

## The Preaching of the Cross | 1 Corinthians 1:17b-31

- Verse 17a –
  - **Christ sent me not to baptize** - As in v. 16, an anti-Baptism doctrine cannot be built from these words. On the other hand, a practice that over-emphasizes baptism can be questioned. Paul was a missionary who spent only 18 months in Corinth. One can question how much legitimate discipleship can be done by one man in 18 months. For a person to completely change their world-view typically takes much longer. Paul's task was not a life-long ministry in Corinth (which likely would have resulted in many more baptisms), but rather to get something started and then move on.
  - **but to preach the gospel** - **Preach the gospel** is the single Greek verb εὐαγγελίζω [euangelizo], literally *to announce the good news* or, in a transliterated sense, *to evangelize*.
    - *Note:* this is further proof that Baptism and evangelism are not one in the same.
- Verse 17b –
  - **not with wisdom of words** - The apparent emphasis is on **wisdom**, not **words**. The Gospel is one of words, but not one crafted in *word wisdom* (a literal translation). That is, Paul did not evangelize with clever speech using the tools of a skilled rhetorician, but he did use words exclusively to craft a logical presentation of the Gospel. He was not a silver-tongued orator (2 Cor. 10:10) but he was persuasive with logic (see Acts 18:4 and the use of διαλέγομαι [dialegomai]).
  - **lest the cross of Christ...** -
    - A "gospel" that doesn't have the cross of Christ as central is really no gospel at all, it is a make-believe fairy tale.
    - Personal note: in many ways the music-worship industry has made **the cross of Christ** to be **of none effect**. They have done this by making the cross an *emotional* rather than a *logical* presentation. As soon as the emotions wane (as they do so quickly), all thought of the cross is gone.
- Verse 18 –
  - **the preaching of the cross** - The word **preaching** is not in the Greek. Literally, *the word of the cross*. The KJV translators changed from a noun to a verb.
  - **to them that perish foolishness** –
    - Without a basis in the history of man in relationship to God, the word of the cross is **foolishness**. How could a dying man provide my salvation?
    - The cross standing by itself, isolated from Biblical revelation, is foolish indeed.
    - This highlights the importance of Biblical instruction to **them that perish**.
  - **us which are saved** –
    - Literally, *to those who are being saved*. The verb is a present passive participle (as is **perish** earlier in the verse).
    - In truth, nobody who is currently living has fully *perished* nor been fully *saved*. Paul makes this argument in Romans 8:19.
    - It would be irresponsible to conclude from these words that salvation *may or may not* come to a final end, for the words do not speak to that matter, they simply say that some are currently *being saved*.
  - **the power of God** - To the one *being saved*, there is no power of God in salvation outside of the cross.
- Verse 19 - Sometimes, as here, a New Testament quote sheds light on an Old Testament passage. In this case, we can better understand Isaiah 29:14 because of Paul's use here, which clarifies that the Isaiah passage is prophetic of the cross of Christ.
- Verse 20 - These rhetorical questions cause the reader to notice the point that **God made foolish the wisdom of this world**.
  - The **wise** are the *sophists*, those who are *sophisticated* (the Greek word is σοφός [sophos].)

- The **scribe** was the one so educated in the Word that he was supposed to have a tremendous religious insight.
- The **disputer of this world** was the rabbi, whose custom it was to go to the *hall of disputation* where rabbi's would gather all day long and discuss theological and civic matters.
- Now Paul says that all of this has been **made foolish**.
- Verse 21 –
  - It was the **wisdom of God** that **the world** would not know God **by wisdom**, but rather **by the foolishness of preaching**, or literally, *the foolishness of the proclamation [of the Gospel]*.
  - Note that this verse states that God saves by the proclamation of the Gospel.
    - Paul says the same in Romans 1:16 and Romans 10:17.
    - To insert a doctrine of *effectual call* is to revert to the wisdom of man rather than the clear revelation of God.
- Verse 22 - Neither a **sign** nor **wisdom** will provide salvation!
- Verse 23 –
  - **we preach Christ crucified** - Sadly, the modern Christian world is providing either signs or wisdom in order to win people to Christ, when our motto ought to be **we preach Christ crucified**. A sign will *wow* the audience, and wisdom will *enrich* or *enlighten* the audience, but only the proclamation of **Christ crucified** can present salvation to the audience.
  - **to the Jews a stumblingblock** - The crucified Christ was called **a stumblingblock** in Isaiah 8:14-15, and it was prophesied that many would stumble over Him. The Jewish nation became so enamored with the Kingdom that they failed to see the *Suffering Servant* as an equal part of the Messianic role.
  - **unto the Greeks foolishness** - For **the Greeks** (a term that has broad reference to worldview as much as nationality, and probably more than nationality) **Christ crucified** is simply *moronic*. The Greek word for **foolishness** is *μωρος* [moros].
- Verse 24 – It has often been said that the Bible speaks of three groups of people: *Jews, Gentiles, and the Church*. While one could debate the identity of **them which are called** (is it the Jewish nation or the Body of Christ, or both?), this third group is clearly in contrast to the thinking of both the **Jews** and the **Greeks** (v. 23). The third group sees **Christ crucified** as **the power** and **the wisdom of God**.
- Verse 25 - This is a strong reminder to get your theology from the pages of Scripture, not from the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of man.
- Verses 26-29 –
  - In these verses, **your calling** is used as an illustration of the manner in which God rejected the world's wisdom and used **the foolish things of the world** (the events leading up to and including the crucifixion?) in order that, in the end, **no flesh should glory in his presence** (that is, to boast before Him).
  - Sadly, (as in the note in v. 23), the modern Christian world desires the seemingly wise and powerful things of this world to grow its ranks.
- Verse 30 - Believers are made to be **in Christ Jesus** by God, and Jesus is our **wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption**. We should not seek these things through any other means other than being **in Christ Jesus**.
- Verse 31 - When we trust Christ for the four things of verse 30, we can only **glory in the Lord** and never in ourselves.