**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems - #3**

**A Search for Wisdom**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-31 – Part One**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

***18*** *For the message of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ***19*** *For it stands written,*

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,*

*and the learning of the learned I will confound.”*

***20*** *Where is the sage? Where is the scribe? Where is the inquirer of this age? Has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish?* ***21*** *For since, in God’s wisdom, the world did not come to know God through its own wisdom, God was pleased to save those who have faith through (despite) the folly of the proclamation (what was preached).*

***22*** *Whereas Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,* ***23*** *we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,* ***24*** *but for those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

***25*** *For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.* ***26*** *Look now at your own calling, brothers. For not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were powerful; not many were of noble birth.*

***27*** *But God chose what is foolish in the world in order to shame the wise, and what is weak in the world to shame the strong.* ***28*** *God chose what is lowly and despised in the world, things that do not exist, to nullify the things that do,* ***29*** *so that no human being might boast in God’s sight.* ***30*** *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, uprightness and sanctification and redemption,*

***31*** *so that, as it stands written, “Let the one who would boast, boast of the Lord.”*

**Study of the theme**

Paul sets up the true test of false and true teaching for both Jews and Greeks.

1. It is “the message of the cross”.
2. Then it is “the power of God”.
3. What is it “the folly of proclamation”?
4. It is “Christ crucified”.
5. Its content looks like “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles”.
6. But in reality “Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God”.
7. How does the world look at it? “ It is foolish in the world”.
8. How does God sees it? “Wisdom from God, uprightness and sanctification and redemption”.

This is where the Gospel stands in three ways, in contrast to the world:

1. “The wisdom of the wise,” a phrase derived from Isaiah 29:14, used in verse 19.

2. Unable “to know God” (verse 21).

3. Wisdom “of human beings” (verse 25).

Then the Gospel meets our humanity in two ways:

1. It is for those who are nothing (verse 28), and
2. No one can boast (verse 29).

The folly of the message of the cross and God’s power of God:

1. The sage, the scribe, and the debater of this age can debate with God but on the basis of the wisdom of this world, which is regarded as the foolish proclamation.
2. But in the religious context that is Judaism the Jewish wisdom demands a sign.
3. The Greek Philosophers search for wisdom.
4. Both see Christ crucified and this looks like God’s foolishness and weakness because foolishness and weakness are contrasted with human wisdom and strength. Paul concludes as he states his essential preaching: “*For those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God*.”
5. In verses 26–31 Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of their initial call to faith: many of them were not wise, or powerful, or of noble birth. But the Gospel of God chose the foolish and the weak, the lowly and the despised, “*even things that are not, to nullify the things that are*” (verse 28). Then Paul concludes that “in Christ Jesus” became for them wisdom from God; righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (verse 30). It is as if Paul is saying here that it is a different wisdom; not just wisdom that stands as wisdom by itself but has it *with Him*, that is, Jesus, not just systems and ideas. Righteousness and sanctification and redemption and wisdom – each – *is* the Person of Jesus. Our tendency throughout our history is to change a person to an idea.

**A Note from Philemon**

“When we truly love someone we normally don’t love such a person because of this or that idea. But when we hate someone it is normally about an idea or because the person whom we hate does not fit our system.”

**On Divine Wisdom**

“Divine wisdom has truth and love, but demonic wisdom has seduction, deception, hate, enslavement, and works for distraction. That is why St Paul said that Jesus has “become righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Divine wisdom is that of the wisdom of God and this is not merely an “attribute” but the Divine Person of the Son of God. Thus we are not called to learn about an attribute but to participate in the life of the Redeemer, where we will have righteousness and sanctification in Christ.”

**No Human being can boast**

Paul emphasizes that no human being can boast in God’s sight because the status of Corinthian Christians comes from God alone. Paul ends by quoting Jeremiah 9:22–23.

**Paul’s Vision of the Cross of Christ**

1. Paul maintains the teaching that he has inherited from the early Christians before him, as the primitive kerygma that he quotes in (1 Cor 15:3), “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” This is the basis of salvation. Jesus has died as a representative of sinful human beings and to have sacrificed himself as the Passover lamb to save the human race from death (1 Cor 5:7; Rom 8:3); and 2 Cor 5:21 make clear “1For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
2. He was made sin is the OT way of speaking of the sacrifice for sin for it was called in the LXX just sin. Please notice that even in the Hebrew text of Hosea 4:6-8, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me.  And since you have forgotten the law of your God,   I also will forget your children. The more they increased,   the more they sinned against me;   they changed[\*](javascript:void(0);) their glory into shame.  They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity.
3. The cross is the manifestation of God’s wisdom and power. That is why Paul calls Jesus Christ “the wisdom of God” (verse 24) or the “wisdom from God” (v. 30); for Paul nothing is true wisdom but Christ crucified.
4. Paul obviously was not only addressing the different groups in Corinth but also teaching the proper Gospel which is declared by using in (verse 23 and in 2:7) the pronoun “we”. So by saying, “We proclaim Christ crucified” (verse 23), this statement is not limited to the preaching of Sosthenes and himself, but to the whole church (1 Cor 15:11) “So whether it was I or they, in this way we preach, and in this way you came to believe.” By using the first plural, Paul is identifying himself with all other Christian preachers, as well as with all Christian believers, as (verse 30).
5. Paul continues his teaching that the human wisdom risks loosing the Good News when this wisdom is exalted disproportionately to the detriment of the meaning of Christ and his cross.

**Not Human Wisdom**

Wisdom, eloquence, and rhetoric may have their place in human discourses, but Christians – whether they come from a Jewish or a Gentile background, viz. the Gospel or the Message of the cross – can’t be subjected to any form of human wisdom. Why?

1. The cross does not use power or strength.
2. There are no techniques of persuasion in saying “one died for all.”
3. The cross puts love first and love has been always seen as weakness. Why should God save us by love and not by using his divine power?
4. When the all-powerful God sends his Son to save us by dying this horrible death, who can feel or think that there even *is* wisdom is such a death?

**Graffiti: The Cross as Seen by an Early Pagan**

Here is an image of how the cross was interpreted in the eyes of a pagan person who left this Graffiti found in Rome around the second century.

***“Alexamenos, worship God!”***

***“Alexamenos, Worship God!”***

The accusation that Christians practiced [*onolatry*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onolatry)(donkey-worship) seems to have been common at the time. It was based on the misconception of the Jews worshiping a God in form of a donkey. The source of this prejudice is not clear. [Tertullian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian), writing in the late 2nd or early 3rd century, reports that Christians along with Jews were accused of worshipping a deity with “the head of an ass.” He also mentions an [apostate Jew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy_in_Judaism) who carried around [Carthage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage) a [caricature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caricature) of a Christian with ass's ears and hooves, labeled *Deus Christianorum* [*Onocoetes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Onocoetes&action=edit&redlink=1) – “the God of the Christians begotten of an ass.”

From [Tertullian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian), [*Ad nationes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ad_nationes&action=edit&redlink=1)*,* [*1:11, 1:14*](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian06.html)

**The original**



**Strength and Wisdom**

Paul insists that all Christians must draw strength for human life and its endeavors from “Christ crucified,” who is “wisdom from God,” the only one in whom we can find our uprightness, sanctification, and redemption.

**Reading the Words of Paul**

1 Corinthians 1:18: *For the message of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.*

This statement, ***Ho logos ho tou staurou***, means “the word of the cross,” but logos is not just a word, it is an action. Here the *logos*, the action of the message, stands in contrast to s***ophia logou***, or “eloquent wisdom.” For Paul as Jew, it is the summary the Gospel to say “Jesus Christ and him crucified,” because Jesus proclaims God’s power and wisdom, not using either to clean us up from the misuse of power and wisdom. Paul repeats “the message of the cross” in a master letter Galatians (3:1, “*the cross of Christ*”).

**The Message of the Cross**

“*The message of the cross*” is the answer of Paul to those whom he will call the spiritual ones ***pneumatikoi*** in 1 Corinthians 2:15, whether they are Jews or Greeks (1:22). A mature Christian is the one who lives by the wisdom of the cross. So what is this wisdom?

1. If we forgive for nothing and don’t demand a price or compensation just like the parable of the wicked servant who borrowed 10 thousands and was forgiven the debts but could not forgive a fellow slave who owed him much less, (Matt 18:21-35). This is the wisdom of the cross that frees us from keeping a “grudge”. Jesus forgave those who crucified him while the nails were still in his body hurting him.
2. Wisdom that does not fight evil by using the same means that evil uses because all the tools of evil are for distraction, but the cross is for reconciliation (2 Cor 5:21).
3. Evil does no build because it is always negative power that destroys but the cross is the “seal of accepting the most evil ones that can make their hearts melt.

**CROSS - The Deception of the Jehovah Witnesses and the Mormons**

The Greek word ***stauros*** as it appears in ancient history has been used for the T-shaped instrument of execution to which criminals were nailed in the Roman world, not just a “stake.” Because of the T-shape, it is properly called a “cross.” Crucifixion had been derived from the Persians (see Herodotus, *History 1.128.2; 3.125.3; 3.132.2*). The Roman orator Cicero called crucifixion ***crudelissimum taeterrimumque supplicium****,* “a most cruel and disgusting punishment” (*In C. Verrem 2.5.65*); and “unworthy of a Roman citizen” (*Pro Rabirio 5.16;* cf. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion,* 22–24). For Gospel passages that speak of the “cross” as the mode of Jesus’ execution and death, see Mark 15:21, 30, 32; Matthew 27:32, 40, 42; Luke 23:26; and John 19:17, 25, 31. See also the above Graffiti.

**The Folly of the Cross**

The “folly” is for those contemporaries of Paul as well as for Moslems because of the contemporary conventional wisdom about crucifixion in the Roman world was just Christian “madness.” As Justin Martyr (150 AD) recorded later on: “They say that our madness consists in this: that we put a crucified man in second place after the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of the world” (*Apology* I, 13.4). Pliny the Younger (61 AD – ca. 112 AD) called Christianity a madness and a perverse and outlandish superstition (***superstitio prava et immodica***, Ep.10.96.4, 8). Similarly, Tacitus called it “a pernicious superstition” (*The Annales* 15.44.3). Suetonius said it was “a new and mischievous superstition” (*History of the Roman Emperors, Nero* 16.2). But the crucifixion of Jesus differentiates “the message of the cross” from all the myths of the ancient world because this crucified God came to give up his life to save (see M. Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 1–10).

**The ‘Perishing’ and the ‘Saved’**

“*Those who are perishing*” (also in 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3; cf. 2 Thess 2:10) are those who have not accepted the Christian gospel, and hence can eventually be “lost” because they have missed what God wanted to give. In contrast, those “*who are being saved*” are those who see the cross as the power of God. Why did God use this different power?

**Letter from Philemon,**

My bother George,

May the Holy Spirit reveal the power of the Crucified Jesus to you. Many Moslems come to me and ask, “Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?” If we say to them, “Jesus died to forgive us our sins” we hide the power of the cross. But if we say, “To deliver us from the tyranny of death,” the cross starts to become clear to some of them but not to all, as many have inherited a deep hatred for us and for Jesus. When I say even to Christians that St. Paul says, “*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law*” (1 Cor 15:56), they don’t understand that this sting is what drives us to sin because we have inherited mortality because the same apostle said “*for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ*” (1 Cor 15: 22). This sting of mortality drives us to all irrational behavior. Let us speak of the cross in a positive way, not in a negative way, and say positively, “Jesus died to give us life.” As you said one day, it is like a blood transfusion but still greater, for Jesus died to give us his life and was raised to make this life immortal.

My brother, nothing that is given to us by God has ever been negative. We can’t say there is a gift that is a “not,” for the forgiveness of sins is not reckoning any of our sins, but life eternal in truly the divine gift of God (Rom 6:23). So the cross is the power that brings life. Only God can do this, and only God can abolish our death. God recreates us by the death of his Son.”

May the sign of the cross seal your heart and body

Philemon

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***Pope’s Notes***

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