

The Wisdom of the Cross

1 Corinthians 1:10-31

Next year, we will open the year with 1 Corinthians.

First Corinthians addresses reports that Paul received from a church member, Chloe, as well as a letter he received from the church itself (1 Corinthians 7:1). He spent 18 months in Corinth four years prior to writing 1 Corinthians, so he was intimately familiar with the church, its congregants and city.

The city had a negative influence on the Corinthian church and Paul discusses their divisions and quarrels, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, marriage and singleness, freedom in Christ, order in worship, the significance of the Lord's Supper, and the right use of spiritual gifts; and a profound teaching on the resurrection.

Paul addresses in the very first chapter, much of what ails the church: pride & selfishness. He confronts it immediately.

First: The Problem. 10-17

It was a problem -

- a) Of Personalities. 12

We all tend to lean toward our friends or CG.

- b) Of Performance. 13-16

This is reminiscent of the American church growth movement where size is everything.

- c) Of Power. 17

Second: The Point. 18

- a) Think of the mission: Without a point, we all get dull.
- b) Think of Peter: Seeing waves bigger than Christ, we all tend to sink
- c) Think of the disciples: Thinking of our selves we all become selfish

The cross is foolishness because it contradicts normal, natural thinking. It requires supranormal and supernatural thinking to see the cross for what it is.

We all think we are acting in the best interests of the cross, but Paul clearly states that divisions and quarrels are not in the best interests of the cross.

Remember: The first effect of sin is broken relationships:

- God and the first couple
- Adam and Eve
- Cain and Abel

The church is supposed to present a different model for relational health.

As we enter another season of Covid, how will you act differently?

How will you keep the cross central?

How will you trust in the power of Christ rather than your own power?

Third: The Cure. 19-25

- a) The cross of Christ humbles the wise – 18-25
- b) The call of God is for those are humble. 26-31

The backbone of the discussion in 1:18–3:23 is a series of six OT quotations (1:19; 1:31; 2:9; 2:16; 3:19; 3:20), all taken from passages that depict God as one who acts to judge and save his people in ways that defy human imagination.

Paul's primary quotes are from Isaiah 25-31 where Israel is choosing to trust a foreign power to protect them from their enemies.

Isaiah 30:1-5 - *"Ah, stubborn children," declares the LORD, "who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; ² who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! ³ Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation. ⁴ For though his officials are at Zoan and his envoys reach Hanes, ⁵ everyone comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit, but shame and disgrace."*

Isaiah 31:1-3 – *Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD! ² And yet he is wise and brings disaster; he does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. ³ The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.*

But God is promising a redeemer who will do for them what no foreign ruler can do.

The background of Paul's use of Isaiah: There is a messianic figure introduced in 11:1, a 'shoot from the stump of Jesse', whose first characteristic is that the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel and might will rest upon him (cf 1 Cor 2:10).

Isaiah 11:1-2 - *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*

Even though the 'wise' in Israel were blind and deaf to God's warnings, (Isa 28:7, 12; 29:9-14; 30:9-11; 33:18), when Israel is restored and her righteous king reappears, the blind and deaf will see and hear again (Isa 29:18, 30:20-22, 32:1-5, 33:17-22).

This king will put into effect God's plan of salvation, which is independent of human wisdom

Isaiah 40:12-14 – *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? ¹⁴ Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?*

quoted in 1 Cor 2:16. But, significantly, this salvific plan will come about in a strange and marvelous way.

A suffering servant will come and will suffer vicariously as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. This servant shall be wise (*sunesei*, Isa 52:13), and by his knowledge (*sunesei*) he will justify many (Isa 53:11).

In this way, he will silence and amaze the rulers of the nations (Isa 52:15, alluded to in 1 Cor 2:9). So the eschatological judgment, salvation and vindication of those who wait patiently for God is an amazing, unheard-of, unimaginable act of God's wisdom (Isa 64:6, cf 1 Cor 2:9).

In the same way for Paul's readers, God's wisdom is greater than any sign the Jews could see or any wisdom the Greeks could proffer (22).

The cross is God's superlative wonder which gives life to those humble enough to repent of self-reliant wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30)

Bottom line: Pride has broken the Corinthian church. If you pay close attention (and we will see it next year), Corinthian pride causes almost every problem the Corinthian church suffers.

Corinth is broken by pride and conceit and the model and power of the cross is the only antidote.

Fourth: Our Application. 26-31

We are once again hearing voices telling us which way to go in the resurgence of the Covid pandemic. These voices contradict each other and create schisms within people, even the people of the church.

But the cross presents a different model of salvation. It is one in which the humility of a God who chose to become human and suffer at the hands of his own creation, wins a salvation that is not just temporary but eternal.

And this is the model we are called to follow.

- a) Our salvation is not based on worldly standards, or we would not be saved. 26
- b) God chose the foolishness & weakness of the cross to shame the wise & strong. 27
 - The idea that death could create life
 - Christ not defending himself but dying instead
- c) God chose the lowly and despised to accomplish the impossible. 28
 - Mary and Joseph
 - The disciples and Gentiles
- d) He did this so that no human could boast. 29

Why is God against pride and boasting? Because pride and boasting harm us and damns us.

ILL – On Friday, May 31, 1889, the South Fork Dam of the Little Conemaugh River broke 14 miles above Johnstown, PA, killing 2,209 people and accounting for \$490 million, 2021 dollars in damage. Man, who survived, is in heaven bragging. *“Be humble,”* someone says to him, *“Noah is in the crowd.”*

No one can boast in God’s presence. It is unwise or foolish.

Pride removes Christ from the throne and places self on it.

We must caution our hearts and minds now. We must bow before the cross now. We must walk into this season clothed in humility.

We will have our own opinions but when relating to each other and to others, we must exercise the humility that has saved us and will continue to save us.

- a) Humility
- b) A cross focus

Conclusion:

As we relate to one another -

It is possible to be right and incorrect.
It is possible to be correct and unright(eous)

But humility and trust in God's wisdom saves us from ourselves.

These relational issues continued to plague Corinth and Paul wrote a second letter to address a particular situation in the church.

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 - *Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. ⁶For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, ⁷so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, ¹¹so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

Community Groups:

- 1 – How are you coping with the rise of Covid cases in our nation?
- 2 – What would you fear most about a potential return to the strictest Covid protocols?
- 3 – What does the cross say about our fear?
- 4 – How does the cross teach us to respond to adversarial circumstances?
- 5 – What do we / you tend to trust in rather than Christ?
- 6 – What circumstances existed in OT Israel for Paul to use them as an analogy?
- 7 – How does he describe the divisions in Corinth in vs 10-16?
- 8 – V 17 - Why would Paul's baptismal record undermine the message of the cross?
- 9 – Vs 21-22 - Why does Paul call the message of the cross 'foolishness' to perishing people?
- 10 – How is the cross the power and wisdom of God to Christians?
- 11 – Discuss how the first effect of sin is broken relationships?
- 12 – What does that teach us about sin in our own lives?
- 13 – How does the cross humble us?
- 14 – Why does God not want us to be proud, to rest in our own knowledge or ability?
- 15 – How is it possible to be right and incorrect, correct and unright(eous)?
- 16 – What is your primary take-away from this text?