
EASTER SUNDAY

THE CRUX OF CHRISTIANITY

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

“18 For 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. 19 For it is written, *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*¹

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? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, *“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*²

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most polarizing message of all time. It may divide mother and child, brother and sister, and many other significantly attached individuals. The Gospel is the message about Christ, but it is far more extensive than most imagine. From the beginning of time, God has been moving human history towards a purposeful end. Christ is the key figure in this overarching plan, and human sinners are the beneficiaries of His incomparable work. Christianity may be perceived as more than the simple Gospel, but one is foolish to think that it is anything other or less. In this message we consider the crux or essence of Christianity and the value of God’s wisdom, which we find only there.

¹ Cited from Isa. 29:14; and several related cross references are Job 5:12, 13; Jer. 8:9; Matt. 11:25

² This is a paraphrase quote from Jer. 9:23, 24; and Paul also uses the phrase in 2 Cor. 10:17

SETTING THE STAGE

This week, as I was poking around the web a bit for an illustration, I stumbled across a quiz. “*What kind of Christian are you?*”³ The quiz claimed that it would detect my category of Christianity after only 21 questions. I was curious, so I began with the first question. “The Bible is... A) A flawless, timeless, authoritative record of God's will and plan for humankind; or D) A contradictory and often racist, misogynist, and violent book that has done at least as much harm as good.”

I was surprised to see “D” as an option, since it is quite antagonistic to Christianity. So, I decided to see how the quiz would classify someone who held violently antagonistic views toward Christianity. I answered every question with the most blatantly hostile answer available, even denying that any “Jesus of Nazareth” ever lived – much less that such a one died and arose from the grave. At the end, the quiz told me that I am a “‘Bishop Spong’ Christian.” Now, I don’t know “Bishop Spong,” but based on the answers I gave, I would be no Christian at all!

If Bishop Spong or anyone else denies that there is a Christ, that this Christ is the one who lived and died for sinners, and that Christ conquered death and gives hope to those who would follow Him, that they too should defeat death in the end, then they have departed from Christianity altogether!

Richard Niebuhr, in his book “The Kingdom of God in America,” once wrote, “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the [ministry] of a Christ without a Cross.”

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

- (1) THE “WORD OF THE CROSS” IS THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST**
- (2) WORLDLY WISDOM OPPOSES THE GOSPEL**
- (3) GOD’S WISDOM IS CHRIST HIMSELF**

³ The quiz: <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/Quiz/What-Kind-of-Christian-Are-You.aspx#>

EXPOSITION:

(1) THE “WORD OF THE CROSS” IS THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

- THE “WORD” OR MESSAGE OF GOD
 - “**the word of the cross... is the power of God**” (v18)
 - “**the word of God**” is that which “**increased**” and caused the Church to grow (Acts 6:7, 12:24)
 - “**the word of God**” is what “**agitated and stirred up**” crowds (Acts 17:13)
 - “**the word of God**” is the content of teaching delivered by faithful and trustworthy men (Heb. 13:7)

- CHRIST (HIS PERSON AND WORK) IS THE WORD/MESSAGE
 - “**the word of the cross... is the power of God**” (v18)
 - Paul summarized the message of the Gospel by saying, “**Jesus Christ crucified**” (1 Cor. 2:2)
 - Christ Himself is called the “**Word**” of God in human form (John 1:1, 14)
 - All of the Old Testament pointed forward to that singular climax at the cross of Christ, and all of the New Testament explained the implications thereof.
 - Therefore, we ought not think too narrowly of Christ.
 - If we think only on the babe in a manger, then we forget that God the Son was with the Father before the world began. We forget that the Son is the One through whom all things were created and the One in whom all things exist.
 - If we focus too much on Jesus’ obscure childhood, then we venture into pure speculation, and tread on ground that God did not provide for any sturdy follower.
 - If we see Jesus only as the tender friend to sinners, then we may be surprised to catch a glimpse of Him beating and throwing out the money changers.
 - If we attune our ears to Jesus’ words of love and peace, such that we cannot hear the fullness of their meaning, then we may forget that God disciplines those He loves.

- If we affix our eyes upon the suffering Savior, hanging upon that Roman cross, we may be tempted to think that He has lost His power to rule the world.
- If we celebrate only that Jesus arose from the dead, then we may lose sight of His miraculous ascension and think little of His intercession on our behalf this day.
- If we idly await the day when Christ returns, and think only of Him as a distant King, then we may forget that He is right with us through the good times and bad in this life.
- If we only refer to Jesus as someone we invited into our lives at some point in the past, then we may be surprised to learn that He is our Lord, King, Master, and Savior at this very moment.
 - We may see, then, that knowing Christ is much more encompassing than most of us might imagine. Cover to Cover, the Bible speaks of the person and work of Christ. We ought to love and know this “word of the cross.”
- With all of this in mind, it is still helpful to consider the simplicity of the Gospel – “the word of the cross.”



- THE “WORD OF THE CROSS” IS THE POWER OF GOD
 - “the word of the cross... **is the power of God**” (v18)
 - “the word of God” is the “**sword of the Spirit**,” which cuts deep to expose error and defend truth (Eph. 6:17)
 - “the word of God” is always active and never “**bound**” (2 Tim. 2:9)
 - “the word of God” is at work in believers, bringing about spiritual growth and health (1 Thess. 2:13)
 - “the word of God” is “**living and active**” diving so deeply into a person that it reveals the “**intentions of the heart**” (Heb. 4:12)
 - The “**living and abiding**” “**word of God**” is that which brings spiritual life from spiritual death (1 Pet. 1:23)

(2) WORLDLY WISDOM OPPOSES THE GOSPEL

- THE JEW DEMANDS A "SIGN" (v22)
 - The irony of this is incredible!
 - Christ performed numerous signs among the Jews during His earthly ministry
 - He miraculously produced food (Jn. 6)
 - He healed multiple ailments and diseases (Lk. 9:42, 14:4, 22:51; Jn. 4:50, 5:11)
 - He demonstrated power over the physical world (Mk. 4:39).
 - He demonstrated power over the spiritual world (Lk. 9:42).
 - He even arose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:4))!
 - The "sign" they demand is the momentary sign of their choice (Jn. 6).
 - Are we like this today?
 - Maybe some of us demand that God appear in this sort of way or that.
 - Maybe some demand a Savior who saves them from a physical, emotional, relational, or even political problem.
 - In these ways and others, we may be just like the first-century Jews. We may demand that Christ perform a sign of our choice, rather than acknowledging and marveling at the signs He has already provided.
- THE GREEK SEEKS "WISDOM" (v22)
 - This too is supremely ironic!
 - What book besides the Bible has had so many scholars devoted to its study?
 - What written record has had anywhere close to the scrutiny and critique of the Bible? And yet the Bible has stood the test of time.
 - How many books, articles, poems, songs, paintings, sculptures, and the like have been introduced to the world because of the content of the Bible?
 - Many Sociologists and Psychologists have sought wisdom to combat the brokenness of humanity, but the Scriptures (the Gospel of Jesus Christ) has a track record of transformative power.

- The “wisdom” they seek is the man-centered wisdom of temporal gain.
- Are we like this today?
 - Maybe some of us want the message of Christ to be about living life as a good, moral person.
 - Maybe some of us want Jesus’ message to be a therapeutic balm on various wounds in our lives.
 - Maybe some of us merely want to know what Jesus would say about our parenting, our goal setting, or the arrangement of our furniture.
 - In these ways and others, we may be just like the first-century Greeks. We may demand a Gospel that begins with us and ends with us. We may seek only an earthly wisdom that has immediate practical application.
- THE GOSPEL IS “FOLLY TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING” (v18)
 - The Gospel is simple
 - Anyone can understand what the Gospel claims
 - Anyone can either accept or reject those claims
 - The Gospel is demanding
 - Man is unwilling to consider the claims of the Gospel
 - I have never heard a secularist, atheist, or pagan argue against the Gospel for what it actually is. They distort it to their own demise.
 - Man is unwilling to give up his illusions of grandeur
 - Some will understand the Gospel claims, but they will deny those claims because of their demands on personal sacrifice.

(3) GOD'S WISDOM IS CHRIST HIMSELF

- Christ “**is the wisdom of God**” (v30) – Christ Himself is the prize!
*“because of him [God] you are **in Christ Jesus**, who became to us **wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption** (1 Cor. 1:30).”*
 - Christ is our “**Righteousness**” (v30)
 - Christ gives us His righteousness as He gives us Himself!
 - Christ is our “**Sanctification**” (v30)
 - Christ makes us pure as we partake of Him, and He sets us apart for the glory of God.
 - Christ assures us that He will ultimately rid us of all sin and we will enjoy Him forever.
 - Christ is our “**Redemption**” (v30)
 - Christ buys us back from our slavery to sin and judgment.
- You are “**In Christ**” (v30)
 - The Christian is not someone who has been offered an alternative philosophy. He has not been given a new religious structure by which he may climb towards God. He does not hold a mightier power to accomplish great things with his life.
 - The Christian is one who possesses Christ! And Christ possesses him/her!
 - If all you want is family-friendly morality, then be a Mormon.
 - If you want vague spirituality without moral restraint, then follow Oprah.
 - If you want ambiguous thoughts about connecting with the universe, then dive into Eastern Mysticism.
 - If you want respectable worldly wisdom, then be like the secularists and skeptics of our day.
 - If all you want is the American Dream, then don't waste your time at a church on Sundays.
 - If you want freedom from sin and guilt, new desires for righteousness, right relationship with the God, and resurrection life after death, then cling tightly to the Savior who died and now lives! For He is the only one who can offer hope of this kind. Jesus Christ is the resurrected Redeemer, and He offers life to all who will trust in Him.

MY PRAYERS

- May God forgive us for neglecting His incredible gift – Christ Jesus.
- May God forgive us for demanding a “sign” or seeking worldly “wisdom.”
- May God help us to enjoy the benefits of His wisdom – the person and work of Christ.
- May God help us to cling tightly to Jesus, who saves sinners like us.