

## 8. GOD MADE FOOLISH THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD: 1 Corinthians 1:20-21

by Brett Baggett on Sunday, August 22nd, 2021

**BIG IDEA:** God does not save through the wisdom of the world; He only saves His people by faith through the preaching of the gospel!

### I. GOD HAS MADE FOOLISH *THE WORDLY WISE* BECAUSE SALVATION DOES NOT COME THROUGH THEIR WISDOM (vv. 20-21a)

**1 Corinthians 1:20-21a** “20 *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?* Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. . .”

- **WISE:** Calvin: “Now, by *the wise of this world*, he means those who do not derive their wisdom from illumination by the Spirit through means of the word of God...”
- **Proverbs 2:6** “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;”
- **EXAMPLE:** Jordan Peterson. Clinical psychologist from Canada who has many wise things to say, but he currently does not have the wisdom that comes from God, revealed perfectly in Scripture, therefore Peterson cannot tell you how to have your sins forgiven.
- How sad would it be to have a clean room but spend eternity in hell! How horrible to take responsibility for everything except how to be forgiven and counted righteous before God!
- God has made foolish the worldly wise because salvation does not come through their wisdom!

**TRANSITION:** There is Paul’s argument in general. Now, in the next two men he mentions, he specifically goes after the *Jews* and the *Greeks*.

### II. GOD HAS MADE FOOLISH *THE SCRIBE* BECAUSE SALVATION DOES NOT COME THROUGH THE LAW (vv. 20-21a)

**1 Corinthians 1:20-21a** “20 *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?* Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. . .”

- **SCRIBE:** The Scribes were those among the Jews who were experts in the Law of God—they could tell you every single Law of God in the Old Testament, and they wrongly believed that you could make yourself righteous before God by diligently keeping His Laws. They were the wisest of the Jews!
- **And this is what Jesus said of them...**
- **Matthew 23:27** “Woe to you, *scribes* and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.”
- **The Law cannot save you!** “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” (**Galatians 3:10**)
- **First of all, the Law of God is a mirror to expose your sin.** If you try to break up the Law and use it to scrub away your sin, you are as foolish as someone who would take a broken piece of glass to scrape the dirt off their skin.
- **CHILDREN:** Can you imagine how silly it would be to take pieces of broken glass with you into the bathtub when you need to wash off a bunch of mud? That would be foolish! Don’t do that. You would only hurt yourself. **This is how silly people are who try to earn God’s love!**
- You cannot make God forgive you; You cannot make God love you by being very obedient; You must trust in Jesus and what He has done on the cross; then you can know God forgives you and loves you!
- **EDMUND CALAMY:** “By the law we see our misery — and by the gospel we see our remedy.”

**Therefore:**

**I) See that God has made foolish those who think that through their works they can earn God’s love!**

**II) See that those who try and obey well enough to put God in their debt, all they are doing is placing themselves under a curse!**

- **Q.** How about you? Do you depend on your obedience, your works, or that you are trying your best, and therefore God should accept you? **A.** It will not work! Turn from your sin and your self-righteousness and embrace Jesus Christ through faith!
- God has made foolish the scribe because salvation from sin does not come through the law!

**TRANSITION:** But God has not only shown the wisest among the Jews have been made foolish; God also says, through Paul, that the wisest among the Greeks have been made foolish!

### III. GOD HAS MADE FOOLISH *THE DEBATER* BECAUSE SALVATION DOES NOT COME THROUGH THEIR PHILOSOPHY (vv. 20-21a)

**1 Corinthians 1:20c** “Where is *the debater* of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21a For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom...”

- **DEBATER:** It seems Paul is talking about the Sophists or others like them: “[A Sophist was] a paid teacher of philosophy and rhetoric in ancient Greece, associated in popular thought with moral skepticism and [superficially plausible] reasoning.” (**Oxford**)
- **Acts 17:21,32** “21 Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. . . [then Paul preached the gospel to them]. . . “32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.”
- **Calvin:** “Thus in a general way he brings to nothing man’s entire intellect, so as to give it no standing in the kingdom of God.”

**Q.** What does this mean for us?

### I) Through the wisdom that the world offers, your biggest problems will be dealt with.

- Gather all the wise medicines of every learned man who has ever lived, and it will not be able to heal you from the plague of sin.
- CHILDREN: The world cannot give you what you need to make you happy; only Jesus can give that!

### II) See how foolish you are if you look for rescue or peace or happiness in philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, economists, scientists, or civil authorities;

- Salvation from sin does not come through any of these men! God has made foolish the wise, the scribe, & the debater of this age.
- JOHN TRAPP: "Not the Jews by their deep doctors, nor the Gentiles by their wits and wizards, could grope out God (Acts 17:27)."

### III) Do not trust in wisdom from those who do not submit to Christ and His Word, however clever it may seem!

- You can search diligently for all the wisdom this world has to offer; sit at the feet of Plato, follow the teachings of Aristotle, diligently ponder Socrates, or heed every piece of life advice from Jordan Peterson, but you will never find out how to be rescued from sin nor will you be happy in Christ.

TRANSITION: Now that we see what cannot save us, and therefore what God has "made foolish," Paul tells us how God DOES save from sin!

## VI. IT PLEASSED GOD TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL (v. 21)

1 Corinthians 1:21 "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."

- EXPLANATION: In these two verses, Paul is not only summoning the wise, scribe, and debater to show us that we cannot be saved through them; Paul is proclaiming victory! Like a soldier in the winning King's army, it is as if Paul is crying out, "Where are the ones who claim to save? They can do nothing! My King saves in such a way so that He alone is glorified."

### Q. Why does he say preaching is FOLLY?

- A. He means that those who do not believe, who rather trust in worldly wisdom, scribes, or debaters; they see the preaching of the gospel as folly!
- NOAH: Noah for one hundred and twenty years built the ark and was a "herald of righteousness." Did he not warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come? Was he not surely counted as a fool for his building and preaching? Yet, who was saved?
  - CHRISTIANS IN AD 66: The Christians who fled Jerusalem in AD 66, when Rome surrounded the city; they warned others that Christ had promised destruction was coming & to flee from the wrath to come. They must have sounded like fools! But who was saved?

Here is what Paul is saying:

- The preaching of Christ crucified is that great spiritual defibrillator that God uses to make dead sinners come to life and cling to Christ by faith!

Q. Can you imagine how silly a defibrillator would look to someone who does not know that it can save a life? So with preaching!

- WILLIAM BRIDGE (1600-1670): "In Christ crucified, you may see a full answer . . . to all your needs, to all your fears, to all your doubts."
- It pleased God to save His people through the preaching of the gospel!
- CHILDREN: Learn how to listen to your parents teach you the Bible; learn how to listen to pastors preach the Bible; this is how God will save you and make you most happy!

Therefore, by way of application:

### I) See that all you need to do in order to be saved from your sin is believe!

- God does not save through baptism; He does not save through your obedience or morals or wisdom; He does not save through a pastor praying a prayer with you; He does not save through speaking in tongues; He does not save through anything other than faith in His Son Jesus Christ.
- WATSON: "To every believer, the debt-book is crossed out; the black lines of sin are crossed out in the red lines of Christ's blood."
- Q. Do you believe in Jesus alone—trusting in His perfect life, His death for sin, and His resurrection to conquer death?

II) See how humble we should be who have been saved! God did not save us because we were wise, nor because we were excellent scribes or debaters; He saved us by bringing us to faith through the preaching of Christ Jesus crucified for sin and raised for salvation!

- Q. Are you humble? Do you see that you were not saved because you were wise or because someone else was? But it was by the sheer mercy of God?

III) See that you who will faithfully preach the gospel will be regarded as fools, just like Paul; just like the Christians in AD 66, and just like Noah! Yet, again, I ask, who was rescued and preserved?

- Q. Are you ready to be regarded as a fool for Christ's sake? If not, you will not be of much use in glorifying God.

### IV) See how you can do others the most good: preach the gospel to them!

- Q. Husbands and Fathers, do you want to do your wife and children the most good? Q. Mother's, do you want to do your children the most good? Q. All of you, do you want to do your friends and neighbors the most good? Tell them the gospel and exhort them to repent and believe in Jesus.

### V) See that you must never despise preaching!

See that preaching is the great means that God uses to save us and sanctify us; to reconcile us to Himself and make us more holy, Thomas Watson in one of his sermons gives us these encouragements for how to hear the word of God preached:

- I) give great attention to the Word preached,
- II) come with a holy appetite to the Word,
- III) come to it with tenderness upon your heart,
- IV) receive it with meekness,
- V) mingle the Word preached with faith,
- VI) be not only attentive in hearing — but retentive after hearing,
- VII) reduce your hearing to practice,
- VIII) beg of God that he will accompany his Word with his presence and blessing,
- IX) make it familiar to you (talk to others about the preaching you hear).

- **WILLIAM PRICE (1597-1646):** “We drown our sins in the Red Sea of Christ's blood.”
- **RICHARD RAWLIN:** “Christ's love is written in characters of blood, and his grace is stamped on every line and blessing of the gospel.”
- **WILLIAM BRIDGE (1600-1670):** “In Christ crucified, you may see a full answer . . . to all your needs, to all your fears, to all your doubts.”