

Paul wastes little time addressing the problems within the Corinthian church, beginning with the source of divisions within the church. Their pride over which leader they were following was causing strife within the church and Paul was concerned about how easily they were led astray from the simple truths of the gospel by the “wisdom” of the world. Paul wanted their trust to be in the cross instead of worldly wisdom.

**Verses 1-9:** Paul greets the church at Corinth, referring to them as saints despite the fact that they may have been the most carnal church that he dealt with. He thanks God that they have been “enriched” by Jesus Christ so that they are not lacking in any spiritual gift and because God has called them into fellowship with His Son so that they can be presented blameless in His presence.

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10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

The church at Corinth had many problems and Paul quickly begins addressing the first one. Certain members were disagreeing with others on matters of doctrine and it was causing various divisions within the congregation. Paul appeals to them by the name of Jesus Christ that they stop allowing differences of opinion from creating these divisions and that they abandon their opinions in favor of the truth, something they could all agree upon. Paul will begin correcting their mistaken opinions with gospel truth in a few verses.

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11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

We don't know if Chloe was a man or a woman but apparently this person, who was well known in the church, had written to Paul and informed him of the “contentions” (strife; fighting) that was in the church. It was this information that prompted Paul to address the divisions in this letter to the Corinthians.

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12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

**“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ”** – One of the sources of division in the Corinthian church was that they were identifying themselves with a leader in the early church that they admired and were considering themselves superior to those who followed someone else. Some followed Paul, while other followed Apollos, an eloquent preacher who had recently came to Corinth (Acts 18:24-28, 19:1). Some followed Cephas, (another name for Peter: John 1:42). Finally, some, likely more correctly, declared that they followed Christ instead of men. Much like the rivalry that many have rooted in the sports team they root for or the brand of vehicle they drive, each of the Corinthians considered the man they followed to be spiritually superior to the others, which made them superior as well.

**“Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”** – Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions to illustrate the folly of what the Corinthians were doing. Christ was a point of unity and not division. Paul then points out his own spiritual insignificance, since he was neither crucified for them nor were they baptized in his name.

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14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; 15 Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. 16 And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

Apparently Paul did very little baptizing himself; he must have allowed others to handle the task of baptizing new believers. Paul could only remember baptizing a handful of people and was grateful to God for that fact because he did not want anyone to be able to accuse him of trying to exalt himself or gain followers by baptizing people in his own name.

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17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

**“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel”** – Paul states that the job that Christ had sent him to do was to preach the gospel in order to win people to Christ, not to baptize believers. As an apostle, Paul's job was to seek the salvation of the lost, which was accomplish through the preaching of the gospel (v. 21). There are those that teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, but the fact that Paul says that this was not his job as an apostle is evidence that faith in Christ is all that is required. Performing works in order to gain salvation is contrary to grace (**Rom. 11:6** “*And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*”).

**“not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect”** – The Greeks were easily impressed by philosophy and intellectual arguments, having such philosophers as Socrates and Plato among their number. Paul knew that the Corinthians would think that intellectual sounding arguments carried more weight than the simple truth of the gospel, and he later describes that as one of his fears (1 Cor. 2:1-5). If their faith was in the wrong thing then the cross would do them no good, so he states that he wanted their trust to be in the cross of Jesus Christ and not in cleverly worded arguments.

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18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

**“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness”** – To contrast those who trust in wisdom vs. those who trust in the cross, Paul states that these who do not trust in the cross will perish because they consider the preaching of the cross to be foolishness. The unsaved world looks at Jesus' death on the cross as being pointless and ineffective to benefit us today.

**“but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”** – On the other hand, for those of us who have been saved because we trust in the sacrificial and substitutionary death of Christ on our behalf, we see that it was a demonstration of the power of God and that it is the means of our salvation (**Rom. 1:16** “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*”). It is the power of God that enables people with a sinful nature to believe the gospel and be transformed into people who love God and desire to please Him.

19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

**“For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent”** – Paul quotes from Isa. 29:14, where the LORD states that salvation is His work and not something attainable through human effort or understanding (“*Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid*”).

**“Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer [someone skilled in arguing philosophy] of this world?”** – The “wise” refers to the “wise men” that advised kings and were educated in different disciplines. The scribes were those employed to create new copies of the OT scriptures by copying existing scrolls by hand. Scribes became very familiar and knowledgeable with the scripture through the repeated handwriting of its contents. The “disputer” was someone who was skilled in making philosophical arguments. Paul’s question is: If God has “destroyed the wisdom of the wise” (v. 19), then where does that leave these people who depend on their own human wisdom and education? **“hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”** – Has not God made the world’s wisdom pointless and foolish since it cannot bring them salvation? People depending on the world’s wisdom will die spiritually bankrupt since they will go into eternity without salvation.

21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

**“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God”** – God’s wisdom guided Him to design salvation to be something that cannot be achieved by man’s intellect or wisdom. It is not a person’s IQ that can save him/her nor can people figure out how to save themselves. It is impossible for people to save themselves through human effort or wisdom.

**“it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”** – After designing salvation to be beyond what human wisdom or intellect can attain, He chose to use what the world calls foolishness (the preaching of the cross) to be the means of salvation. It takes simple faith in the gospel to be saved, rather than intellectual effort.

**“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom”** – Paul divides the unbelieving world into two types: Jews and Greeks (Gentiles). The unbelieving Jews were constantly asking Jesus for a sign to prove the authority of His teaching (Matt. 11:38, 16:1; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16; John 2:18, 4:48, 6:30) because they had the attitude that they would not believe unless it was proved to them. This is the opposite of true faith (Hebrews 11:3a says “Through faith we understand...” and not “through understanding we have faith...”). Similarly, the Gentiles seek for “wisdom” or that which makes sense according to human understanding. This approach also bypasses faith, which can only come as a gift through the Spirit of God (**1 Cor. 2:14** “*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*”).

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which 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.

**“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock [snare; impediment], and unto the Greeks foolishness”** – The idea that their Messiah was crucified is a impediment to the unbelieving Jews (who are waiting for a sign) and a foolish one to the unbelieving Greeks.

**“But unto them which are called [invited], both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God”** – Those who are called (invited by God) have been given the gift of faith and so the fact that Christ was crucified becomes the power and wisdom of God that enables them to be saved.

**“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men”** – Even on His worst day (something He doesn’t have), God is so much more wiser and stronger than mankind on their best day. God’s plan of salvation (considered foolishness by the world) is infinitely superior to anything man could conceive.

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

God does not need our intelligence, or strength, or any other abilities that the world might find valuable. Paul did not say that “not any” of the wise, mighty or noble are called. Rather, he said that “not many” are called because most people with such characteristics trust in these things rather than understanding that these things have no value to God. The word “calling” refers to an invitation, and those that God invites to come to Him are chosen for His own reasons.

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And 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:

God does not need to take advantage of our human skills and strengths and He does not need to pick from the “best” of humanity those who will be saved. Rather, God loves to prove that He can do much with little by choosing to use those whom the world discards as being of little value. This brings glory to God and deprives mankind of any opportunity to boast.

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

No one will be able to stand in God’s presence and take credit for their salvation. Salvation is all of God, from start to finish.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

If we are in Christ, it is because God enabled us to be so. It is through God that Jesus has become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, so that we cannot take credit for our salvation. God should get the glory for our salvation, as said in Paul’s quotation of Jer. 9:24.