

What the Cross Reveals

(1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

The mention of *the cross* in verse 17 introduces this passage. The universal symbol of Christianity is a cross. There is a cross above our baptistry and one on the spire of our church building. People wear crosses as jewelry on rings and necklaces. Today, it is a pleasant symbol. However, in Paul's day, a cross was a horrible symbol with which no one would want to be associated. A cross was the instrument of capital punishment. What would people think if we had an electric chair mounted on our steeple? Or, a gold-plated electric chair on a necklace or ring? To Paul's original readers, a cross carried the same meaning an electric chair does for us today. In this passage, we will discover *the cross* reveals **three** things about God, beginning with ...

God's Power (1:18)

Paul begins this section: *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness (1:18a). To them that perish—unbelievers, who only have human wisdom—the preaching of the cross is foolishness.* Concerning salvation, the thinking of unbelievers is described in Proverbs 14:12. What is it?

However, *unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1:18b)*. All believers are in the process of being *saved* because our salvation won't be complete until the redemption of our bodies when Christ returns. How is this described in Philippians 3:21a?

This is called *the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23)*. Jesus died on the cross to redeem our spirits and bodies. Therefore, the cross reveals **God's power**. The cross also reveals ...

God's Wisdom (1:19-21)

Next, Paul paraphrases Isaiah 29:14: *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent (1:19)*. Isaiah wrote these words when the Assyrians were about to attack Judah. King Hezekiah's counselors advised an alliance with Egypt. Instead of turning to God for help, Judah relied on human wisdom and power by first seeking help from Egypt. However, it was only God's miraculous intervention that was able to save them (2 Kgs. 18:17-19:37).

Paul continues describing how God makes worldly wisdom foolish: *Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? (1:20a-c)*. The *wise* refers to Greek intellectuals. The *scribe* probably refers to the Jewish scholars. The *disputer* refers to Greek debaters and philosophers.

The point is all the brilliant minds of the world cannot fully understand the plan of God through the cross. Why, according to God in Isaiah 55:9?

In His infinite wisdom, God chooses to save people through the preaching of the cross, which to unbelievers is *foolishness* (1:18a). Human wisdom would never lead anyone to think God would send His sinless Son to die a horrible death on the cross to save us. However, God's wisdom makes human wisdom look ridiculous. Paul puts it like this in his rhetorical question: *hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* (1:20d).

Paul continues: *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God* (1:21a). The world's minds are totally incapable of knowing God through human wisdom. Therefore, what does Paul write in 1:21b?

In His sovereignty, God knew people would never come to Him through human wisdom. Instead, He chose the cross. Not only that, He also chose "country boys" from Galilee, who were considered *unlearned and ignorant men* (Acts 4:13), to proclaim the cross of Christ. God wants to make it perfectly clear that human wisdom does not enable people to know God.

The cross reveals **God's power**, **God's wisdom**, and ...

God's Way (1:22-25)

The cross reveals **God's way** to win the lost. There are many differing opinions in our culture as to what the church should do to win the lost. Scores of seminars are held every year on the subject. However, people's desires haven't changed. Paul writes: *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom* (1:22). During Jesus' ministry, the *Jews* repeatedly demanded miraculous *signs* (Mt 12:38; Jn 2:18, 6:30).

Like the *Jews*, many people today still want to see *signs*, or miracles. However, Jesus calls such people an *evil and adulterous generation* (Mt 12:39a). Then, what does our Lord say (12:39b-c)?

The word *Greeks* (1:22b) refers to cultured people (in contrast to barbarians), who are interested in *wisdom*, or philosophy, and sophistication. A crucified Savior doesn't fit that bill.

There have always been people, like the *Greeks*, who look for *wisdom*. They want everything to jive with human wisdom or knowledge. Some are drawn to those who preach positive thinking or to liberal churches who teach the Bible is morally, scientifically, and theologically out-of-date. They falsely teach Jesus is **not** the only way, and declare a blood sacrifice for forgiveness of sin is too morbid and old-fashioned for modern, educated minds.

When Jesus tells His disciples about His approaching death on the cross, Peter takes Him aside and says, *this shall not be unto thee* (Mt. 16:22). Then, what does our Lord say to him (16:23b)?

Next, our Lord says, *thou art an offence unto me: for you savor not the things that be of God, but those that be of men* (Mt 16:23c-d). Peter was playing the role of Satan by trying to circumvent God's plan of salvation through the cross. According to 1 Corinthians 1:23a, what must a church do if they want to win the world **God's way**?

The cross is *unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness* (1:23b). The word translated *stumblingblock* (SKANDALON, skan'-dal-on) is the word from which we get the word "scandal." The Greek word refers to anything that causes a hindrance, or offends. Preaching about a crucified Messiah, or Savior, offended the *Jews* and was *foolishness* to the *Greeks*.

However, preaching the cross to those who *are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God* (1:24). Those who *are called* are those whom God draws to Himself by His Holy Spirit (Jn 6:44a).

Salvation begins and ends with God. If there is the slightest tugging of your heart to become a Christian, to be baptized, or to recommit yourself to Christ, that is the Holy Spirit drawing you to God.

How does Paul sum up this passage in verse 25?

This means if there were any *foolishness* in God, it would be *wiser* than all collective human *wisdom*. If there were any *weakness* in God, it would be *stronger* than all collective human strength.

Like Judah in the Old Testament, maybe there is an "Assyrian" at your door. It might be a relationship problem, overwhelming personal debt, a bad habit, a horrible sin, or something else. Don't be like King Hezekiah who depended on human wisdom and strength. The solution to overwhelming problems begins at the cross because you can only experience God's power and wisdom through the cross. Then, you can handle your "Assyrians"—your problems—God's way. How does Ephesians 3:20 express the power and wisdom available to do things God's way?

The cross of Christ reveals **God's power, God's wisdom, and God's way.**