

Text: 1 Cor 1.10-17

As we move through Corinthians, we will keep our place by developing the broad outline we started with.

I. Introduction (1.1-9)**II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)****A. Divisions in the church (1.10-4.21)**

¹ Cor 1.11 For I have been **informed** concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

Divisions Revealed (10-12)**Paul's Opening Apologetic (13-17)****Review of last week:**

What did the presence of divisions reveal about the Corinthians? **They were emphasizing their own sense of superiority by promoting their "favorite leaders."**

How did Paul begin to deal with their controversies? **He minimized his own importance, rejoicing that he had personally baptized comparatively few of them.**

Bonus Question, look at verse 17: What philosophical background did the controversy reveal? **The Corinthians were used to worldly philosophers and their "wisdom of words" ("cleverness of speech" 17), and were thinking in those terms as they set Christian leaders off against one another.**

The Gospel vs. Wisdom (1.18-2.5)

(Note: we will likely not finish this whole section this week.)

Section 1: the cross vs. human wisdom (18-25)

Verse 17 mentions the subject, vv. 18-19 flesh out the theme of this whole section. What is contrasted in v. 18? **How those perishing and those being saved look at the word of the cross.**

Verse 19 supports the proposition of v. 18. It quotes Isaiah 29.14. What message does it communicate? **It is always God's plan to overthrow the "wisdom of the wise"**

Compare the idea of v.17, “cleverness of speech” (“wisdom of word”) with v. 18, “word of the cross.” What is the “word of the cross”? **The gospel**

What is the “cleverness of speech”? **The anti-god message the world champions and follows**

Paul launches into rhetorical questions, challenging the wisdom of the world. (20)

Compare Isa 33.18, Job 12.17, Isa 19.12

In attacking wisdom, Paul uses the words *aiōn* and *kosmos*: “debater of this age,” “wisdom of the **world**.”

What kind of wisdom is Paul attacking? **Worldly wisdom, or purely human natural understanding**

Way back machine: When the Bible talks about wisdom, what does the Bible mean? (think of Proverbs, especially) **practical skill in living**

“In first-century Corinth, ‘wisdom’ was not understood to be practical skill in living under the fear of the Lord (as it frequently is in Proverbs), nor was it perceived to be some combination of intuition, insight, and people smarts (as it frequently is today in the West). Rather, wisdom was a public philosophy, a well-articulated world-view that made sense of life and ordered the choices, values, and priorities of those who adopted it. The ‘wise man,’ then, was someone who adopted and defended one of the many competing public world-views. Those who were ‘wise’ in this sense might have been Epicureans or Stoics or Sophists or Platonists, but they had this in common: they claimed to be able to ‘make sense’ out of life and death and the universe.”¹

What does “wise man,” “scribe,” and “debater” represent in v. 20? **The experts of this age, those skilled in the wisdom of the world.**

Does that mean that Paul would disregard the wisdom or skill with which people of his age had learned to navigate the oceans or erect large buildings? Would Paul reject the wisdom that enables space flight and moon exploration? **No**

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Leicester: Baker Book House ; Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 15–16 (quoted in Constable).

What is the wisdom of this world, then? **It is the wisdom tightly connected with this world's system.**

Can you think of examples in our current culture? **Many answers possible here**

How has God made the wisdom of the world foolish? (20, see v. 21) **God made the wisdom of the world foolish through the preaching of the cross**

What effect does God's wisdom have on those who receive it? (21) **It saves believers from their sins: worldly wisdom never saves people from sin, no matter how much worldly rhetoric claims for itself (embracing "wokeness" makes you righteous, according to the world)**

What three things are compared in vv. 22-23? **Jewish signs, Greek wisdom, and Christ crucified**

V. 18 describes "those who are perishing" and contrasts them with "us who are being saved" due to our response to the preaching of the cross. In v. 22, Paul divides "those who are perishing" between Jews and Greeks.

How is it that the cross became, for *both* Jews and Greeks, the point to reject the gospel? **The Jews looked for a sign [power], the cross looked like weakness; the Greeks looked for wisdom, the cross (and resurrection) seemed like utter foolishness.**

How does the symbol of the cross seem to you? **Various answers ... an emblem of victory, power, glory, etc.**

"It is hard for those in the christianized West, where the cross for almost nineteen centuries has been the primary symbol of the faith, to appreciate how utterly mad the message of a God who got himself crucified by his enemies seemed to the first-century Greek or Roman ... it was well over a century before the cross appears among Christians as a symbol of their faith."²

"The 'stumbling block' and 'foolishness' language ascribed to Christ in his crucifixion is difficult for the modern Christian to grasp, but we have to keep in mind how the proclamation of an executed criminal as 'good news' would have played out in the first-century context to the Jew with fervent

² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 76.

messianic expectations and to the Greek who coveted honor, esteem, and success.”³

What new word does Paul bring into the discussion in v. 24? How does it describe our relationship with the two classes of unbelievers, Jews and Gentiles? **The called; we are summoned out of the wider world into an exclusive fellowship.**

How do “the called” view the cross? (24) **As the power and wisdom of God [notice who power answers to signs; and wisdom of God answers to foolishness]**

Paul then makes an axiomatic statement in v. 25 (axiomatic = taken for granted “goes without saying”). Despite the evaluation of the world, how does God’s foolishness and weakness compare to the evaluation of men? **God at his weakest and most foolish is stronger and wiser than men.**

To bring this back to the subject of divisions (1.10-17), what does this suggest about how the Corinthians were evaluating their favorite spiritual leaders? **As representative of new philosophies, as heroes of the mind, who they could ally themselves to.**

Section 2: the world’s view of believers (26-31)

Section 3: the powerful effect of Paul’s preaching (2.1-5)

³ Mark Edward Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 28 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 2014).