

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Call

February 2023

Winter Quarter

February 4, 2023

Lesson #1 – Resume of Those Called

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

ICE BREAKER –

1. What is the difference between the world's wisdom and God's wisdom?
2. Why does God choose ordinary people for service in His kingdom?

Key Verse – “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: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”—1 Corinthians 1:28–29

LESSON BACKGROUND

The city of Corinth lies about 50 miles west of Athens. That's about a one-hour train ride today, but in the first century AD, the “distance” was much greater in terms of culture and history. Athens had been the Greek center for philosophy, religion, education, and government for centuries (compare Acts 17:18–21). Names of Athenian philosophers are still recognized, especially those of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Corinth, on the other hand, was an industrial, working-class city. Located strategically near the four-mile-wide Isthmus of Corinth, the city thrived because of its Diolkos, an ancient railway system that transported small boats and cargo overland between the Aegean Sea and the Gulf of Corinth. The fees for using it were high (making Corinth a wealthy city), but the railway saved merchants many days of sailing around the Peloponnesian Peninsula with its treacherous coastline and plentiful pirates. A modern canal cutting through the isthmus was not completed until 1893.

Acts 18 records Paul's first visit to Corinth, after a disappointing time in Athens. Historical clues in Acts allow us to date this time as an 18-month period in AD 51–52, not quite 20 years after Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1–31).

Paul wrote the letters we call 1 and 2 Corinthians sometime between AD 54 and 57 while in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:5–9). Paul had received reports of several issues troubling the Corinthian congregation (1:10–17).

In the section of verses preceding today's lesson, Paul identified one of those problems: factions. Members of the congregation had been rallying around specific leaders in an unhealthy way (1 Corinthians 1:12). One of the factions had named Paul as its guiding light, and he objected, unwilling to countenance church divisions (1:13–16). He reminded his readers that he had come to Corinth to preach the gospel—period (1:17). This led him to recount the motives and actions of his initial visit to Corinth, today's text.

LESSON COMMENTARY

1 Corinthians 1:18–25 - For (v. 18) develops Paul's explanation of the power of the cross (v. 17). Foolishness was sometimes used in secular Greek for what was insipid or dull, and even for the sluggishness of animals in winter. Crucifixion was viewed with universal disgust in the first century, and it was considered a faux pas to mention it in polite company. "Disgustingly stupid" gets at the sense of the word. Yet in this foolish cross is the power of God. For (v. 19) introduces a proof from Scripture to the effect that the cross is the power of God whereby He destroys the worldly wisdom of leaders. Isaiah 29:14 has eschatological and messianic overtones (cf. the use of "wondrously" in Is 29:14 in connection with the messianic prophecies of Is 9:6, "Wonderful Counselor"; 28:29) (see Roy E. Ciampa, and Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007], 697–98). The word wisdom (*sophia*) as a noun occurs 51 times in the NT, 28 times by Paul, 16 times (plus 10 uses of the cognate adjective *sophos*) in 1Co 1–4. Though this is debated, Paul seems to connect wisdom with the rhetorical skill of sophists, which they employed to win a following. Some in the Corinthian church appeared to be using similar skills to advance themselves in the church. But Paul also employs wisdom in reference to God, Jesus, and his own gospel message (e.g., 1:21, 24, 25, 30; 2:6, 7).

"Impressive ability" is the sense of *sophia*, and this translation works well both in reference to secular wisdom (rhetorical skill) and God's wisdom.

Wise man (v. 20) is further defined by two terms, one for Jewish and the other for Greek wise men. Scribe is probably the Jewish legal expert who had expertise in the more technical aspects of the law and who taught the Pharisees especially. Debater (*syzetetes*) was often used for the professional debaters and quarrelers who were common among Greco-Roman sophists. God has turned their impressive abilities into foolishness. For (v. 21) introduces a detailed description about God making foolish the world's impressive abilities. Since explains why God made worldly wisdom foolish (because the world did not acknowledge Him), and the phrase God was well-pleased ... to save those who believe presents how He made worldly wisdom foolish (through the foolishness of the gospel message). For indeed (v. 22) further expands upon the idea of how the world of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles acknowledged neither God nor His gospel. It is because Jews ask for signs. They believed that the arrival of the Messiah would be accompanied by signs and miracles and that He would do more spectacular works than even Moses did. Perhaps they were hoping for something like the constellation Ursa Major running to bite Orion on the leg, or the Big Dipper tilting the other way. They refused to recognize the signs Jesus performed, or to acknowledge the validity of the greatest sign, the resurrection. Jesus' death was a stumbling block for them (v. 23), for how could one who was crucified as a criminal be their Messiah? Greeks search for wisdom indicates why Greeks did not acknowledge God. A crucified carpenter is foolishness (v. 23), not impressive! But (v. 23), in contrast to what those in the world sought, Paul preached Christ crucified (v. 23). In His life, death, and resurrection is manifested

the power of God and the wisdom [impressive ability] of God, against all human estimations. With because (v. 25), Paul confirmed that the gospel preached was the power and wisdom of God. C. K. Barrett writes, "What God has done in Christ crucified is a direct contradiction of human ideas of wisdom and power, yet it achieved what human wisdom and power fail to achieve. It does ... deliver man from his bondage...." (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC [New York: Harper & Row, 1968], 56).

1:26–31. For (v. 26) 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 (MBC): begins an illustration of God's powerful "foolishness" and "weakness" (v. 25) which are wiser and stronger than men. The very makeup of the Corinthian church, for whom God had done great things and through whom He was doing great things, is an indication of His power through those whom the world considers weak. Verses 27–28 indicate God's design, which is to shame ("to confuse," "to disgrace") the wise and strong by choosing, using, and blessing the weak and foolish so that no man may boast before God (v. 29; cf. v. 31). God alone gets the credit (v. 31). Part of the reason Paul emphasized this was to cause the Corinthian faction leaders to quit drawing attention to themselves as secular sophists did, and recognize the supremacy of God in the world and the church. They were joined to Christ Jesus (v. 30) by His doing, not through any impressive ability of their own. Because of that connection with Jesus, believers recognize in Him God's wisdom, His "impressive ability," and receive His righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Righteousness (God's own moral excellence and virtue given to believers; see the comments on Rm 1:17; 3:21–31) comes to the believer because of being "in Christ." Many deny the concept of "imputed righteousness," and while Paul never used the exact term, he has a category for it (2Co 5:21; Php 3:9). Sanctification means "the status of being set apart and consecrated to God" with a life, it is hoped, of practical holiness that accompanies it. Redemption is "effecting the release of a slave or a prisoner of war by paying for that release." Theologically, it refers to the deliverance of sinners from sin's penalty and power by the blood of Jesus.

LESSON NUGGET – The world's wisdom has crept into the church, and it did not mix with the wisdom of God (Isaiah 8:20). Various theologies are the attempts of scholars to interpret the Word of God, but they are not the Word. Never allow them to be a cause of division.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, The Life Application Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*