

1 Corinthians Series #4

"The Message of the Cross" - 1 Cor. 1:18-25

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Two Kinds Of Wisdom

1. There are two kinds of wisdom
 - a. the wisdom of man, as seen in his philosophies and religions
 - b. the wisdom of God, as seen in the Gospel of Christ
2. We can live our lives by one or the other, but not by both
3. The reason is they are mutually exclusive
4. That is what Paul writes about in vs. 18-25

B. The Problem In Corinth

1. Last wee - a call to unity
2. A report about the church in Corinth being wracked by factions
3. As such, the church was a reflection of the City at large
4. Corinth was a major Greek City
 - a. among the Greeks at this time there were 50 different philosophical schools and movements
 - b. each had its own view of the meaning of life and specific plan of ordering society
 - c. most people in Corinth were a part of one group or another
 - d. after they became Christians, many held on to their prior training and philosophical views
 - e. they merely "Christianized" them, merging the wisdom of man with the message of the gospel
 - f. so, there were several camps in the church
5. Paul contrasts the wisdom of man with the wisdom of God and shows that the Christian is called exclusively to the wisdom of God

II. TEXT

A. V. 18

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1. Paul divides the whole human race into two groups
 - a. those who are perishing
 - b. those who are being saved
2. What marks the distinction between them is their response to the message of the Cross.

3. The Message of the Cross is what we call the **GOSPEL**
 - a. the good news of Jesus Christ
 - b. that He died for our sins and rose again from the dead to give us new life
4. Those who reject the message of the cross find it to be foolishness
 - a. "foolishness" = moria; moron
 - b. the gospel appears moronic, as absolute nonsense to those who are perishing
 - c. "How can the death of an obscure Jewish carpenter on a Roman cross in an obscure corner of the world some 2000 years ago be the answer to the issues and problems of life?"
5. For those who are being saved, the message of the cross is the very power of God.
 - a. the gospel is not foolish but the supreme revelation of God's love and grace.
 - b. in the cross is revealed how much God loves us and yearns for our restoration to wholeness.
 - c. the great value of each human being is revealed in the cross - for Christ died to save us, to redeem us, to ransom us from sin and eternal death.
 - d. as the little saying goes, "I asked God how much He loved me. He said, 'This much.' Stretched out His hands, and died."
 - e. the Christian sees in the Cross the power of God at work to meet each and every one of his or her needs
 - f. and that is why Paul speaks of these two groups of people, not in the past tense but in the present.
 - 1) they are either perishing
 - 2) or they are being saved
5. Those who reject the message of the cross are perishing
 - a. every day they drift farther and farther away from hope
 - b. their hearts are becoming harder and harder
 - c. sin corrupts them more and more
 - d. their problems mount
6. Those who receive the message of the cross are being saved
 - a. they were saved when they were born again
 - b. but then they enter into a life of spiritual progress
 - c. they are being saved;
 - 1) saved from indwelling sin
 - 2) learning to overcome old habits and patterns of sinfulness
 - d. where does this power for change come from?
 - e. FROM GOD THROUGH THE CROSS
 - f. that is why Paul says that the message of the cross is

- g. the power of God for those who are being saved
 - the Christian is like the energizer bunny; we keep going, and going, and going - because the Cross is our vital link with God.
- 7. We do not start at the Cross and then go on to something else as we grow in Christ.
 - a. the cross is the root, trunk, branch, and twig of our lives.
 - b. and from it comes the fruit of change into Christ-likeness
- 8. So, today, either we are being saved through the power of the cross, or we are perishing in our sins
- 9. It's true that we cannot stand still in the realm of spiritual growth
 - a. either we are growing and becoming more like Christ
 - b. or we are diminishing and becoming more satanic
- 10. The problem is Corinth is that there were many Christians who were trying to start with the cross, but then go on with the wisdom of man

B. Vs. 19-20

19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

20 Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

- 1. Paul begins his contrast of the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man by quoting Isa. 29:14
 - a. **"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."**
 - b. Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, had led his forces against Judah
 - c. the Assyrian generals were very wise in the ways of war
 - d. they had made their plans and laid their strategies
 - e. God spoke to King Hezekiah thru Isaiah that Assyria would be defeated supernaturally.
 - f. the Jews were just to stand and watch
 - g. that night, 1 angel killed 185,000 of the Assyrian troops - Sennacherib retreated
- 2. Paul's point is that man thinks himself so wise, so clever
- 3. But really, he doesn't have a clue
- 4. Man's wisdom is unreliable and impermanent
 - a. today's pet theory is tomorrow's refuse for the dung heap of history
 - b. that is why Paul asks . . .

c. **Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age?**

- 1) where are the glorious philosophies of the past?
 - 2) where are the schools, teachers, students of bygone eras?
 - 3) they are all gone now; they have been seen for the foolish and bankrupt systems they are and were.
 - 4) the students are attending new schools; the teachers are teaching new philosophies
5. While man's wisdom changes and then passes away, the wisdom of God remains the same and endures.
 6. The message of the Cross is as powerful today as it was 2000 years ago
 7. The reason why is because the message of the cross is based on the revelation of God while the wisdom of man is based on his own limited and lost reasoning.
 8. That is why Paul says in v. 21 . . .

C. V. 21

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

1. In all his wisdom, man never broke through to discover God
2. So God revealed Himself
3. Like me writing a letter and putting it in a box, and you sitting right there trying to figure out the exact content of that letter, merely by thinking
4. You would have to take a look at the letter to know
5. Man could never know God unless God revealed Himself.
6. God did - His greatest revelation is at the Cross!!!
 - a. do you want to know what God is like?
Look at the Cross
 - b. do you want to know what God is doing?
Look at the Cross
7. And here's the critical issue: God changes men and women who are perishing into men and women who are being saved through the preaching of the message of the cross.
 - a. the message goes forth
 - b. the HS shows a person that they are lost in sin, that they are perishing
 - c. pains them, then points them to Christ
 - d. is that where you are right now?
 - e. going to give you an opportunity to respond in a moment

D. Vs. 22-24

**22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;
23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the
Greeks foolishness,
24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of
God and the wisdom of God.**

1. Because the Jews had a long history of the supernatural and miraculous, they expected the Messiah to come in great glory and majesty, accompanied by all sorts of stupendous signs
 - a. that is why they kept asking Jesus for a sign
 - b. but Jesus had already given many signs and performed many miracles
 - c. they simply would not believe.
2. The Greeks did not look for the supernatural so much as they looked for a new and superior philosophy.
 - a. they wanted a teaching that would tickle their itching ears
3. For both the Jews and the Greeks, the cross was about as opposite their desires and expectations as one can get
 - a. so the Jews stumbled over it
 - b. and the Greeks considered it moronic nonsense
4. But for those who are called, whether Jew or Greek, the cross is the power and wisdom of God
5. And Christ is the answer to every need.
6. The point is this: Either we live by the wisdom of man, as revealed in his philosophies and religions, his schools of thought and social programs

-or-

We live by and through the wisdom and power of God, as revealed in the Cross
7. Paul leaves no room for the mixing and merging of the two

III. CONCLUSION

A. V. 25

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1. God is never foolish and never weak
2. But if there were something in God's plan that was foolish and weak, it would still be superior to the best of man's wisdom and strength

- B. The Choice Is Ours
 - 1. Will we live by the Cross or by the wisdom of the world
 - 2. The Cross is the wisdom and power of God
 - 3. The wisdom of the world is unreliable and impermanent

- C. Christians - Bring Your Problems To The Cross
No matter what they are, their solution and answer is found there.

- D. To The Rest - Come to the Cross!