SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

1 COR. 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

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?

21 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.

22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

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

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*:

27 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;

28 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:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

NOTES

The Wisdom of the Gospel

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Related Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16; Colossians 2:1-15; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; Jeremiah 9:23-26; Matthew 11:25-30

TIME: between A.D. 54 and 56 PLACE: from Ephesus

GOLDEN TEXT—"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Lesson Exposition

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING—1 Cor. 1:18-20

The response to the preaching of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). Crucifixion meant prolonged, excruciating humiliation (criminals were often crucified naked). Corinthians highly valued status, so following someone who had suffered such a humiliating death would seem foolish to them. Jews considered a person who died by crucifixion to be accursed (cf. Deut. 21:23). People thought the Messiah would be a conquering king, not a suffering servant. While the crucifixion of Jesus may appear foolish, in God's plan, it is wise and powerful.

The destruction of all worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 1:19). Paul reinforced his point by quoting Isaiah 29:14. God judged the leaders of Isaiah's time. The quotation functioned as a bridge to Paul's critique of those seen as wise and powerful in his day.

The foolishness of worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 1:20). The Jews revered scribes who studied the Old Testament, and the Greeks respected philosophers. These men were the pinnacles of Jewish and Greek intellectual society, respectively. Paul mentioned the futility of both.

STUMBLING AND SURPASSING—1 Cor. 1:21-25

God's wisdom of the cross (1 Cor. 1:21). We are dependent on the so-called foolishness of the gospel for salvation. God's purpose is not for people to think their way to a relationship with Him. People must acknowledge the crucified Messiah.

God's purpose beyond human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:22). The Jews' demand for signs recalls Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees and teachers who demanded signs of His identity and to validate His teaching (cf. John 6:30; Matt. 12:38). Jesus performed many signs, but He would not be coerced into performing a sign. Similarly, Paul stated that the Greeks looked for wisdom. This recalls Paul's journey to Athens. In the marketplace, Paul's address seemed to be going well until he mentioned Jesus' resurrection. The Greeks did not believe in resurrection. Some sneered, while others were willing to hear more and some believed (cf. Acts 17:30-34).

The obstacle of the cross (1 Cor. 1:23). Jesus' death and resurrection seemed ludicrous. Why would the Messiah die shamefully in weakness,

rather than delivering His people with power and might? This message seemed foolish. We are called to lay down our presumptions by repenting and accepting the crucified Messiah.

The message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:24). Despite the obstacles for Jews and Greeks, people among both groups did respond to the call of God. Far from being weak or foolish, Christ's death and resurrection are the powerful fulcrum on which history turns.

God's surpassing wisdom and the cross (1 Cor. 1:25). Having established the supremacy of God's wisdom, Paul expressed how much greater God's wisdom and power are than human wisdom and power. "Foolishness" and "weakness" refer ironically to the crucified Messiah.

BOASTING AND HUMBLING—1 Cor. 1:26-31

The inadequate (1 Cor. 1:26). Some Christians had the wealth to host gatherings. Most, however, were not wealthy. Normally, wealth and power are important for a movement. Yet by using weak and unlikely people, God demonstrates that the power is from Him, not them (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6-7).

The weak (1 Cor. 1:27-29). Paul used a threefold repetition of "God hath chosen." God chose the foolish to shame the wise. God chose the weak to shame the strong. God chose the lowly to bring to nothing that which seems important. God surpasses all human status, power, or wisdom. God's wisdom surpasses human wisdom. There is no room for boasting. Paul alluded to Jeremiah 9:23-24, which exhorts the wise, the strong, and the rich not to boast. God seemingly went out of His way to save those who were weak, uneducated, and lowly. His strength is perfected in our weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10), for then we cannot boast but trust only in Him.

The crucified Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). The point is not that the Father caused Jesus to *become* wise. Rather, Jesus became wisdom *unto us* and the means by which we receive righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are found in Christ alone. Because of Christ's work on the cross, we are given His righteousness and enter a relationship with God. In Christ, we are sanctified and continually transformed by the power of His Spirit.

The praiseworthy Lord (1 Cor. 1:31). Paul ended with a quote from Jeremiah 9:24. Our only hope is in the crucified Savior. Boasting is ridiculous. All glory to God!

—Matthew Friedman

QUESTIONS

1. What is one reason Jesus' crucifixion was such a stumbling block to the Jews?
2. What Old Testament passage did Paul quote in 1 Corinthians 1:19?
3. Why did Paul specifically mention scribes and philosophers?
4. How did the Jews' desire for signs correspond to the life of Jesus?
5. Why did Paul highlight that the Greeks sought wisdom?
6. How did Paul talk about God's foolishness and weakness?
7. What does God's use of weak and unlikely people demonstrate?
8. What does "no flesh should glory in [Jesus'] presence" (vs. 29) mean?
9. What does Paul mean when he said that God made Jesus wisdom unto us?
10. Why is no one able to boast before God?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The mindset of unbelievers opposes the mindset of believers (1 Cor. 1:18).
2. God's wisdom has no equal (vss. 19-20).
3. It is impossible to find God through mere human intellect (vs. 21).
4. What counts for wisdom varies for different people groups (vss. 22-23).
5. Only in Christ can we find God's wisdom (vs. 24).
6. Nothing beats God's wisdom (vss. 25-26).
7. God uses weakness to proclaim His greatness (vss. 27-28).
8. No one is worthy of glory at God's expense (vs. 29).
9. In Christ, we gain everything that human wisdom cannot provide (vs. 30).
10. We should boast in God's wisdom (vs. 31).

—Glenn Weaver

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How can we show God's wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18)?
2. How do people pursue wisdom today (vs. 20)?
3. What can and cannot be known about God through human wisdom?
4. What are obstacles to the message of the cross in our culture?
5. How does God view status (vs. 26)?
6. How can the unlearned be wiser than the learned (vs. 27)?
7. Why does God choose unexpected people to be wise (vs. 29)?

—Glenn Weaver

Golden Text Illuminated

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

In the bustling city of Corinth, where philosophy and rhetoric were highly prized, the apostle Paul presented a message that challenged human wisdom. Our golden text encapsulates the radical nature of the gospel, asserting that what appears foolish and weak by human standards displays the pinnacle of divine wisdom and strength.

That divine wisdom, hidden from the wise of this world, manifests itself through the weak and foolish message of the cross. We can never earn our salvation. We must trust in Christ's grace.

In His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus embodies the wisdom of God in a way that confounds human expectation. The cross, a symbol of shame and defeat in the Roman world, became the supreme demonstration of God's wisdom and power.

Divine wisdom stands in stark contrast to human wisdom. This passage emphasizes the futility of worldly wisdom as its philosophers, scribes, and the debaters all fall short in their quest to understand the divine.

This paradoxical wisdom challenges us to reevaluate our understanding of power. It calls us to trust God's wisdom above our own reasoning or the prevailing philosophies of our age. Even if God's ways do not always make sense to us, we should recognize that He is wiser than we are (cf. Prov. 3:5-8). God invites believers to see the cross not as a symbol of defeat but as the ultimate display of God's wisdom and power.

—Gene Kissinger