

Glory Belongs to God Alone

1 Cor 1:25-2:5

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, 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Intro: Paul continues his discussion of God's wisdom. This really is a critical aspect for all of us to consider. If we cannot get to the point where we understand and believe that God has the answers we will continue to go after human wisdom and philosophy. Which will result in continued frustration and produce an endless search for what is right in front of us.

If you look out over the congregation then you would not find many who would be what we call the "intellectuals". Most would be average everyday people and that is exactly what Paul is pointing out in this section. The ones who think they are above average would not be interested in the message of the cross. Primarily because the message of the cross does not take a genius to understand; it is plain and simple which the intellectual would dismiss. If it doesn't take deep thought, ongoing debate, how impressive could it be? Yet that is exactly what makes the message of the cross so impressive; anyone can understand the message, anyone can respond to the message; you do not have to be an intellectual giant.

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. Consider your calling, brethren, he says. Paul always uses the term calling to refer to the saving call of God, without which no one would respond. "You know what sort of persons you were when God called you out of darkness. You know that He did not accept you as His child because you were brilliant or wealthy or intelligent or powerful. If you were any of these things," he says, "you were saved in spite of them not because of them. If anything they were stumbling blocks that hindered you, obstacles between you and God's grace." He implies that they should be glad that not many were wise according to the flesh or mighty or noble. Such things often keep people from the sense of need that leads to salvation. If more of them had been wise, mighty, or noble, it is likely that fewer of them would have been saved.

God is not interested in your level of intelligence He is looking for those who will respond to the Love of God that sent Jesus to the cross for our sin. Notice that those who responded to God do not include many rich, God is not calling people because they are millionaires or famous athletes or entertainers or statesmen. His salvation is open to them just as surely as to others, but only on the same basis of faith. The very things that put them ahead in the world may actually put them behind with God. It is the understanding that a person needs help beyond what they are capable of doing themselves that will bring them to the Lord.

Jesus prayed on one occasion, ***"I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes"*** (Matt 11:25). As the context makes clear, this prayer was spoken publicly as a part of His preaching to the crowds. He was pointing out that pride in anyone will hinder them from humbly coming to faith. He wanted them to know that God wanted them to come empty handed to receive the free gift of salvation. He was also warning that

"the wise and intelligent" needed to get past their pride in their own accomplishments and realize that would not help them understand their need before God.

From a human standpoint we respect strength and those who have gained knowledge from their studies; we are impressed with human accomplishments; but those very things will actually make it harder to embrace the message of God. The very things that impress us do not impress God.

In the end the uneducated (by world's standards); the weak by human standards, who accepts God's gift of salvation is wiser, stronger and far better off. What good is all the human wisdom and strength if a person ends up in Hell? Will their human wisdom and strength be a comfort throughout eternity?

When we look at the disciples that Jesus called they were all simple, plain everyday people. The exception is Paul who was well educated. The scripture does not say that God will not call the rich, the mighty, the educated; but it does say NOT many. Paul clearly was the exception, but the point is God can and does call who He chooses.

In A.D. 178 the philosopher Celsus described Christians as the worse and least of all people:

Let no cultured person draw near, none wise and none sensible, for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any man is wanting in sense and culture, if anybody is a fool, let him come boldly [to become a Christian] We see them in their own houses, wool dresses, cobblers, the worst, the vulgarest, the most uneducated persons They are like a swarm of bats or ants creeping out of their nest, or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in mud.

That is an accurate description of what the known world of his day thought of Christians.

Vs 28 God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and... has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are.

The word translated **despised** means, "**to be considered as nothing.**" The Greek is in the perfect tense here, indicating that what was once despised will continue to be despised. So people who were thought to be nobodies in society would continue to be thought of as nobodies. This whole idea was detestable to the Greeks, being known, being prominent was all they wanted. To become a Christian and be willing to accept being a nobody was the last thing they wanted.

The world measures greatness by many standards. At the top are intelligence, wealth, prestige, and position — things which God has determined to put at the bottom. God reveals the greatness of His power by demonstrating that it is the world's nobodies that are His somebodies.

According to God, the greatest man who ever lived, apart from Jesus Himself, was John the Baptist. He had no formal education, no training in a trade or profession, no money, no military rank, no political position, no social pedigree, no prestige, no impressive appearance or oratory. Yet Jesus said, "*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist*" (Matt 11:11). This man was scorned by the world but honored by God.

1 Corinthians 1:29-31

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."

The real issue in all of this discussion is the glory of God. Man wants glory for himself ; God deserves the glory be given to Him.

The boasting of men is really a shallow attempt to take credit for something that they had no real control over. Whatever men accomplish it is by the power of God and the will of God and nothing less. So the boasting of men is really empty because the praise and glory should be given to God and eventually will be. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship"* (Eph 2:8-10).

By failing to acknowledge God we fail to give credit where credit is due. In fact the very breath we take we take because God allows it, the very life we live, we live because God allows it. There is nothing that exists without His power, purpose, and provision. We see this in nature with the sun, rain and harvest, and in life with our very breath, strength and thinking coming from God.

Men are saved not by their intelligence, accomplishments, or human wisdom. Those who trust in these will never receive God's salvation and life and wisdom — because real wisdom comes from God and that will only come to those who humbly accept Jesus as their savior. Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me"* (John 14:6).

The wisdom received from God through Christ is real and sufficient to meet our daily needs. In his next letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, *"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"* (2 Cor 4:6).

The person of the world cannot see or receive God's wisdom, the wisdom that could show him God Himself, His plan for the world and for His people, and the future eternity that He gives through His Son. And so men live only for the moment, for the now, having no idea where they came from, where they are going, or what they are doing here in the first place. Yet the simplest, most uneducated person who humbly places his life in Christ's hands is given the truth about all of these things. He knows what all the sages and philosophers of all time have never been able to discover or will ever be able to discover. He has God's wisdom as one of His Savior's precious gifts.

"Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1:31)

Although in Christ we have received God's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, we have no grounds for pride or boasting, because we did not deserve, earn, or produce any of them. Man's wisdom can produce none of those things. It can only produce pride, misunderstanding, strife, and division. As Jeremiah had written hundreds of years before Paul quoted him, *"Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." "May it never be," he wrote the Galatians, "that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Gal 6:14).

1 Corinthians 2:1-2

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (2:1-2)

It is clear, the gospel of God's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption cannot be obtained through human wisdom. Here Paul demonstrates that it also is not to be presented through human wisdom. Paul did not come to Corinth as a philosopher but as a witness. He came proclaiming... the testimony of God. A person can only testify to what he himself has seen or heard or experienced. A witness in a courtroom is to report only what he knows objectively, factually, and personally. He is not to speculate, guess, or deduce. Paul was a witness only to God's revelation, not to his own human understanding or reason or inclinations. God's revelation was everything; human wisdom was nothing.

We should not come to church to hear the pastor's opinions about politics, psychology, economics, or even religion. We should come to hear a word from the Lord through the pastor. God's Word edifies and unifies; human opinions confuse and divide.

Paul assured the Corinthians that he had not come to them with a lot of human thoughts and opinion. He presented them with the testimony of God and nothing else. Some years later he reminded them: **"We have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"** (2 Cor 4:2).

The primary task, the only task, of the ministry is to clearly share the truth of God.

Paul warned Timothy, **"The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron"** (1 Tim 4:1-2). Timothy was to "give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching" (v. 13). That was his job. That is every preacher's job. Any other approach weakens the message.

In his second letter to that young minister, Paul solemnly charged him **"in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus" to "preach the word"** (2 Tim 4:1-2).

It is hard to understand how so many pastors refuse to pay attention to the Scriptures. Instead they fill the heads of their congregation with this world's philosophy, their own opinions and the trends of the day. My clear responsibility is to preach the word and nothing else. It is the power of God to save people, change lives and do a marvelous work in the hearts of men.

Having said that there is another side to the failing churches; many congregations, do not want their pastors to preach the Word. They **"will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires"** (v. 3). As one commentator has observed, "In periods of unsettled faith, skepticism, and mere curious speculation in matters of religion, teachers of all kinds swarm like the flies in Egypt. The demand creates the supply. The hearers invite and shape their own preachers. If the people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf-maker is readily found." Some people, including some immature believers, will go from church to church looking for the right preacher. Unfortunately their idea of "right" preaching is not sound biblical exposition but interesting observations and suggestions based on the preacher's personal philosophy. They are not looking for a word from God to believe but for a word from man to consider.

Conclusion: When Paul had preached to the Corinthians, as when he had preached anywhere, he was determined to know nothing among his hearers except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. He was not interested in discussing men's ideas or insights, his own or those of anyone else. He would proclaim nothing but Jesus Christ, the crucified, risen, and redeeming Jesus Christ. He did not preach Jesus simply as the perfect teacher or the perfect example or the perfect Man — though He was all of these. The foundation of all of his preaching was Jesus as the divine Savior.

Obviously the apostle was not saying that he preached or taught nothing but evangelistic messages, or that he expounded only those parts of Scripture that deal directly with Christ's atonement. He taught the full counsel of God, as his writings make clear (Acts 20:27). He ministered in Corinth for a year and a half, "teaching the word of God among [them]" (Acts 18:11). But it was, and still is, the cross of Jesus Christ that is the stumbling block or the foolishness to unbelievers (1 Cor 1:23), and until a person accepts God's revelation in the cross, no other revelation matters. The preaching of the cross was so dominant in the early church that many Jews and Gentiles accused the Christians of worshiping a dead man. To help a person understand the gospel Paul would go to any length to explain and clarify the cross, but he would not say one word to modify or contradict it.

Charles Spurgeon said:

The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls, nor does it lie in the preacher's learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert the soul.

The church should not have divisions based on philosophy any more than it should have divisions based on individuals. We are to be united around God's wisdom, not human wisdom. We are one in Jesus Christ and should be one in His Word and power, and in the fellowship of those who are His.