LESSON 10
February 5, 2023

Unit III. God's Call and Its Responsibilities

Wisdom and Foolishness

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 25:1-15
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

KEY VERSES

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, KJV)

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God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:28-29, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- **Contrast God's wisdom with the foolishness of people.**
- **Affirm the wisdom in following Jesus Christ.**
- **Perform actions accordingly as you are strengthened by Jesus.**

*Key Terms

Foolishness (verse 18)—Greek: *mória* (mo-ree'-ah): folly; absurdity.

Weak (verse 27)—Greek: *asthenés* (as-then-ace'): without strength; feeble; sick; helpless.

Wise (verse 19)—Greek: *sophos* (sof-os'): learned; skilled; clever; cultivated.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Many people can recall childhood playground competitions that involved team captains selecting members for their respective teams. To increase the odds of winning, each team leader would try to select the very best players available. In a similar way, God chooses people all the time, but with one huge exception: God doesn't require the best, the brightest, or the most highly skilled. Because of His own self-sufficiency, God often chooses the least likely candidates to accomplish His purposes. Why? Because, by the enablement of His Spirit, God can qualify the unqualified. That is why He said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in [human] weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV). God does not rely on human eloquence, intelligence, or giftedness—nly on His own wisdom and power. His chief work is the saving of souls, which He accomplishes by the simple preaching of the Gospel by His own chosen vessels.

The Biblical Context

Paul writes that the cause for the division within the church is a general misunderstanding of the heart of the Gospel, the message of the Cross (see 1 Corinthians 1:18–3:4). What does it take to deliver the Gospel effectively? Impressive titles and degrees? A great voice? A winning personality? Superior intelligence? No. The message of the Gospel does not require any of these. God's approach is not like the world's way of thinking. Unlike the world, God never seeks to impress. Souls are not won to the kingdom because of the impressive qualities of the messenger or the hearer. The Gospel message is not reserved for intellectuals. Many Jews and Greeks rejected the idea of a crucified Savior. They preferred one who appeared powerful, influential, and wealthy—a messiah who would be a conqueror of enemy forces and nations rather than a commoner to be humiliated and crucified. Setting aside such human expectations, Jesus came for the purpose of giving His life to pay the penalty for human sin. It is the wisdom of God to use that sacrifice to justify sinners. Without faith in Jesus, the human mind can neither fathom God, nor approach Him, nor receive eternal salvation.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

By Foolishness

(1 Corinthians 1:18-21)

KJV

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.
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?
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.

NIV

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."
20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Paul explains that the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—specifically the Cross and the Crucifixion—is the power of God. Paul confessed that God did not send him to baptize people for the sake of making converts, but to preach the Gospel with simplicity, without diminishing the power of the Cross of Christ that leads to eternal salvation (see verse 17). Aware of Jewish expectations about the Messiah, Paul wrote that the preaching of the Gospel is the powerful revelation of God's power to save, despite appearing as foolishness to those who choose to perish in their sin (**verse 18**). Supporting his claim, Paul quoted Isaiah 29:14, in which God vows to astound those who have no true love or devotion for Him and seek to know Him based on empty religion, wisdom, and intelligence (**verse 19**). The greatest minds on Earth cannot comprehend or explain what God has done (**verses 20-21**). Paul explains the different effects of the preaching of the Gospel. Some anticipated a highly intellectual rendering of God's plan. Others expected a royal messiah or military conqueror. Yet, God sent a Messiah who gave His life and rose from the dead—foolishness to those who miss the spiritual meaning of the sacrifice. The impact or effect for those who believe is salvation through Christ to God; and for those who count it as foolishness, it is sin leading to a final condemnation from God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Think about your own conversion story. What moved you to finally accept the Gospel? What did it take to win you to the kingdom?

By Faith *(1 Corinthians 1:22-25)*

KJV

22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:
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.

NIV

22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,
23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Many Greeks and Jews who had their own ideas and notions about the Christ and how He would come were inclined to reject Him (see **verse 22**). Some looked for specific signs and wonders. Others looked for a military conqueror who would bring about the restoration of David's throne. Still, others preferred convincing intellectual arguments. Most rejected the idea of an executed "criminal" and the claim of a bodily resurrection. For them, it was a leap of faith they were unwilling to take. In their zeal to know God on their own terms, they completely failed to grasp Him at all. Knowing God begins with accepting that no one can comprehend the mind and processes of God (see Isaiah 55:8-9). Paul preached the message of a crucified Christ—a message that found its mark only in the hearts of those who were ready to receive the fullness of God's grace by faith (**verse 23**). For the caller of God, believing Jews and Gentiles alike (verse 1), that which is a stumbling block for some becomes a stepping-stone to God (**verse 24a**). In Christ, everyone who believes receives access to the power and wisdom of God (**verse 24b**). Paul plainly stated that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisest of men, and God's weakness is stronger than the mightiest of men (**verse 25**). Those who believe to the point of confession and repentance are led by the Spirit from sin into a life of salvation. By His wisdom and might, God guides and empowers them to overcome future obstacles and challenges.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Share a faithful experience that God empowered you to overcome. What earthly wisdoms had failed?

By Frailty *(1 Corinthians 1:26-31)*

KJV

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

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:
29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.
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.

NIV

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.
27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,
29 so that no one may boast before him.
30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.
31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Paul called Corinthian believers to reflect on their own salvation experience. He noted that by most standards, most would not be counted as wise, socially influential, or of privileged upbringing (**verse 26**). Paul's primary point here is that the strength of one's human aptitude and background does not make that person more acceptable to God. No skill or ability can substitute or replace Jesus' work on Calvary. If that were the case, then common and ordinary people would have no hope of knowing God (**verse 27**). According to the Scriptures (Old and New Testaments), God has chosen people from every pathway of life—the strong and the weak, the intellectual and the simple, the wealthy and the poor. Because He possesses all things and has all power, God abides with those who are low in status by society's standards, as well as those who are flattened or at the bottom, despised or hated, and overlooked (**verse 28a**). Ironically, it is the despised and the rejected whom God often chooses for displaying His power of salvation. Why? Because they reflect His power by amazing and putting to shame conventional thought and wisdom. Although viewed as frail, they are mighty in the Lord. It is a blessing that God offers salvation not based on top achievements, but totally from Himself, through Jesus' death (**verses 28b-29**). Therefore, believers glory in God (**verse 31**) and not of themselves—for God gathered each one to Himself through Christ by His wisdom, making them righteous, holy, and redeemed (**verse 30**).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Reflect on the limitations of your own ability and the fact that, regardless of what you have done and what you do not have, God still saved you for His glory. Who are the most likely candidates to relate to your personal testimony of salvation?

A Closing Thought

God's grace is so amazing that it continues to puzzle those who think they are qualified to analyze and comprehend God. For generations, people have tried in vain to create their own plans and pathways to