

Following a nine verse introduction, Paul begins to deal with a series of problems which had come to his attention. The first of those was the presence of disunity in the church and the factions which were its evidence. The Corinthian believers showed a lack of understanding both concerning the message of the Gospel and the messengers of the Gospel. They were subdividing the Gospel ministry and re-working the Gospel message to make it sound better in their thinking. Such "words of human wisdom" could make the message of the Gospel ineffectual (vs. 17). The big problem behind the factious spirit was a wrong way of thinking. Neither the Gospel message nor the ministers of the Gospel can be fairly evaluated by human means. In support Paul gives three facts about the Gospel message.

- I. The Gospel message will be viewed differently depending upon the state of the person hearing it (1:18).
  1. Paul introduces the phrase, the message of the cross (vs 18), which is identical with the gospel (vs 17). See 1 Co 15:3-4. He focuses on the cross instead of the resurrection, because it is the cross to which most will object. The cross represents more than the death of Christ, but His execution by a despicable means. The message of the cross addresses our sinfulness, that we are under God's wrath and judgment, and our deliverance, that Christ had to be executed in our place because we could do nothing to rescue ourselves. The message of the cross is also exclusive. Only by faith in Jesus Christ alone can we be delivered from the wrath of God.

Nothing can or should be added to make the content of the message more appealing. Only the state of the person hearing the message will change how the true message is viewed.
  2. There are only two possible states and only two possible reactions to the message of the cross. To those who are perishing the message of the cross is foolishness. To those who are being saved the message of the cross is the power of God. Cf. Romans 1:16. Only these two groups are possible. One group was saved (Rom. 8:24), has been saved (Eph. 2:5), is being saved (1 Co. 1:18) and will be saved (Rom. 5:9). The other group is now under God's wrath and are condemned (John 3:18, 36) and will perish (experience eternal loss of well-being). There is no third group and no neutral group.
- II. With the Gospel God has chosen to frustrate the so-called wisdom of man (1:19-21).
  1. Paul first establishes what he is saying with a rough quote of Isaiah 29:14 from the Septuagint.
  2. He asks three questions which span all possible categories of human wisdom and probably allude to other statements of Isaiah (19:12; 33:18) where human wisdom was frustrated. Neither the human wisdom of OT days nor of "disputers" in Paul's day led to salvation or to God's wisdom.
  3. "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" anticipates an affirmative answer which is given in the next verse. God made the world's wisdom look foolish, first by letting them try in their wisdom to come to Him yet failing miserably, and then by providing true knowledge of Him by simply believing the message of the cross. In contrast to the spectacular testimony of creation, God chose to reveal Himself in a personal way to those who by faith accept that the Man who was executed by crucifixion as a common criminal, despised and rejected by His own people, was actually God, come in flesh, who by His death provided payment for the penalty of our sin.
- III. The Gospel of God is more powerful and wiser than any human wisdom and plan (1:22-25).
  1. The Jews demanded signs and therefore find the message of the cross a stumbling block. They typically wanted Jesus to do acts of power (miracles) to prove who He was (signs). But they rejected the signs which He offered and demanded their own. Cf. John 6:26-30 and 11:45-48 with 12:9-11. The person who seeks signs is seldom satisfied by the signs which are given. The Jews wanted a powerful, glorious deliverer and saw the cross as a mark of weakness. The message of the cross was to them a stumbling block, as it will be to all those who seek signs. Those today who seek signs – demonstrations of supernatural power – in order to believe, probably will not place their faith in Christ, crucified, but, like the Jews who had been fed by Jesus, they will seek to be fed again.
  2. The Greeks sought wisdom and therefore find the message of the cross to be foolishness. The cross needed to "make sense" to the Greeks. But logic always begins with certain presuppositions which when wrong, lead to wrong conclusions. The message of the cross will be foolishness to those today who seek rational explanation when they begin with the wrong presuppositions, i.e., that man is supposedly basically good or that God will not intervene supernaturally in the affairs of men.
  3. To those whom God has called, Christ is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. Those being saved are called by God through the proclamation of the message and are called effectually by the Spirit of God. The message of the cross is Christ, crucified. It is first of all the person of Christ. It is then second what Christ did, i.e., was crucified and died for us in our place. The believer experiences Jesus Christ, as the power and wisdom of God.

We must conclude then that the message which we are to communicate if the lost around us are to be saved is Christ, and Him crucified. It is this message and none other that is the power of God unto salvation.

We must also conclude that it is God, by His Spirit, who convinces people and effectively changes their hearts, changing the perishing into those being saved. Miracles and power demonstrations do not of themselves convince people of the Gospel. Neither do fancy arguments or any form of human logic.

We are called to pray that God will work and we are called to be diligent in understanding and clearly presenting Christ, crucified.