

July 26th, 2020

We Preach Christ

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

God vs. the sophists

This morning's passage is the perhaps the clearest passage contrasting the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God. In one sense, what we will see this morning is similar to the showdown between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Both of them claimed Divine right. Both of them claimed to be the true wisdom and true power from God. But only one of them walked away alive. That's what Paul's displaying in our passage. It's a showdown between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. It's God vs. the sophists. The doctrine of Christ crucified vs. the speculation of the philosopher. Make no mistake, this the same battle that we see raging today. It is played out every day. Paul is going to demonstrate who was the real power and who has the real wisdom. Paul is going to show us that the Church can all the confidence in the world as we preach Christ.

The Big Idea...

Christ crucified is the only true power and true wisdom in this world, therefore we preach Christ

- ☆ The Perishing of Man's Wisdom
- ☆ The Proof
- ☆ The Power of God's Foolishness

I. The Perishing of Man's Wisdom

How the gospel defeats factionalism

Now these in these verses, **v.18-25**, Paul is continuing his argument from the last section. Remember Paul is arguing against factions. He is rebuking the Corinthians for saying in **v.12** "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Why do these factions exist? Because the Corinthians were impressed with the wisdom of this world. Now Paul is going to show them that this type of worldly thinking is destroyed by the cross of Christ.

The gospel divides the human race

Please look with me at **v.18**. "For¹ the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Now realize that this is a summary verse of the whole section we are looking at. So I want to only draw your attention to a couple things here. First, it the word of the cross that divides humanity and nothing else. We see all these divisions that humanity makes. In the ancient world it was division between Jew and Gentile, Roman and Barbarian, slave and free. Today we see divisions between black and white, male and female, Republican and Democrat. Paul is saying here that the cross makes all of those divisions vanish. The only division that matters, the only division that will have an eternal consequence is between those who are perishing and those who are being saved.

¹ This verse begins with "For." The word "for" almost always means "because" in Paul's writings. So here in **v.18** he's giving the reason for *why* **v.17** is true. Allow me to paraphrase: **v.17** Christ sent Paul into the world to preach the gospel [**v18**] *because* the word of the cross alone can save. Human wisdom and the sophistry and schemes of man *cannot* accomplish this. Consequently, the word of the cross is absolutely folly to the world's way of thinking because it undermines everything the world values. What does the world value? It values honor, glory, power, wisdom, and success. But what does the cross say to every human being? It says we are none of those things. In fact, we are the opposite of those things. We are shameful, blameworthy impotent, ignorant failures. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). This is why **v.18** begins "For the word of the cross is *folly* to those who perishing." It is folly, foolishness, stupidity in the eyes of the world to accept that they really are that bad.

The either/or of the gospel

Secondly, there are only two responses to the word of the cross—or the gospel. Either it is seen as utter folly or the power of God itself. These two responses are seen in Paul’s own missionary work. In **Acts 17**, when he went to Mars Hill and preached Christ crucified, and buried and resurrected he experienced these two responses. **v.32** says “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, *some mocked*. [**v.34**] But some men joined him and *believed*.” Some men sneered at the stupidity of the gospel, but others were so overwhelmed by it’s power that their lives became forever changed. Now the problem with the Corinthians is that they failed to see this. They wanted to be seen as sophisticated. But that was the rub. The culture they lived in saw their gospel as folly.² The only way the Church could gain cultural currency with it’s secular peers was to speak and think like the sophists. But what Paul is showing them is that is a fool’s errand.

God destroys the wisdom of the world

Look at **v.19** For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Now Paul is quoting the book of Isaiah. Please turn with me to **Isaiah 29:13-14**. Isaiah was prophet to Judah, who lived to see Israel go into Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C. Judah was not far behind. They were engaging in gross idolatry and hypocrisy in their worship. **Isaiah 29:13-14** is an indictment against them.

And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; *and the*

² If the gospel you preach is *not* foolishness to the world, then it is not the gospel you are preaching. Paul is telling us that when we faithfully preach the word of the cross, the world will scorn it and us. So you see there is no other option but to be foolish in the eyes of those who are perishing. The gospel *alone* is the power of God to save. Nothing else can.

wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.”

So take all that in. Judah’s sin was that they weren’t really worshipping the Lord. Sure they went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath, and they offered the sacrifices that God wanted. They went through all the external motions, but in their hearts, they didn’t love Him. God saw through their hypocrisy, and punished them for it. What was their punishment? End of **v.14** “...the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.” Now Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies it to the entire Gentile world in **1 Corinthians 1:19**. The spiritual analogy is this: just as God judicially blinded the Jews for their turning away from Him, so He has done to the whole world.³ God says “I will *destroy* the wisdom of the wise,” meaning that God has put an end to it, He has abolished it. “The discernment of the discerning I will *thwart*,” meaning God has nullified it, He has made it void, He has utterly frustrated it.

Natural wisdom vs. spiritual wisdom⁴

But what is this *wisdom* that God has destroyed and thwarted? It is not natural wisdom, meaning it is not wisdom that God has graciously given mankind to advance in science and technology and mathematics, and medicine, and a thousand other natural things. God in His infinite kindness has not destroyed that wisdom. The unbelieving world is full of wisdom of that kind, and many of them are far more brilliant than many Christians. But God has destroyed their spiritual wisdom. “...If we want answers to what life is about—answers about where we came from, where we are going, and why we are here, about what is right and what is wrong—then [the wisdom of the world] cannot

³ Ephesians 4:18 “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”

⁴ For a further discussion on the wisdom of the world vs. the wisdom of God, see Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 87

help us.”⁵ Natural man is as stupid as a rock when it comes to life’s ultimate questions. Why? Because this is part of the judgment. God has judged spiritual blindness with more spiritual blindness.⁶ **Romans 1:28** “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”

1st principle: It is suicide to adopt the world’s wisdom in the Church

That brings us to our first principle. It is suicide to adopt the world’s wisdom in the Church. Why? Because God has already destroyed it. That’s why Paul is so passionately pleading with the Corinthians on this point: ‘Why are you adopting the world’s way of thinking, in making factions, and divisions among yourself? Don’t you realize God has already judged that way of thinking?’ But we do the same thing in our day. What has the Church in American done? We have adopted the world’s thinking on social justice, and on the woke movement. Both of which could very easily be demonstrated to be the world’s way of thinking.⁷ How will that end for the Church if God has already destroyed that way of thinking? No local church has ever continued to be a faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ who has adopted the world’s way of thinking. That’s why Paul is so animated here at the beginning of this letter. The Corinthian Church is in peril. Churches that adopt wisdom from the world are in peril. Test yourself: are there ways you are currently thinking like the world? What do you hope in most? Is it the same thing that the world tells you to hope in? What do you fear the most? Is it the same thing the world tells you to fear? What is your idea of “the good life?” Is it the same thing the world tells you is “the good life?”⁸

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 39

⁶ T. C. Edwards, pg. 25

⁷ <https://sovereignnations.com/2019/01/30/social-justice-gospel-conference-all-sessions/>

⁸ <http://storage.cloversites.com/crosshaven/documents/xray.pdf>

That's our **first point**. God has destroyed all the wisdom in this world that could make one wise unto salvation.⁹

II. The Proof

Paul gives two proofs to his claim that God has destroyed the wisdom of this world. The first proof is from experience, and the second is from history.

1. The proof from experience

Let's first consider the proof from experience. Paul asks in **v.20** "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" These questions follow the prophecy that God has destroyed the wisdom of the wise.

Paul's **first question** here is general "Where is the one who is wise?" Is there even one who can give you satisfactory answers to life's most difficult questions? He then moves to the Jewish world in **the second question**: "Where is the *scribe*?" The word *scribe* pointed to the most educated class among the Jews.¹⁰ In both the OT and NT the scribes were charged with transcribing the Scripture, interpreting it, and applying it. So the scribe was essentially the cream of the crop in Judaism. When Paul asks "Where is the scribe?", he's not saying 'find me one.' He's saying 'find me a scribe who possesses the true wisdom of God.' In Paul's **third question** he moves to the Gentile world: "Where is the *debater* of this age?" Where is the philosopher, the sophist, the orator who can produce true wisdom? He answers all of these with his **final question**: "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" In other words, the reason why you cannot find true spiritual wisdom in the world today, is because the prophecy is true. God has destroyed it.

⁹ Take the smartest, most intelligent worldly man. It doesn't matter if his IQ is astronomical, it doesn't matter if he is a world leader. He has no spiritual wisdom. God has destroyed it.

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 20

Dear congregation, this verse is so relevant today. Paul is telling us to look around at the world today, and he's asking us: Doesn't your own experience prove this verse is true? Have your eyes seen or your ears heard true spiritual wisdom in the world today? Look past the flashy lights, and the empty rhetoric, is there something you can rest your soul in? What politician has provided a solution to unite all the divisions that exist, who can stop nations from waging war against each other? Which self-help guru, or philosopher, or psychologist has adequately been able to tell you what is wrong with your inner man, and who has pointed you in the direction of true happiness and a peace that can't be taken away? Which scientist or doctor has been able to come up with a cure for death? What metaphysician has been able to travel to the other side to tell you what is there? What worldly religious man has been able point you to the true meaning of life, and the purpose for why you exist? Why can't you find anything like this? Because God has destroyed the wisdom of the wise? "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" This prophecy is fulfilled in the world today and every day since it was promised.¹¹ That's the **first proof** that **v.19** is true, our own experience teaches us so.

2. The proof from history

The second proof that **v.19** has been fulfilled—that God has really destroyed the wisdom of the wise—is seen throughout world history. Please look at **v.21** "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom..." let's stop there. Again the word "for" means 'because' and it connects **v.21** to **v.20**. So let's connect them together. The last question in **v.20** reads "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" The answer is 'yes

¹¹ Some commentators point to Paul's three-fold question here (v.20) as a quotation from Isaiah 33:18 where prophet says: "Your heart will muse on the terror: "Where is he who counted, where is he who weighed the tribute? Where is he who counted the towers?" In the context, these questions arise from the promised deliverance the Jews would experience from King Sennacherib of Assyria. Matthew Henry in his commentary on Isaiah 33:18 says here: "These words may be taken as Jerusalem's triumph over the vanquished army of the Assyrians, and the rather because the apostle alludes to them in his triumphs over the learning of this world, when it was baffled by the gospel of Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:20. The virgin, the daughter of Zion, despises all their military preparations. Where is the scribe or muster-master of the Assyrian army? Where is their weigher (or treasurer), and where are their engineers that counted the towers? They are all either dead or fled. There is an end of them."

He has, v.21 “[Because]...in the wisdom of God,¹² *the world did not know God through wisdom...*” Paul is looking back into the past when he says, *the world did not know God* through wisdom. Meaning, throughout world history the great experiment has been tried—the experiment of whether or not mankind could attain a knowledge worthy of God; the experiment of whether mankind could reform and cure themselves. What have we discovered? Paul tells us: the world has never arrived at a knowledge of God through worldly wisdom, though thousands of years of human civilization have tried. What nation or people group can you point to that has arrived successfully through their own wisdom at a true knowledge of God that has led to peace and joy and the abundant life? There is none. That great experiment was especially on display during the time between the writings of the Old and New Testament. Do you ever wonder what God was up to during the time between Malachi (the last OT book) and Matthew (the first NT book)? What was God doing? *In the wisdom God*, as Paul says in v.21, God was showing that mere human wisdom is a complete failure. Listen to how Jonathan Edwards puts it:

“[During that time] learning and philosophy were risen to their greatest height in the heathen world. Almost all the famous philosophers among the heathen [Socrates, Plato, Aristotle] were after the captivity to Babylon. Almost all the wise men of Greece and Rome flourished in this time. What these philosophers in general chiefly professed as their business, was to inquire, wherein man’s chief happiness lay, and how to obtain it.¹³ They seemed earnestly to busy themselves with this inquiry, and wrote multitudes of books about it...they wearied themselves in vain, wandering in the dark, not having the glorious gospel to guide them...God suffered these great philosophers to try what they could do for six hundred years together; and then it proved by the events of so long a time,

¹² For insight into this phrase “in the wisdom of God” I found Charles Hodge helpful. cf. Hodge, pg. 21

¹³ The Roman Scholar “...Varro tells us, no fewer than 288 opinions” were put forth to answer the question: what is the chief end of man. *Thy Word is Still Truth*, Ed. Peter A. Lillback & Richard B. Gaffin Jr, (Phillipsburg, NJ, P & R Publishing, 2013), pg. 494.

that all they could do was in vain; the world not becoming wiser, better, or happier under their instructions, but growing more and more foolish, wicked, and miserable. [God permitted] this, that it might be seen how far reason and philosophy could go in their highest ascent, that the necessity of a divine teacher might more convincingly appear. God was pleased to make foolish the wisdom of this world—to show men the folly of their best wisdom—by the doctrines of his glorious gospel, which were above the reach of all their philosophy.”¹⁴

That’s our **second proof** that God has destroyed the wisdom of the wise. Throughout all human history, “the world did not know God *through wisdom*.”

Objection: this contradicts Romans 1:21

But this verse brings us into conflict with another verse in Scripture, actually in Paul’s own writings. In Romans 1 Paul makes the argument that God is angry—wrathful—at the unbelieving world. Why? **Romans 1:21** tells us: “*For although they knew God*, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...” Do you hear the conflict?

In **1 Corinthians 1:21** Paul says “...*the world did not know God*.”

In **Romans 1:21** Paul says “*For although they knew God*...”

That seems like a contradiction. In Scripture when you come to these places that seem to contradict, what’s always needed is a more careful attention to the text.

¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1* (Carlisle, PA,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 568. I believe this quote in part, helps to interpret the truths of Galatians 4:4 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...” The fullness of time no doubt has several references, but I think that one clear reference is that after God had demonstrated the utter failure of human wisdom for thousands of years, that man cannot find a savior for himself then God sent His Son.

On Romans 1:21

First, what is the context of Romans 1? The context there is that God has given an overabundance of revelation in the created world that demonstrates beyond all doubt that every human being not only knows the God exists, but that He has certain attributes. Paul says in v.20, the verse immediately preceding the one in question: “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”¹⁵ That’s why every human being knows that there is a God and that He is eternal and all powerful, and Divinely endowed. Even the great philosophers during the time between the Old and New Testaments attested to the one true God.

“Socrates acknowledged one Supreme Being as the framer and preserver of the universe.”¹⁶

Clement of Alexandria one of the early Church fathers who was educated in classical Greek philosophy and literature gave several direct quotations in his writings that not poets like Virgil held to the idea of one Supreme God, but also philosophers like Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca held to the same doctrine.¹⁷

“Plato [himself] was a monotheist; [but] he considered the myths concerning Zeus...and other gods a necessary part of education.”¹⁸

There are no such thing as atheists. Atheists are lying when they say there is no God. That’s why God is angry, because they are suppressing the undeniable

¹⁵ “The end for which all things were made is to know God.” T. C. Edwards, pg. 28

¹⁶ W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology, 3rd Edition*, Ed. Alan W. Gomes (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2003), pg. 188

¹⁷ *ibid*, pg. 189

¹⁸ T. C. Edwards, pg. 29

truth that God exists. In that sense, the world clearly knows God, and that He is worthy of honor and praise.¹⁹

On 1 Corinthians 1:21

So then what is the context of **1 Corinthians 1:21** when Paul says “...*the world did not know God?*” It’s clear that Paul here is talking about the knowledge necessary for salvation, *not* the knowledge of God’s existence. The world does not know—*cannot know*—God *savingly* through it’s wisdom. This is what the Westminster Confession of Faith says in it’s very first sentence. “Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.”²⁰ So yes the world does know that God exist and that He is worthy of worship—that’s the truth of **Romans 1:21**. But no the world does not know and will never know God savingly if left to it’s own wisdom—that’s the truth of **1 Corinthians 1:21**.

That’s our **second point**. The *world does not know God* through it’s own wisdom. And the two indisputable proofs of this is **1) Experience**. Paul asks in **v.20** “Where is the one who is wise?” Nobody has ever been able to stand up and answer that question. **2) History**. It’s clear from **v.21** that no nation or people group since the beginning of the world has ever solved the mystery of life: why are we here? what has gone wrong? how can it be made right?

¹⁹ “Unthankfulness is guilt (Romans 1:21). Failure to worship the true God is guilt (Romans 1:21).” Shedd, 186

²⁰ WCF 1.1

III. The Power of God's Foolishness

Inspired irony

Paul here uses ironic language to describe God's solution to all this. He calls the preaching of the cross folly. He calls God himself foolish and weak. Picking up in halfway through v.21

"...it pleased God through *the folly* of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the *foolishness of God* is wiser than men, and *the weakness of God* is stronger than men."²¹

The two permanent classes of men

So let's take this one part at a time. Why is does Paul call our preaching folly? Because v.22, it goes against the expectation of both the Jews and the Greeks. What do the Jews want? They demand signs. Meaning they always have "required external supernatural evidence as the ground of their faith."²² This is what the Jews were constantly begging of Jesus in the gospels. **John 6:30** "They said to [Jesus], 'Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?'"²³ What do the Greeks want. They seek after wisdom. Meaning, "they required rational evidence, [and] wouldn't receive anything as true which they could understand, and see the rational

²¹ "The reason why those that are called see in the crucified One the Christ of God is that the Gospel has proved stronger and wiser than anything human, inasmuch as it saves men, what the world has failed to do." T. C. Edwards, pg. 34

²² "Or instead of taking the verse in the general sense, the foolishness of God, may mean the gospel. The meaning then is, 'The doctrine of the cross, though regarded as absurd and powerless, had more of power and wisdom than anything which ever preceded from man.'" Hodge, pg. 24

²² Hodge, pg. 22

²³ also cf. Matthew 12:39 and Mark 8:11

grounds of.”²⁴ By listing both of these, Paul shows us that all mankind falls into one of these camps. Either you require a demonstration of supernatural power to believe, or a demonstration of rational evidence.

We preach Christ crucified

How does Paul answer that? **v.23** “...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” What does Paul mean by saying “we preach Christ crucified?” Because he says something very similar in **2:2** “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” What does he mean? Let’s start with what he doesn’t mean. **First**, Paul does not mean that he limited his preaching to a very narrow portion of truth. No Paul said in **Acts 20:27** “...for I did not shrink from declaring to you *the whole counsel of God*.” Paul taught everything in the Bible when He preached to the Churches. **Secondly**, Paul in saying we preach Christ crucified does not mean that we preach a lifeless and dry repetition of truth. All one has to do is to read the whole corpus of Paul’s writings to know he didn’t mean that.

Everything was made to hang upon the cross

So then what does Paul mean? He’s using a literary device known as a synecdoche. A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole. So if someone says to you out in the parking lot, “hey check out my wheels,” you know what he means. He wants you to check out his car. Wheels a part stands for the whole in this figure of speech. When Paul says “we preach Christ crucified” he means the whole of the gospel, the entire scope of God’s plan to redeem fallen man through Jesus Christ. It’s similar to how Jesus told the Jews in **Matthew 22:40** that “On these two commandments [loving God & neighbor] *hang* all the law and the prophets.” Likewise Paul is saying that everything that he ever taught—every truth, every doctrine, every

²⁴ Hodge, pg. 22

duty, every ethical requirement all hang upon the cross of Christ.²⁵ Christ is the linchpin that holds everything together. He is the sun in the theological galaxy that every other truth orbits around.

A stumbling block and folly

But this, Paul says halfway through **v.23** is “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” Why is Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews? Because their singular expectation was of a Messiah who would raise Israel to a position of supreme global domination.²⁶ A man crucified as a criminal was an insult to them, which is why the Scripture says “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense” (**Romans 9:33**)²⁷

Why is the gospel folly to the Greeks?²⁸ They knew that misery was in the world. They knew that sin was the great plague of mankind. Why then is the Christian gospel folly to them. Because every element of wars against the way the natural man thinks. To the natural mind, the **incarnation** is foolish. That God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to become mortal and put on flesh and dwell among us as our prophet, priest and king. The doctrine of **substitution** is foolish. That Jesus Christ willingly stood in our place, and perfectly obeyed and honored the law, which man had disobeyed and dishonored in order to satisfy Divine justice. The doctrine of **propitiation** is foolish. That Christ endured the full and just penalty for our sin, absorbing the whole wrath of God and died a cursed death on the cross. The doctrine of **imputation** is foolish. That when a sinner under the power of the Holy Spirit is

²⁵ Ashbel Green in *Princeton and the Christian Ministry Vol. 2*, Selected by James M Garretson, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), pg. 20

²⁶ *ibid*, pg. 22

²⁷ Also see 1 Peter 2:8

²⁸ “The cross was among the Romans *infelix lignum* [unhappy tree], and crucifixion the punishment of slaves and conquered enemies. To preach what was already shame as God’s way of salvation was to add insult to folly.” T. C. Edwards, pg. 33-34

“To the Greeks this doctrine was foolishness. Nothing in the apprehension of rationalists can be more absurd than that the blood of the cross can remove sin, promote virtue, and secure salvation; or that the preaching of that doctrine is to convert the world.” Hodge, pg. 23

persuaded and enabled to receive and believe upon His name after which all of his sin becomes Christ's and all of Christ's righteousness becomes his. The doctrines of **glorification** and **damnation** are foolish. That all who accept this gospel will be rewarded with everlasting life in the presence God Himself, while all who reject it will be shut up in hopeless misery and eternal punishment was simply beyond belief.

In summary to both Jew and Gentile, the doctrine of Christ crucified was and is the most offensive and foolish thing that can be conceived.²⁹

But to those who are called

But Paul continues in **v.24** "...to those who are *called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." What makes the difference between the negative view the world has of Christ crucified in **v.23** and the positive view the Church has here? The Church is *called*. God called them to salvation and the rest He did not. This is what Paul addresses next in **v. 26-31** so God-willing we will see that next week. For here, just realize that nothing can overcome this negative view that the world has of Christ crucified unless God acts *first*. Once that happens Christ crucified becomes the most powerful and most wise thing in all the world.

Christ the power of God³⁰

So first of all what does it mean that Christ is the *power* of God? Power comes from the word *δύναμις* *dynamis*, where we get the word dynamite. Christ is the dynamite of God. He is the explosion of God on the earth, and specifically Christ is the explosion of God upon the soul of His elect. The gospel is not *merely* a collection of words, it carries the sovereign power of God. Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 1:4-5** "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, *but also in power*

²⁹ cf. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 85 and Asabel Green's summary of the gospel in *Princeton and the Christian Ministry*, pg. 18-19

³⁰ So much help on this and the next section by Ashbel Green in *Princeton and the Christian Ministry*, pg. 23-33

and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” How did this power manifest itself in their lives?

They became imitators of the apostles and the Lord (v.6)

They received the Word in spite of affliction with all joy (v.7)

They began to proclaim the Word themselves to Macedonia and Achaia (v.8)

They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (v.9)

Every part of their lives were turned upside down, because Christ is the power of God. We also see this reality on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached his first sermon. His crowd was completely hostile to the doctrine of Christ crucified. It was they who only 40 days earlier had crucified the Lord of glory. But God had called many in that crowd to Himself, so when Peter began to spoke the Word began to explode. No longer did they see Christ as a stumbling block, but we read that when “they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37) Christ the power of God had come upon them and had destroyed all the strongholds of unbelief they once had.

But it wasn't just in the Apostolic age. Consider the Reformation. First we must understand the darkness the preceded and necessitated a Reformation. The Church stopped preaching Christ crucified. Substituted in it's place was gross superstitions and will-worship, the veneration of pretended relics, and a works based system of salvation. Rome had become (and still is) a sewer through which flowed a filthy stream of worldly wisdom bereft of the clear and pure water of the gospel. What happened? The power of God! When Luther started preaching justification by faith alone, the entire world turned upside down. Christ the power of God blew up the old world, and light came after darkness—post tenebras lux.

Or what could study the lives of George Whitefield and Howell Harris and the conditions that prevailed in England and Wales before the Great Awakening in the 18th century. The drinking of gin had become the general

mania. “In London, one house in six was a drinking parlor...inn-keepers promised to make a man drunk for a penny, and would provide straw for him to lie on until he had recovered his senses.”³¹ “It was publicly avowed that vice was profitable to the state,...and that polygamy, concubinage, and even sodomy were not sinful.”³² It was a day not unlike our day. But when Christ the power of God came upon men like Whitefield and Harris everything changed. A whole nation changed. The great Calvinistic Methodist movement was birth and thousands upon thousands of souls were brought safely into the kingdom of God.

Or we could consider Christ the power of God in our own practical lives. Beloved, ask yourselves. What type of preaching explodes like dynamite upon your souls? Is it that type of preaching that tells endless stories, or engages in philosophic speculation, or where every point is the punchline to a joke? Is that the type of preaching that banishes your gloom, and nourishes your faith? Is that the type of preaching that fills your soul with a hatred of sin, and a love for the Savior? No. Only Christ crucified—the power of God can create those holy affections in the soul of the saint. Nothing else has the power to do so. When Paul says that “Christ *is* the power of God” he is saying that there is no other power. All other preaching is weak and impotent and ineffectual.³³

Christ the wisdom of God

But Paul says more. **v.24** “...but to those who are called...Christ the power of God *and the wisdom of God.*” Christ is the wisdom of God. Meaning nothing demonstrates the infinite knowledge and skill and judgment and foresight of God *more than* Christ crucified. The doctrine of Christ crucified illustrates every doctrine and every duty. It shines the light of the wisdom of God on everything.

³¹ John Morgan Jones & William Morgan, *The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales Vol. 1*, Trans. John Aaron (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 2

³² *ibid*, pg. 3

³³ There are also ways that one can preach Christ Christ-less-ly. See *Princeton and the Christian Ministry*, pg. 34-35

Consider how the doctrine of human depravity. How sinful and polluted and corrupt must humanity really be, if it can never be cleansed, until it is washed in the blood of the Son of God?³⁴ Or consider God's hatred of sin. How much must God loath of sin, if He wouldn't show any tenderness to His well-beloved Son, but make Him drink the cup of His wrath down to the dregs? Only Christ the wisdom of God, can show us how sinful man is, and how God hates sin.

Consider the love of God. How could God's love better be represented to you than in Him sending His Son in your stead? "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 **John 4:10**). Here God the Son is holy harmless and undefiled. Here you are a wicked rebellious sinner. What could possibly convince you that God could ever love you? What could He possibly do to show you that He desires to dwell with You as Your God and that you would be among His people? Only the cross of Christ can truly convince the soul of a sinner that God really loves him. Where else can find more love, more mercy and more compassion from God than in Christ crucified? Only Christ the wisdom of God, can show you that God loves you with an everlasting love.

Or consider how all of God's attributes are perfectly harmonized in Christ. God is holy, so He must demand perfect obedience to His law. And God is just, so He must punish sin. But God is also full of mercy who desires to show pity to sinners. This is *the* unsolvable puzzle of the universe. How can God save sinners unless He parts with His holiness or justice? Or how can God remain holy and just without condemning all sinners to eternal misery? The answer is Christ. The cross is where "...lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (**Psalm 85:10**). Only the cross can make sense of God's attributes and secure God's glory. Only in the cross can God be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (**Romans 3:26**).

³⁴ *ibid*, pg. 30

Or consider from where will you gain assurance of your salvation? How can you know that God will not abandon you? How do you know you will persevere in the end? Beloved, we know the treachery of our own hearts. We see our hidden sins, and we see how prone we are to iniquity and how often we run in it. We know that if we were left to ourselves, we would fall.³⁵ What hope to do we have? Only the Christ the wisdom of God can answer that question. We can have full assurance because if “God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”³⁶ In giving us Christ, God has already given us the best thing—His only beloved Son. It would be the greatest insult to Christ if God withheld any smaller gift like our final perseverance. Christ the wisdom of God shows that the saints have nothing to fear. We will never come into condemnation, we will never be forsaken, we will never be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A plea to preach Christ only

Do you see beloved? Do you see why we must always preach Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God? The moment a Church stops preaching Christ crucified, is the moment when ICHABOD is inscribed over the door because the glory has departed.³⁷ If a Church doesn't preach Christ crucified it has no power from God or wisdom from God.

A plea to hold outs

Some of you are here this morning, and though you have heard us preach Christ crucified, you are still holding out. You are actively opposing the Savior. Oh the danger you are in my friend. God has devised the most wise plan to convert sinners, and has exercised the greatest power in seeking to reconcile

³⁵ Even if we could start all over again, with the knowledge we have now, we would still disqualify ourselves in every way.

³⁶ Romans 8:32

³⁷ *Princeton and the Christian Ministry*, pg. 36

them to Himself. You have reason to fear and tremble today if you continue to live in rebellion to Him. He has sworn in His wrath that unrepentant sinners will not enter into His rest. I plead with you most earnestly, you have heard now another free offer of salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't refuse it. You know not when you will hear it for the last time. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."³⁸ Will you be among those who believe and are saved? Or will you be among those who don't and perish?

³⁸ 2 Corinthians 6:2