

Theme: The Worldview Battle Matters

- 1) Some want wisdom but get foolishness
- 2) Some want power but get weakness
- 3) Christ preaches the Gospel (Christ = The Cross) v.18 and v.24 (Telic Note)

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25 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. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who 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.**

Avid coffee drinkers in the Pacific Northwest know how important a filter is. Before I moved out here I never really thought there was much of a difference in how coffee was brewed. What a novice mistake right? The choice and quality of filter is right up there in importance with bean selection, roast type, and freshness of the grind. Some filters are simple, like the light paper kind used in brewing mass quantities of coffee. Others are more specialized, like the tiny re-usable pod for Keurig brewing machines. Still others, used in commercial machines are even more complex. Not only does a filter determine quality, different types are also not interchangeable. You can't fit a big paper filter in a tiny Keurig machine. Each brew system has its own particular filter.

The same principle is truth when it comes to a person's worldview. A worldview is a sort of filter through which you distill the events that happen in the world. This filter shapes the things you believe, the choices you make, and the values you hold. Like coffee filters, not all worldviews are the same, nor are they interchangeable. And, perhaps most important of all, there are different qualities of worldviews.

The text before us outlines the simple distinction in worldviews and how they ultimately determine what a person believes about God. We can certainly share differing opinions about things like coffee, but the truth about God is not based on opinion.

When it comes to human nature, everyone ultimately falls into one of two worldviews. Paul makes this distinction between Jew and Greek. Jews look for a sign. Greeks seek after wisdom. Now, Paul uses the terms Jew and Greek to speak to his direct audience in their cultural setting. These titles do not mean that only Jews and Greeks ethnically hold to these worldviews. One may be a Gentile and have the same frame of mind that Jewish people in Paul's time did. No matter what one's race, upbringing, or gender is, the two basic worldviews of life come down to **wisdom** and **power**.

#### Part 1: Some want wisdom but get foolishness

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Paul directed the wisdom-dominated worldview at the Greeks because it's what they were known for. The Greeks ushered in Western-minded philosophy which sought to find true wisdom. Great thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle come to mind. Historians like: Herodotus and Thucydides are also

of note, as are the influential poets like Homer and Sophocles. All of these individuals, though they pursued different forms of the arts, sought after wisdom.

It's also noteworthy that this was the very culture into which the New Testament Church was born. Many times in the book of Acts we are told that Paul "reasoned" with Greeks over the Scriptures, such as we're told about his time in Athens, **Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2).**

The kind of reasoning that Paul engaged in involved disputing and arguing between two different worldviews. What exactly were those two worldviews? One was the wisdom of the world, based on personal evidence. We might think of the saying, "*Show me and I'll believe.*" The other worldview was the message of the cross. Listen to what Luke records about Paul's time in Athens. Immediately after stating that Paul began reasoning with them, he says this, **explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."**

To the Greeks, the gods were slightly better than humans but certainly willing to stoop to human levels of morality and retribution. A portrait of the sinless Son of God, condemned to the cross and raised in glory stood in stark contrast. Yet, the message of the cross is not based on human wisdom or discernment. According to Paul's description here in our text, the cross is the last thing the world would imagine to be true, and it is received by faith, not experience. And so the natural Greek mind counts the gospel as foolishness.

Is this not what we continue to see in the world? Today, the Greek philosophical style is emulated in our culture too, in fact our culture is built upon it. Truly, when it comes to the natural world, observation of the physical *is* how we grow in our wisdom. But, because that is true, many assume that the physical is all there is, that there is nothing spiritual. And so the cross of Jesus, a purely spiritual blessing, is discounted as nonsense. When the blessings of forgiveness in Christ are counted as foolishness, the only remaining hope is in material things. And so, societies' attention is shifted to the environment, to personal rights, to quality of life here on this earth. These things become the Greek philosopher's highest morality.

Even at Paul's time there was a specific school of philosophy known as the Epicurean style. Their motto was, "Eat, drink, and be merry." If the here and now is all there is, then get what you can while you can. It's not hard to see how philosophies like these, based entirely on the material and physical, have become a breeding ground for greed, coveting, materialism, self-indulgence, and the much more in our culture.

A message of the cross, which tells the sinner to repent, the believer to trust, and describes a Kingdom not about eating and drinking but rather righteousness, peace, and joy will certainly be counted as foolishness in such a worldview. But that's exactly how God would have it be. He does not want the work of His Son to look like the things of the sinful world. He wants it to stand out as it certainly does. He wants the cross to be highlighted by contrast to anything else that exists in the world. Sometimes, that leads people to call it "foolish" but at the end of the day the cross stands on its own and it always there for people to see.

How clear is the vision of Christ's cross in your life? How strong is your trust in it? Would you claim it as your worldview, or have you fallen prey to thinking that human knowledge and wisdom are the cure to societies' problems? Does true morality come from a Savior's love and devotion, as He died

alone without your help? Or must morality be driven out by progressive ideas and agendas and by finding new ways to attack the same problems that afflict our world? All of the sudden, if you're being honest, it's pretty easy to see how the Greek worldview has entered the Christian faith. It can exist there for some time, side by side with the gospel cross. But, in truth, only one can truly be trusted and relied upon for help. Some to whom Paul ministered to gave up the fight for the cross, and counted Jesus as too foolish. He continues to encourage you to trust in Christ alone.

## Part 2: Some want power but get weakness

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The other predominant philosophical worldview at Paul's time was the Jewish emphasis on power. We might at first think that the Jews focused entirely on the Old Testament Scriptures and were therefore concerned with the Messiah's cross. However, the very ministry of that Messiah, Jesus, spelled out clearly that this was not the case with most the Jews. They had been led down the wrong path in seeking not the kingdom of God by grace, but an earthly kingdom of power and autonomy from the Romans. Paul states that the medium through which this power was desired was signs – think miracles. In contrast to the Greek tendency of denying the supernatural, the Jews freely embraced it. Their history was one with many supernatural events through which God interacted with signs and miracles. But, the purpose of these signs was to confirm and establish the fulfillment of covenant through Jesus, not to set up an earthly kingdom.

For those caught in this worldview of power, Paul says they will receive weakness instead. How ironic that just like the Greeks, those Jews who denied the Savior would actually receive the very thing they were trying to avoid. Don't we see this at the actual cross of all places? The doubters cry to the Christ: Come down from the cross and we will believe! Essentially, show Your power, give us a sign and we will follow You. A dying and suffering Savior, pinned to the tree of punishment by nails, was simply too weak for them to trust. Yet, the very moment that Jesus would have come down from the cross, all would have been lost.

All unbelief is real foolishness and weakness. Imagine what must have been going through Christ's mind, as He hears the mocks and taunts, and as the crowd cries for the very thing that would spell eternal disaster for them. What more could be said than, **“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”**

The Jewish desire for power may not be as predominant in our culture as the Greek pursuit of wisdom, but it still affects us today, and especially the church. How many Christians do we hear of that claim to have received some divine message or sign from God? Instead of humbly and quietly following the simple word of God, they attract huge followings by proclaiming some sort of a sign. In a way, it's not so different from the Greeks; both methods are asking for more than God's word of grace as a reason to believe in Jesus.

This worldview of power also reels its ugly head when it comes to displaying faith. Too much is made of what must be shown to establish true faith. We hear questions like, “do you have faith or saving faith?” “Are you a Christian or a born again Christian?” It's all a matter of what you show in your life – signs. But, since when did the Holy Spirit sanctify sinners by such methods. We confess, **“I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in true faith.”**

Yet, even power and the attraction for signs can be present under the protection of faith. This is not only a problem that Jewish-minded people of the world have, we Christians struggle with it too. Have you ever pushed against God's Word because you just felt you knew better? Have you ever put more stock in your own experiences rather than God's promises? How many times have we all invested more effort, care, and energy in pursuing the things of this world and not the things of God? All of it, is vain chasing after power.

In the end, we may judge truth from different worldviews, or filters, but they all eventually come down to wisdom or power. Either the basis of truth is something intellectual or something tangible. And so, we remind ourselves again that whether we are actually Greek or Jewish is not the distinction, but whether we are wisdom-dominated or power-dominated. All nationalities are included.

Yet, here is the very change through Christ. His death on the cross marks the perfect intersection between wisdom and power. It seems the opposite to the eyes of unbelief but God Himself has ordained it to be so. This should lead us to think for our lives. If I see myself trusting in human wisdom to solve life's problems or if I see myself pursuing power and influence here on earth, have I set up an idol that gets in the way of truth? The world will tell us what it wants. God will too, and He warns us to be on the guard against what may appear right, but in reality is completely opposed to His will. This is the battle of worldviews and not all are created equal, nor do all deliver the same blessings or curses.

So, where is the opponent of the cross? The wise, the scribe, the disputer; Paul covers all – thinker, writer, and doer. The answer is that there is none. Sure, many try, but never does any opponent of Jesus measure up to a threat is even worthy to be counted. We would do well to pay attention for our lives. Perhaps we are not as wise and powerful as we so often think.

The true hope of wisdom and power is found in Christ. Vv. 18 and 24 summarize nicely, **v. 18: the message of the cross is power to those who believe. V. 24: Christ, the power of God and wisdom of God.** There it is clear as day, preached time and time again by faithful Christians. To have Christ is to have true power and wisdom. To have Christ is to have His cross. It may not seem like much on the surface. Truly, we have heard it many times before and the world certainly isn't advertising it well. But, which one of us could honestly say we don't inwardly feel the truth of our final verse: **the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.** We know this to be true because God has created us to know it. But, we trust it with full confidence of faith because the Holy Spirit has fixed our hearts and minds on Jesus. And perhaps that's really the simplicity of it all. Wisdom and Power – different worldviews – knowing and trusting.

May God continue to equip, strengthen, and encourage us in the battle of the truth – keeping our worldview on the cross of Jesus above all others. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Preached at Redemption, 3-12-17