

**United in Christ: Overcoming the Challenges of Diversity  
Studies in 1 Corinthians  
How God Accomplished Mankind's Salvation**

**Intro:** In our last lesson we discovered that the essential problem of the Corinthians was division centered in personal self-promotion and pride. The contest about who was the greater Christian was inseparably tied to the discussion of who was the greater teacher. And the criterion for greatest teacher was the cultural standard of human wisdom or rhetorical skill. All of that left the Corinthians bantering with one another with assertions of superiority like “*I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ.*”

**Paul's initial response to their divisions was simple and forthright:**

*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10)*

**He reminds them that the source of their unity was Christ. He was the one who was crucified for them; He was the one in whose name they were baptized. He was the one in whose body they were united.**

**But the Corinthians' divisions reflected a fundamental lack of understanding as to how God accomplished mankind's salvation (1:18-25), why He acted as He did (1:26-31), and why Paul had preached as he did (2:1-5). I'll let these three statements serve then as a broad outline of where Paul is going with his arguments in this section of First Corinthians.**

*For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor. 1:18-25)*

**Paul begins the discussion by reminding the Corinthians of how God accomplished mankind's salvation:**

**First, God in His wisdom nullified human wisdom by showing the inadequacy of human wisdom to bring about the knowledge of God.**

*Paul begins by taking us back to an OT text that shows how God worked in Israel's history. Even His people had turned their hearts away from Him, and the leaders of Israel had claimed that they through their human wisdom*

*could avoid the judgment God would accomplish through Israel's enemies. Thus the prophet said to them:*

*Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed." (Is. 29:14)*

***So now Paul applies the principle of Isaiah's prophecy to God's work of salvation and judgment in the present age. Those who were "wise" in this age have not been able to use that wisdom to know God (or to be saved by Him.)***

*Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:20-21)*

***The point here is that human wisdom was/is inadequate to bring about the knowledge of God or a right relationship with Him.***

**Second, God in His wisdom nullified human wisdom by refusing to accommodate human conceptions of a savior.**

*For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; (1 Cor. 1:22) If one had asked a Jewish wise man, "How will God save the world?" His answer might have been, "He'll do so by the exertion of great power! And what will be the proof of this power? "Signs!" Perhaps he would remind the questioner of Moses and his great miracles before the deliverance of Israel. If one had asked a Greek wise man, "How will God save the world?" His answer might have been, "He'll do so by the use of great wisdom!" And what would be the proof of this wisdom? "A sophisticated message that compels men to believe". Perhaps they would have envisioned a presentation of ultimate rhetorical skill that would win the approval of all like the wisdom of the Greek philosophers. Yet Paul affirms that God gave them neither signs nor wisdom. He refused to accommodate human wisdom's conceptions of what a savior ought to be.*

**Third, God in His wisdom nullified human wisdom by offering to lost man the message of a crucified Savior!**

***Defying all human expectations, God acted to save the world in the way contrary to all human expectation and thought.***

The message of a crucified Savior was scandalous to the Jew.

The cross was in Jewish teaching the mark of criminal under the curse of God. It revealed the condemned one's complete weakness. Surely such a person could not be the Savior.

Thus, to the Jews the crucified Messiah was a "stumbling block."

The message of a crucified Savior was "foolish" to the Greek.

The cross was in the Greeks thoughts likewise repulsive. To the Greek the whole idea of a savior who was crucified was “foolishness.”

But the net result for both was the same; they were “perishing.” In spite of all their wisdom, they were lost, both Jews and Greeks!

***Yet the preaching of the cross would bring salvation to those who trusted in this “foolish” message.***

To those who believed it would be both wisdom and power from God. It would bring salvation to both Jew and Greek.

### **The meaning and application of Paul’s message**

#### ***How does this paragraph speak to the Corinthian problem?***

The Corinthians had used human wisdom, especially the power of rhetoric, to exalt one teacher over another and consequently themselves over one another. Such an act would be totally incompatible with the work of God who deliberately refused to make use of human wisdom to bring about man’s salvation.

Paul’s logic when understood is powerful and convicting. The Corinthians have used a tool for establishing their superiority as disciples that God did not use in making them disciples!

#### ***How does this paragraph speak to the modern disciple?***

Perhaps there is a more appealing message in our age that would reach more people. Perhaps one that is more flattering to humans? One that does not point out sin in the lost? One that requires less of people to be a true believer?

Should we downplay the cross and place more emphasis upon the philosophy of Christianity? Would that not appeal more to man’s modern intellectual conceptions?

Should we speak less about redemption and more about self-reformation?

Should we put more stress upon what God has done or upon what we must do in order to be saved?

**Conclusion: Surely we can see that, though the world of Corinth was outwardly quite different from our own, 1 Corinthians has a message for our own time as well. It is a reminder of where we were without God and what He did to save us. That message is as needed now as ever!**