jesus rose from the dead, do you know what the Jewish leaders did? They bribed the soldiers to say that the disciples stole His body and that He didn't really rise. That's how blind they were--they didn't want to believe. So, the Jewish people

required a sign. The gospel was also rejected. . . b. By the Gentiles (v. 22b)". . . and the Greeks [or 'Gentiles'] seek after wisdom"The Greeks sought wisdom--they weren't looking for supernatural signs. They would say, "Now let me figure this out. God became a man--no, that can't be. That can't be true philosophically. I can't comprehend God on a cross, bearing man's sin. It can't be true. " The Greeks were so inlove with their own intellects that they cared about little else. So, you have two viewpoints: you have the supernaturalist and the rationalist. The Jewish people were the supernaturalists, and they had pushed that way beyond its norm. At the same time, the Greeks were the rationalists, and they had pushed that way beyond its norm. I know that I'm a supernaturalist--I believe in God. I also know I'm a rationalist--I haven't thrown my brain away. But I'm not going to be a supernaturalist to the place where it's irrational, or be a rationalist to the place where it's antisupernatural. There must be a balance between the two.

2. The Stumbling (v. 23)

Paul explains in verse 23, ". . . we preach Christ crucified. . . ." In other words, "We preach the fact that the Messiah died on a cross and, by the shedding of His blood, paid the penalty for sin. He redeemed the human race. The purpose for which man was made has been restored. Man can now be ushered into the presence of God, with his sin forgiven. He can dwell with God forever. " The Jewish people were given that message, but they didn't believe it. The Greeks were also given that message, and they too rejected it. Why?

Let's look first at the rejection. . .

a. By the JewsThe message of Christ crucified was "unto the Jews a stumbling block. . . " (v. 23b). The Jewish people could not accept the message of Christ crucified. They still don't believe it today. The biggest objection they have about Christ as the Messiah is His death. They had predetermined that their Messiah was going to come to earth, and immediately set up His Kingdom. Christ did come to earth, but He didn't do what they expected. You say, "How do they interpret Isaiah 53?" They don't think it's talking about Christ. You say, "What do they say about Psalm 22?" They avoid it, because it predicted the Messiah would die. The Jewish people point out Deuteronomy 21:23, which says, ". . . for he who is hanged [on a cross, or on a tree] is accursed by God. . . ." They say, "The fact that He died on a cross proves He wasn't the Messiah. Also, He didn't throw off Rome; He didn't set up the Kingdom. "Many Jewish people today have abandoned the idea of a personal Messiah, and merely talk about a Messianic era in which society will be happy, the world will have peace, and everything will be great. They've given up on the idea of a personal Messiah. Those who do await Him won't see Him, because He's already been here. The Jewish people expected Jesus to do all kinds of supernatural wonders. They were expecting the occurrence of miraculous events, such as those described in Joel 2. Instead, He came riding meek and lowly on the foal of an ass into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:5-7). In verse 9, the crowds greeted Him with great excitement, saying, ". . . Hosanna to the Son of David!. . . " But that passed quickly. When He said in John 12:24, ". . . Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. . . ," they didn't understand that He was going to have to die. It was only a matter of days after Jesus had rode into Jerusalem that they were screaming for His blood. They said, "He can't be our Messiah. Where are the wonders? Where are the signs?"b. By the GentilesThe gospel was "unto the Gentiles [or 'Greeks'] foolishness" (v. 23c). It was perceived as foolishness for two reasons:1) They Saw God as ApatheticOne basic tenet of much of Greek philosophy was the fact that God could be described by the Greek term *apatheia*, from which we get the word *apathetic*. Many Greeks thought God was totally indifferent to men. They thought that because God was so far beyond men, He was incapable of feeling. They saw Him as untouchable, whereas Christ Himself was touchable. So the idea that God became incarnate in human flesh, bore the sins of men, suffered pain, and died on a cross was absolutely ridiculous to them. In their minds, God was remote, detached, and indifferent. Celsus, a second-century writer who attacked Christianity, said, "God is good and beautiful and happy and is in that which is most beautiful and best. If then He descends to man it involves change for Him and change from good to bad, from

beautiful to ugly, from happiness to unhappiness, from what is best to what is worst. God would never accept such a change!"The Greeks did not allow, in their thinking, for God to become a man. They thought it was too incredible that He would come to earth and love mankind enough to die on a cross. 2) They Saw the Gospel as AbsurdThe Greeks thought everything had to be complex. If you could figure something out, it probably wasn't true. If an average person could figure it out, it wasn't any good. Anything that was good could only be understood by the highbrows. They thought that the simple, uncluttered message of the philosophically uneducated Christian preachers was so crude, they laughed at it. To them, there was nothing more absurd than believing that the blood of a crucified God could remove sin, secure salvation, promote holiness, and give eternal life. You say, "Well, doesn't that kind of foul up God's plan? If Paul preaches to the Jewish people and it's a stumbling block, and he preaches to the Gentiles and it's foolishness, then where does he go with his message? Doesn't that postpone God's plan?" No. Let's look at verse 24.

C. The Foolishness of God Is Power and Wisdom to the Called (v. 24)

"But unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God, and the wisdom of God. "

In spite of the fact that most rejected it, there were some Jews and some Gentiles who answered the call of salvation. To those who believed, Christ became not a stumbling block, but the power of God. To them, Christ was not foolishness, but the wisdom of God. Did you notice how he contrasts those two things with the two groups? The Jewish people said, "Jesus can't be our Messiah; He's meek, lowly, and dead. He isn't the powerful Messiah. " But for the Jewish people who believed, Christ became the power of God. Paul said to the Colossians, ". . . [I] labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily" (1:29). The Gentiles, on the other hand, said, "What foolishness!" But for the Gentiles who believed, Christ became the wisdom of God.

1. The World's Intelligence

Do you realize that we listen a lot to the great men of our world? There are many great people, from a human viewpoint, that are more intelligent than we are. I wouldn't be able to go through some of the schooling they've had. By the time I got to page twenty of some of the books they've written I'd have to quit reading because I couldn't understand what they were talking about. They are obviously at a higher level of intelligence than most of us are. But when you sum up all the wisdom of great men through all the ages, it turns out that plain, humble Christians are wiser than they.

You say, "John, that's bragging. " No, I'm not talking about my own wisdom. Let me explain what I mean.

2. The World's Ignorance

I'm talking about the fact that I know the wisdom of God. It's in the Bible, and I understand the Bible. You ask, "Well, why don't those intellectuals read the Bible?" They can, but they won't understand it, because they don't have the resident interpreter, the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 2:7 Paul says, ". . . we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom. . . . " God's wisdom is only revealed to those who know Christ. Verse 8 adds that it is a wisdom "which none of the princes of this age knew. . . . " The best of men--the noblest of people--didn't know God's wisdom. Why not? Because it wasn't open to them to find it. Verse 9 says, concerning the truth of God, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard [it cannot be known externally or by experience], neither have entered into the heart [it cannot be known internally or rationally without God's help]. . . . " You can't know the truth of God by observation or rationalization. According to verse 10, God reveals those things to you by His Spirit when you receive Christ.

I'm not saying I'm smarter than the rest of the people in the world. There are many people in this world far more intelligent than I am. But I know what they, with all of their intelligence, will never know: the wisdom of God. They're struggling with economics, social sciences, and many other disciplines, trying to figure out what's going on in the world.

3. The World's Impotence

Regarding power, Scripture essentially says that with all that men have devised, they don't have the power to change their character. Men don't have the power to transform their lives; only Christ has that power. The wisdom of God is vastly superior to the wisdom of men because it has the power to save, the power to regenerate new life, and the power to grant divine wisdom.

So, unto them that are called--those that God has chosen--Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We have unlimited power. We're able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20).

Paul closes this section on the power of God with a principle that sums up everything he's said:

D. The Foolishness of God Is Wiser Than Men (v. 25)

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."
"

Let me ask you a question: Is God foolish or weak? Both of those words are used for the sake of irony. They are words looked at from a man's viewpoint. When a man thinks God is foolish and weak, at that very point God is infinitely wiser and infinitely mightier than that man. There are a lot of things that God knows that we don't know. If you were to study the Bible year after year, you'd come to the realization that you hardly know anything. That's what education does for you--it teaches you what you don't know. The more educated you are, the more you realize what you don't know.

The more I read the Bible, the more I find myself asking questions in my desire to have a deeper understanding. God is far beyond what we can even imagine. There are complexities in the mind of God that are absolutely beyond mankind to even comprehend.

If you were to compare the wisdom of men with the supreme wisdom of God, the difference would be infinity. The simplest thing that God has ever done--the weakest exhibition of His power--which was the cross, is infinitely beyond the greatest of man's wisdom and power. The smallest representation of God's power is able to do what man's wisdom and power could never even begin to think of doing. The doctrine of the cross may be foolishness, but it has power to save lives and to grant wisdom. God's wisdom is superior to men's because of its permanence and its power. There's a third reason why God's wisdom is superior:

III. GOD'S WISDOM: ITS PARADOX (vv. 26-28)

The world loves wisdom. People really want to keep adding on to their knowledge. There's a substantial amount of self-glory and vanity in knowledge. The Bible says, "Knowledge puffeth up. . . ." (1 Cor. 8:1). There are people who love to show off their knowledge to others. The benefit of ignorance is that it humbles us.

It's good not to always have the answer to everything, but rather, to listen and learn. Out of pride, some people will give an answer to something they don't have the answer to.

The world loves everything to be complex and to figure things out with its own wisdom. But that didn't appeal to God, because that's vanity. God could have made a gospel that was so complex that only the smartest people would have been able to become saved. But that would have destroyed the purpose that God had in mind. Jesus said, ". . . I thank Thee, O Father. . . because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Mt. 11:25). God hid the things concerning salvation from the wise men of the world, showing them He didn't need their wisdom at all.

Think of the greatest mind you know of in the secular world--someone with a brilliant mind, like Albert Einstein. Then think of a Christian you know who's pleasant, but not especially known for his intelligence. That Christian is infinitely wiser than Einstein ever thought of being! That humble Christian's life stands as a living rebuke to the wisdom of the world. Verse 26 talks about this:

A. God's Calling (v. 26)

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called"

God had a purpose in doing that. Sometimes we say, "Wouldn't it be great if so-and-so became a Christian?" We think it would be wonderful for a certain brilliant person to become saved. But one reason that the Lord chose for the church to be made up of simple, humble people was to make it a living testimony to the world that He doesn't need its rank, influence, and wisdom. There still are or have been some people in the church that are mighty, or wise, or noble. There was Dionysius at Athens, there was Sergius Paulus of Crete, and there were the noble ladies at Thessalonica (Ac. 17:4) and Berea (Ac. 17:12). There was the chamberlain (treasurer) by the name of Erastus (Rom. 16:23). There have been some noble, some mighty, and some wise--but not many.

1. Criticized

Celsus, in a letter he wrote around A. D. 178, attacked Christianity by saying that Christians said of themselves, "Let no cultured person draw near, none wise, none sensible; for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool let him come boldly. " In referring to Christians, he wrote, "We see them in their own houses, wool dressers, cobblers and fullers, the most uneducated and vulgar persons. " He said Christians were like "a swarm of bats--or ants creeping out of their nests--or frogs holding a symposium round a swamp or worms convening in mud. "

2. Contrasted

But the Christians that Celsus saw as frogs knew more than he did. God intended that the simplicity of the church stand as a rebuke against the complexity of the world's wisdom. We don't need the world's wisdom. The paradox proves it: We who are the simplest and the most foolish are the wisest. Most of the churches in the Roman Empire were made up of slaves. With sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire, you can imagine the impact that had. In Colossians 2:15, the Bible says that Christ is going to put the church on display before the principalities and powers to show the wisdom of God. God doesn't need the wisdom of men.

3. Clarified

In the church, there are "not many wise"--that means "people with supreme intelligence. " There are "not many mighty"--that means "great people, or influential, powerful people. " And there are "not many noble"--that means "well-born, or from high-ranking families. " That is a simple threefold definition of what the world thinks makes a great man. If a man is very intelligent, he's thought of as great. If a man has tremendous influence through money or power, he is considered great. If a man is of high rank--if he's a general, a senator, a president, or the head of an organization--then he is thought to be great. The world bases greatness on knowledge, education, power, money, and rank.

4. Characterized

Would you like to know who was the greatest man who ever lived, according to God? His name was John the Baptist. Did you know he had no formal education? Did you know he had no particular power? Did you know he wore a cloak made out of camel's hair? He ate locusts and wild honey, and lived out in the boondocks. You say, "Maybe he came from a high-ranking family. " No, Zacharias and Elizabeth were not of high rank. Zacharias was a priest, but there were thousands of other priests, and they had no rank. Jesus said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. . . " (Mt. 11:11). He didn't fit the world's standards for greatness, but he fit God's standard because he was a wise man--he knew God. What a paradox!

B. God's Choosing (vv. 27-28)

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are."

In those verses, Paul shows what God has chosen as he mentions what He hasn't chosen. He says, "God has not chosen the educated, but the foolish; He has not chosen the powerful, but the weak; He has not chosen the high born, but the low born. He's chosen things that in the eyes of the world

are nothing, for the purpose of bringing to nothing the things that the world esteems. " The Word of God shows that human philosophy doesn't mean anything. To summarize, Paul has been telling the Corinthians, "Avoid philosophy. You don't need it! Can't you see that the permanence of God's wisdom, the power of God's wisdom, and the paradox of God's wisdom in choosing the church shows that God doesn't need human wisdom?"

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was the twofold reason for division in the Corinthian church?
2. What warning are we given in Colossians 2:8? What is the reason given in Colossians 2:9-10 about why we don't need philosophy?
3. What is the book of Ecclesiastes about? For what reason did God include it in the Bible?
4. According to Ecclesiastes 1:13, what did Solomon do? In 1:18, what did he say about the man who increases in knowledge?
5. After doing all the great works he did, what was the conclusion that Solomon made about himself?
6. In 1 Corinthians 1:19-20, Paul doesn't specifically say that God's wisdom is permanent. What does he do to show the permanence of God's wisdom?
7. What does Paul imply about human wisdom in the series of questions in 1 Corinthians 1:20? What does man need, that his own wisdom cannot provide?
8. What were the Jewish people always asking Jesus to do? How did the Jewish leaders respond to Jesus' healing of the blind man in John 9?
9. Does the world have the mentality to accept the supernatural? Why not (1 Cor. 2:14)?
10. What purpose did Jesus have in doing His miracles?
11. The Greeks did not primarily seek after supernatural signs. What did they seek for?
12. What difficulty do the Jewish people have about Christ's crucifixion? What alternative to a personal Messiah do some of them speak of today?
13. For what two reasons did the Greeks see the gospel as foolishness? Describe how the Greeks viewed God, and how they viewed the gospel.
14. What did Christ become to those who accepted Him (1 Cor. 1:24)?
15. What does 1 Corinthians 2:9 say about man's ability to understand the wisdom of God on his own? According to verse 10, what is the only way we can receive this wisdom?
16. How does Ephesians 3:20 describe the power given to us in Christ?
17. If we were to compare the wisdom of men with the supreme wisdom of God, what would the difference be?
18. Describe the love that the world has for wisdom.
19. What did God intend the simplicity of the church to stand as a rebuke against?
20. In the church, there are not many _____, not many _____, and not many _____ (1 Cor. 1:26).
21. Who was the greatest man who ever lived, according to God? Why?
22. God has chosen things that in the eyes of the world are _____, for the purpose of bringing to _____ the things that the world esteems (1 Cor. 1:28).

Pondering the Principles

1. The Corinthians became divided because they could not let go of philosophies they had held prior to their salvation. Are there things in your life you still hold onto that should be removed? Read Colossians 3:5-10. Are there things of an earthly nature--such as sexual immorality, lust, greed, anger, or lying--that you have not yet dealt with in your life? Read Colossians 2:8, 16-23. Are there still any philosophies, traditions, or teachings such as those mentioned in these verses in your life? Are there rules you live by that have no biblical basis? Prayerfully examine your life and see if there is any sin or human tradition that you need to deal with. If there is sin in your life, remove it and set

your heart and mind on the things of above (Col. 3:1-2). If you still hold to human traditions, know that you are complete in Christ--there is no need for anything else (Col. 2:9-10).

2. A new Christian is like a baby: all the parts are there; it just needs to grow. There is nothing lacking. In order to remember the wonderful promise of our completeness in Christ, memorize Colossians 2:9-10: "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. "

3. God is omniscient and omnipotent--He is all-knowing and all-powerful. By His knowledge and power, He has done things infinitely greater than anything men could do, or even imagine. Read Job 38-41 for a wonderful account of the might of God.

4. In 1 Corinthians 1:26, we are told that "not many wise men. . . not many mighty, not many noble, are called. " Look at the wise men of this world--those who are brilliant and at the top in their field of study. Are very many of them Christians? Does God need those men to explain the gospel to those who are of lesser intelligence? Think of people you know who have powerful influence, such as dictators, military generals, politicians, or business executives. Do you think God needs the power of such people to accomplish His work? Think of those who are well-born or of high rank. Are there many such people in your church or Bible study fellowship? Think of the people in the Bible that God worked through--many of them lived relatively simple lives, some were poor, and very few of them were from high-ranking families. If wisdom, riches, and nobility are not important to God, should they be important to you? Check yourself and see if you have those things in the proper perspective. Ask God to help you be able to discern between the things that have true eternal value and those that have no eternal value.

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