

Series: 1 Corinthians

Title: Where is the Wise?

Text: 1 Cor 1: 19-20

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Paul declared that Christ sent him to do one thing—to preach. And to preach the subject of Christ and him crucified. He wrote, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” (1 Cor 1: 17) He is saying that Christ sent him to literally use the means of public preaching. We know it means literal public preaching because he said we are not to do so with “wisdom of words.” And the subject of our preaching is to be Christ and him crucified—“the cross of Christ.” (1 Cor 1: 17)

Then he divides the whole world into two classes of people—unbelievers and believers. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor 1: 18)

Then the Holy Spirit used Paul to give five more reasons why God chose the means of preaching; why Christ sends his preachers to preach the subject of Christ and him crucified. We will not go through all these now but this will give you an idea of where we are headed over the next few weeks.

First, God chose the means of public preaching because the preaching of Christ crucified is how God destroys the wisdom of the wise and prudent—“For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Cor 1: 19-20)

The second reason given why God chose the preaching of Christ crucified is because it pleased God—“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” (1 Cor 1: 21)

The third reason given that God chose this means is because this is how God calls his people and makes Christ the Power and Wisdom of God unto us—“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Cor 1: 22-25)

Fourthly, God chose the means of preaching Christ and him crucified because it is the means whereby God makes his people nothing so that none of us can glory in God’s presence—“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1 Cor 1: 26-29)

The fifth reason the Holy Spirit gives for God saving his people through this means of preaching Christ crucified is because this is the means whereby God brings all his children to glory only in the Lord—“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Cor 1: 30-31)

Those are five excellent reasons why every called child of God, taught of God in the heart, bows to God and rejoices that God has chosen the means of preaching—of preaching Christ’s person and work—to save his people.

Let’s begin with this first reason the Holy Spirit gives. Verses 19 and 20 declare that God chose to save his people through the preaching of Christ and him crucified because this is how God destroys the wisdom of the wise and prudent.

**1 Corinthians 1: 19: For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20: Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?**

One of the reasons the church at Corinth was divided over their preachers was because of their perception that some were more wise and eloquent preachers. The Holy Spirit gave the apostle Paul these words to declare that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. This world's wisdom—the wisdom of every unregenerate sinner—is brought to nothing by God. But the preaching of Christ, which the world deems foolish, is the true the wisdom of God. It is how God makes his people wise, only in Christ our Wisdom. It is not by natural wisdom that sinners are taught salvation in Christ but by divine revelation through the preaching of the gospel.

### **ON PURPOSE, BY GOD**

The wise men of this world are brought to nothing and perish in their sins, not by accident, but on purpose, by God—“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;...For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” (1 Cor 18-19)

In the New Testament scriptures, when we read words such as, “For it is written”, it refers to the Old Testament scriptures. The Holy Spirit moved Paul to quote from Isaiah 29.

In Isaiah 29, God is speaking to folks in religion in Jerusalem. They are described in our text the way they were regarded by men. They were regarded by men as “wise.” It means skilled experts in learning. They were “prudent.” It means they formed the best plans and used the best means to execute their plans. They were “scribes.” It means they were students of Mosaic Law, who studied and gave their interpretations of scriptures, even the hard-to-understand scriptures. They were “disputers.” It means they were sophists, able to slice and dice and debate doctrine. God is speaking of these very folks in Isaiah 29. They were the most learned, most educated, most wise men in religion.

Yet, God promised to send armies against them and lay Jerusalem low in the dust. (Is 29: 1-9) God promised to send the spirit of a deep sleep, taking away all spiritual discernment from their prophets and rulers, so that the book of God would be a closed book to them. (Is 29: 10-12) Why?

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me,...” (Is 29: 13) Again, be sure to get this. The Lord is not talking about irreligious people, but religious folks; not folks in heathen nations, but in Jerusalem; not in idol temples, but in the Lord's house; not saying evil things about God, but speaking honorable things about God. So what was their problem?

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” (Is 29: 13) Considering themselves wise, they became fools. They worshipped and served the creature (the sinner) rather than God and his Christ. Doing so, they removed their hearts far from God. (Rom 1: 20-32; 2: 1-11)

They did what religious folks are doing today. The religious leaders in Jerusalem tried to create reverence for God within sinners by teaching man-made precepts—man-made doctrines. They used wisdom of words. God says “their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.”

These so-called prudent men preached the sinner's obedience to the law as the way to obtain righteousness and holiness before God. But the only way they could do so was to lower the righteous requirements of God's law. And by lowering the requirements of the law, they did not, and would not, teach men and women that they were sinners in need of Christ. They made sinners think salvation was in their own works.

The Lord Jesus dealt with these vainly religious, wise men when he walked this earth. These men rejected the very Christ, is it any wonder they will reject you and I when we preach Christ's word?

Mark 7: 5: Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? 6: He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias

prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 7: Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 8: For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. 9: And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. 10: For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:

If they would have preached this one law in truth then they would have made sinners see they could not keep the law and must die. This law reaches to the thoughts of the heart. It must be kept in perfection even in the very thoughts and motives of our hearts. Therefore, when this is taught in truth, sinners are taught their need of Christ, who alone has kept this law, even the whole law, of God and is himself, the very righteousness of God, the righteousness of the law, and the end of the law for all who believe on him.

Mark 7: 11: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. 12: And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13: Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

So Christ did what? He preached the law in truth. Christ declared the truth of what the law declares about all sinners as we are born of Adam.

Mark 7: 14: And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: 15: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. 16: If any man have ears to hear, let him hear...21: For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

So we see these men used wisdom of words, teaching that sin is in things rather than in the unregenerate heart, the flesh, of the sinner. Sin comes out of the heart.

Therefore, the sinner God saves must die. We must die in Christ on the cross. We must have Christ as our only Righteousness. Therefore, we must be made new inwardly. Christ our Sanctification must be formed in us making us alive, making us to hear the law and the gospel of our salvation.

Then the outside of the cup will become cleaner. But we must first be born of God from above. We must be brought to rest our entire being upon Christ who is the only Righteousness of God's people.

But instead of preaching the gospel in truth and waiting on God to give a fear of God in the heart by divine revelation, the wise religious leaders in Jerusalem tried to create reverence by teaching the vain doctrines of men which they held to by their traditions. This is what every vainly religious sinner will do unless God intervenes and effectually creates us anew, effectually teaches us the truth and effectually draws us to rest in Christ through God-given faith.

So what did God declare he would do to those wise men in Isaiah 29? What indeed did God do? "Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid." (Isa 29:13-14) God made their so-called wise men, along with their so-called understanding, to utterly perish. God turned them over to a reprobate mind.

Therefore, the result of all their morality-preaching turned the people to utter immorality. You can read it in Romans 1: 19-32. This went on until at last, Christ said to political Israel, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." (Mt 23: 38)

One ancient Jewish writer points out that when the Lord sent the heathen nations, which destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, by destroying their temple and its vessels, by destroying their system of worship, by destroying their books, by destroying their so-called wise men, all the wisdom of natural Israel was taken away because all their wisdom was in men and in carnal works which they could see and touch and feel.

Yet, this is so very important to understand. The physical destruction of Jerusalem—with its wise and prudent religious men, with its carnal works—is a picture of what God shall do with this whole world—religious and otherwise—when he has called the last elect child out of this world. This is doctrine God must teach his people in the heart. Every man-made thing in religion and out, every person found outside of Christ, shall be destroyed by God. The wisdom of man will not last. Trusting in man will not last. Man's works will not last. It is all carnal and full of sin.

Whatever knowledge a man may come to have without the divine revelation of God the Holy Spirit is only the "wisdom and prudence of men", "the wisdom of the world." The wisdom of men is not the Wisdom of God, not Christ our Wisdom. Whatever works a man may do—no matter how men may regard them as good works—they are all carnal, perishing, sinful works. Christ is the Righteousness of God and the eternal Righteousness of his people. Christ is the Wisdom and Power of God to his people.

God used heathen nations to destroy Jerusalem but it was God who destroyed the wise and prudent. God said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." And one day soon, like he did Jerusalem, God will shake every man-made thing in heaven and earth till it is destroyed so that the only thing that remains is that which Christ has created in spirit and in truth, in true righteousness and true holiness.

Hebrews 12: 24: [Every regenerated child of grace has come] to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel.

Christ's eternal blood, his eternal accomplishment of eternal redemption, is better than all the carnal pictures of the Old Testament, better than any works of men performed under the law. Those were given by God to be shadows of good things to come when Christ came. Christ is the Substance, the Body, of which the law and the prophets did speak.

Hebrews 12: 25: See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.

Christ is speaking now in this gospel! Do not refuse him as did the wise and prudent men in Jerusalem when Christ spoke as he walked this earth. Because of their refusal to turn from their vain wisdom and works, because of their refusal to bow and believe on Christ, Christ destroyed them and all their works in the earth with the destruction of Jerusalem. But learn the greater lesson!

Hebrews 12: 25:...For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall* not we *escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: 26: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. 27: And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28: Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29: For our God *is* a consuming fire.

So first, we see that God destroyed—and God destroys—the wisdom of the wise and prudent on purpose because all man's wisdom is vanity. Christ is the Wisdom and Power by which it is destroyed!

## **WHERE IS THE WISE?**

God not only destroyed the wise and prudent in Jerusalem, but throughout the world, God destroys the wisdom of every self-made religionist, along with the wisdom of every philosopher, when God quickens and calls his child into

his church, making Christ our Wisdom and Power—“Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1Co 1:20)

Without a doubt God has made foolish the wisdom of this whole world. From the Jewish scribe to the Grecian sophist, from every self-made religionist to every philosopher in the world, past, present and future, “Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” Indeed Christ our God has!

But apply this to you and I who have been called into Christ’s church. Apply to us because down the page Paul says, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:...” (1 Cor 1: 26)

In Christ’s true church, among his true redeemed, regenerated people, where is the wise man? Where is the scribe among Christ’s people? Where is the disputer, in Christ’s church? Christ’s true people do not boast of knowing Christ by self-wisdom. God is our Teacher. Christ is our Prophet. “It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me,” Christ said. (Jn 6: 45) Our text declares God does this teaching through the preaching of the gospel of Christ crucified! Therefore, true believers do not boast that we are scribes who taught ourselves, who came to know Christ by self-searching his word!

In Isaiah 29, in the midst of judgment, God declared his mercy toward his true elect. Believer, this is who we are! This is what God has done for us! This is why God’s child does not boast of self-wisdom, self-searching, and self-teaching!

Isaiah 29: 18: And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.

We are deaf and blind in ourselves. Only God can make the deaf hear the words of the book. Only God can make the blind see out of darkness. God declares that he is pleased to work this work through the preaching of Christ crucified! And those made meek by God not only begin to rejoice in Christ through the preaching of the gospel of Christ, but we increase more and more, being made willing to be taught of God through the means God has chosen, the preaching of the gospel!

Isaiah 29: 19: The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

For now God has taught us that the self-taught, the scorner, the legalists who watch to entangle us in our words are brought to nothing by Christ and cut off.

Isaiah 29: 20: For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: 21: That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.

Nor are Christ’s people debaters and disputers. We have no reason to dispute, debate and argue with men. We simply declare the gospel and wait on God. It is because we know Christ is the Wisdom and Power of God. Since we have experienced Christ’s Power in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel we now know that Christ will reveal himself when it pleases him in whom it pleases him through the simple declaration of the truth of the gospel. So we invite sinners to come here the gospel. We give them sermons on CD or direct them to listen online. But we do not debate and dispute with sinners. We believe and wait on Christ to reveal himself through the preaching of the gospel!

We are not talking about all who call themselves by Christ’s name. Many make boast of themselves and their self-taught wisdom in the false church. You might even find some hiding among Christ’s true people in his true church making this boast. But you will not find Christ’s true people—his true church—making claims that we taught ourselves.

It is because now Christ is our Wisdom and Power and outside of Christ we know we have none! Christ is our Righteousness and Christ has made his people eternal righteousness; Christ redeemed us with eternal redemption; Christ is everlasting holiness in his people.

Be sure to get this! Christ is God and Man. So all Christ's works are everlasting, eternal works for and in his people. Therefore, God makes foolish the wisdom of this world each time he regenerates one of his elect to eternal life. Eternal life is life that will never end. This life is in Christ Jesus our Life. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (1Jo 5:11-12)

We know these things because God "hath made foolish the wisdom of this world" in the hearts of all those in whom he dwells. He has made our own wisdom foolish and made this world's wisdom foolish to us. God has made us know who we are and made us know what God has done for us and made us recognize what God shall justly do to the will-worker and philosopher of this world.

Read Hebrews 12 again and may God make this word effectual in every heart.

Hebrews 12: 24: [Every regenerated child of grace has come] to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel. 25: See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall* not we *escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: 26: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. 27: And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28: Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29: For our God *is* a consuming fire.

**Amen!**