

**To Exalt Christ**

**To Equip, Encourage, Exhort and Edify Gods' Elect**

**The Church Congregational – 1 Corinthians 1:19-31**

This morning, we continue our expository series based on Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. Paul began his letter by giving the Corinthians a review of their salvation history following God's call to them to be his church. He laid out for them their theological foundation upon which the church had been established, which was the basis for their salvation. It is who they are in Christ. They had their full identity in him.

He said they were the church of God, therefore belonging to him, body and soul. They had been sanctified and were being sanctified, made progressively more holy. This followed their justification, i.e., being declared holy & righteous by faith alone in Christ alone. Paul also made them aware that they were part of God's world-wide church. Grace and peace were their daily blessing from God having experienced the saving grace of God with his salvation in Christ and thus his peace.

However Corinth was a church, a body of believers who had issues, problems that needed to be dealt with and this is why Paul was writing them. In the second of our series, he appealed to them not to have divisions but to be perfectly united in mind and thought. Their problem was that they each had their own favorite preacher whether it was Paul or Apollus or Peter or even Christ. Paul sought to take their eyes off the three preachers and concentrate solely on Christ the preacher and his gospel.

Now in part three of 1 Corinthians 1 Paul continues to redirect their salvation gaze to that of Christ alone.

**Confusion to Comprehension – Verses 19-25**

I want to start by going back to verse 18 as it provides a lead-in, a segue, a launch pad to verse 19 and those that follow. In **verse 18** Paul wrote – *“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.”* Paul knew the power of God in his own life as he was saved by it, as were these Corinthians. It was all foolishness to him at one time but that all changed. Confusion as to who Jesus was, was replaced by comprehension. It was no longer foolish but judicious, sound and sensible.

We see from verse 18 that Paul essentially divides the world into two camps – those perishing and those being saved. To those perishing the cross of Christ is foolishness; it makes no sense. Hundreds died each year on Roman crosses. Jesus' death was no different to them. But it was to Paul. The physical wooden cross was the means to its message, that Christ, the Lamb of God died on it to take away the sin of the world.

Paul was convinced of the power of the cross because he had met the risen Christ, who had died on the cross and rose again to prove its worth and the souls it saved. The cross was not foolishness. It was the power of God. Not only to him but also to the church at Corinth and those it saved by faith. Paul himself had emerged from a position of confusion to a position of comprehension, understanding who Christ was and the purpose and power of the cross. He knew that the resurrection of Christ was not fiction but fact and that changed everything for him.

In **verse 19** Paul speaks to the power of God – *“For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”* Paul was quoting Isaiah 29:14, God's word to Isaiah at that time. Paul took that passage and applied it to the Greek culture of his time which prided itself on human wisdom and intellect. God is capable of destroying both because wisdom and intelligence come from God who made us. Like our soul only God has the ability to destroy it or change it.

In our case God does not destroy our mind, instead he transforms and renews our mind. When Paul wrote Romans 12:2 he knew the truth of what he wrote – *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world (i.e., to its wisdom and intelligence) but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

God takes us, by the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit, from a state of confusion to comprehension, i.e., understanding, discernment, knowledge, regarding his work in Christ.

In **verse 20** Paul asks 4 questions – *“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”* Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844-1900, was a German philosopher who denounced religion and believed instead in the perfectibility of man to be a superman. He declared that God was dead but at the same time he realized the consequences of such a statement. Two world wars and the world always on the brink of one more, bear out the imperfectability of man and that God does make man's philosophy and wisdom foolish and dangerous as well.

John Calvin speaks of – *“the destructive pride of those who glory in the wisdom of the world so as to despise Christ, and the entire doctrine of salvation.”* IOW those who embrace the wisdom and thus the ways of the world will despise and reject Christ & the doctrine of salvation & declare it foolishness.

**Verse 21** reads – *“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”* Because of man’s *“destructive pride”* he/she does not know God, which Calvin said in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was vital. He wrote – *“Man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.”* To know God is to know in whose image we were made and to better know ourselves in our sin and our pride.

God in his wisdom was *“pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”* Through the foolishness of the cross God demonstrated his power to save.

In **verse 22** Paul said Jews demand miraculous signs. They had to see something in order to believe. E.g., the apostle Thomas would not believe Jesus had risen from the dead unless he saw his hands and his side. Greeks look for wisdom Paul said. They had to know something intellectually in order to believe.

In **verse 23** Paul counters by saying – *“But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles”* Some Jews & Greeks could not accept it, but others did. **Verse 24** reads – *“But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* The WCF, chapter 10 speaks of God *“effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.”*

Why does one Jew or Greek consider the cross foolish, but another does not? It is because of God’s effectual elective call by his grace. Remember the sequence of salvation that Paul gave in Romans 8:29-30 – *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified he also glorified.”*

We still see confusion today in regard to the cross of Christ and his death but God’s effectual call and electing draw is still in operation to lead one from confusion to comprehension. Those in the congregation at Corinth have been called to change.

## Called to Change – 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

In chapter one Paul began by giving those at the church in Corinth their theological foundation. They were in the words of Paul sanctified, called to be holy. God's grace and peace were theirs. Paul stated that in Christ they have been *enriched* in every way – in all their speaking and knowledge. Paul assured them God would keep them strong and blameless until Christ returns.

In the center of that theological mix is the declaration by Paul that the congregation at Corinth have been *“called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Verse 2. The call to holiness is a common call of the Christian faith.

They/we are called to be holy. The word “called” in the Greek means *“to be appointed, summoned, specifically the call of the gospel, an effectual call.”* IOW once God wills it, it is effectual, it is effective. It is a *fait accompli*, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as – *“a thing that has been done and is past arguing against or altering.”* God's effectual call to salvation in Christ & to holiness is just that. It is a - *fait accompli* – *a thing that has been done* by God in Christ through the cross and the empty tomb *& is past arguing against or altering.”*

That call to holiness is what sets them/us apart from the world. So, when Paul says in **verse 26**, *“Brothers, think of what you were when you are called”*, that call represents a watershed, a turning point in their lives from what they were into what God was going to make them to be, namely holy, *being made willing by his grace*” to pick up from the WCF and God's effectual call.

Listen to Paul's description of the Corinthians before the call of God in **verses 26-28**. Paul says they were not wise by human standards, not influential, not of noble birth. They were foolish, weak, lowly, despised, of no importance.

These Corinthians were chosen by God to go from what they were to shame the wise, shame the strong, nullify what is. John Calvin quotes two Psalms, 113:7 and 146:8 to describe the congregation – *“He raises the poor from the dust...the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.”* In choosing them God has raised and lifted them up. Note that in verses 27 and 28 Paul says three times that it was God who chose them and why? **Verse 29** – *“so that no one may boast before him.”* Of the five Solas of the Reformation the last one is *Soli Deo Gloria*, to God be the glory. Since God does the choosing and the changing and not us, the glory must go to him.

Look at **verse 30** as Paul brings their salvation history together and the principle reason for them to bring glory to God. Paul wrote – *“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”*

Paul states that they **are** in Christ. The word ‘are’ states a certainty, an assurance that they **are** in Christ which means they **are** saved. They **are** saved, present tense, because God chose them and called them and brought them to faith in Jesus Christ by the inner call of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the gospel by the apostle Paul. All those forces and the power and the will of God came to bear upon those Corinthians/us.

Paul said that Christ *“has become for us wisdom from God.”* If we relied on our own wisdom we would never see, let alone enter the kingdom of God. That is what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 when he told him he had to be born again by the Holy Spirit. But in the wisdom of God, we have been born again and will see and will the enter the kingdom of God if we have embraced by faith God’s salvation in Jesus Christ.

Verse 30 could therefore read - *“Christ Jesus has become our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”* When we embrace Christ, we become righteous, holy and redeemed. In Romans 13:14 Paul wrote – *“clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ....”* If we are in Christ then we have clothed ourselves with his *“righteousness, holiness and redemption.”*

There is the old saying that clothes make the man. In this case the clothing from Christ **re**makes the man, remakes, reimages us *“to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”* Romans 8:29. That is God’s goal and purpose for all those he calls to faith including us. Are you in Christ? The Corinthians were. Is he your wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption? He was for the church at Corinth. Is their theological foundation your foundation?

Amen – **Soli Deo Gloria**