

Sunday, August 30, 2015—I Corinthians 1:19-21: The Foolishness of Preaching

Introduction/Review

- Last week during our time together we looked at “the preaching of the cross” in I Corinthians 1:18. In doing so, we covered the following three points:
 - The Preaching of the Cross in Paul’s Epistles
 - The Preaching of the Cross in Early Acts
 - The Preaching of the Cross in I Corinthians 1
- In summation of point 1 we saw that “the preaching of the cross” in Pauline theology is not limited to the justification of sinful men before God. Rather, it encompasses the totality of the revelation of the mystery regarding the Godhead’s plan in forming the body of Christ in the first place.
- In summation of point 2, we learned that Peter’s “preaching of the cross” in early Acts was not something that Peter was glorying in. Rather, the cross was something for which Israel was called to repent.
- Regarding point 3, we learned that the Power of God today is found in “the preaching of the cross.” In terms of man’s wisdom, God takes the most foolish and unwise thing and uses that to “save them that believe (I Cor. 1:21).” This is the reason that Christ did not send Paul to preach the gospel “with words of wisdom” (I Cor. 1:17). Man’s wisdom causes a power outage in the preaching of the gospel because it confuses the issue and makes men think that they can bring forth something of their own that God will accept. When this happens the cross of Christ is made of none effect because men are getting in their own way in terms of being saved.
- This morning we will cover verses 19 through 21 as Paul continues comparing the wisdom of God with the wisdom of men.

I 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.**
- On the heels of verse 18, where Paul identifies that the “preaching of the cross” is foolishness to the lost but the power of God unto to the saved, he references Isaiah 29:14 in verse 19 to support his point.
- Isaiah 29:9-14—God tells Israel two things in verse 14:

- “. . . the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,”
- “and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid.”
- In Isaiah 29, God is rebuking Israel on account of the fact that “their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” In other words, instead of harkening unto God’s word the nation had given ear to the wisdom of men.
- Matthew 11:25
- I Corinthians 1:19—everything that man thinks is wisdom and prudence God is going to destroy and bring to nothing.
 - I Corinthians 1:17—again this is why Paul was not sent to preach the gospel “with wisdom of words.”

I Corinthians 1:20

- **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?**
- The verse contains four questions. Three of the questions call out three different types of objections to the wisdom of God: 1) “the wise,” 2) “the scribe,” and 3) “the disputer of this world.” The fourth and final question encapsulates the utter folly of all three types of objections.
- *The Wise*—most of the definitions for the English word “wise” are positive with the following exception, “Skilled in arts, science, philosophy, or in magic and divination.” (*Webster’s 1828*) In this sense, “the wise” would include all of the devices that man has come up with to undermine the wisdom of God.
- Romans 1:19-22
 - Genesis 6:5
- Romans 1:23-32—the calamity outline in this chapter began back in verses 21 & 22 when they became vain in their imaginations and professed themselves to be wise.
- I Corinthians 1:20—by asking the question “where is the wise” Paul is addressing the myriad of ways that man’s wisdom opposes the wisdom of God.
- *The Scribe*—the Greek word translated “scribe” occurs 67 times in the Greek text supporting the King James Bible. Of these 67 occurrences 66 times it is translated as “scribe” in English. One time the word is rendered as “townclerk” in the KJB.

- Acts 19:35
- According to *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* the English word “scribe” could refer to a “notary or public writer” i.e., a “townclerk” or “A writer and a doctor of the law; a man of learning; one skilled in the law; one who read and explained the law to the people (Ezra 7).”
 - Ezra 7:6, 11-12, 21
- Matthew 15:1-9—by the time of the earthly ministry of Christ, Israel’s scribes along with the rest of her religious system had become corrupt and where teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.
 - Mark 7:13
- I Corinthians 1:20—by asking the question “where is the scribe” Paul is addressing the religious aspect of man’s wisdom.
- *The Disputer—Strong’s Concordance* defines the Greek word translated “disputer” as a disputer, i.e. **a learned disputant, sophist.**” In English, a “disputer” is defined as “one who disputes, or who is given to disputes; a controvertist.” (*Webster’s 1828*)
 - Sophist—“1) A professor of philosophy; as the sophists of Greece. 2) A captious or fallacious reasoner.” (*Webster’s 1828*)
- A “disputer of this world” is going to seek to oppose the “wisdom of God” through the learned high road of education and philosophy. These are not your country bumpkins spouting old wise fables. Rather, these are trained philosophers or those who have been formally trained and stepped in man’s wisdom.
- Colossians 2:8
- I Corinthians 1:20—after rhetorically addressing “the wise,” “the scribe,” and “the disputer of this world” Paul drops his fourth and final rhetorical question, “hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”
- In one fell swoop Paul brushes aside the totality of the wisdom of this world and declares it to be foolish i.e., void of understanding or sound judgment; weak in intellect; unwise; imprudent; acting without judgment or discretion in particular things. Proceeding from folly, or marked with folly; silly; vain; trifling. (*Webster’s 1828*)
- Job 38:1-4

I Corinthians 1:21

- **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.**
- God in his wisdom made it so that the world by the use of its wisdom would not know God. God chose to do it this way so that “no flesh should glory in his presence” (I Cor. 1:29).
- What pleased God was to take the very thing that the world views and foolish i.e., preaching and use that “to save them that believe.”