

February 5, 2023

“Resume of Those Called”
Lesson 1

I Corinthians 1:18-31

Intro

Paul wrote two letters to the Corinthian church. In the first epistle, he begins by telling them that he has heard of factions in the church around different spiritual leaders. One faction claims Paul as their spiritual leader. Paul writes to this group, and to all the groups, that he objects to the idea of factions in the church of any kind, and specifically in following one leader over another. Paul reminds this in today's study passage that he came to Corinth originally to preach the gospel—period. He tells them of the motives and actions behind his original visit, which are qualities each believer is called to adopt into his or her own life in following Jesus.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

1. vs. 18: Paul begins this section by comparing how two groups view the message of the cross
That message is the historical reality of Jesus' death and resurrection
One group thinks that message is “foolishness”
Paul says that group is “perishing”
They are dying because they have no hope, no way for their sins to be forgiven
The second group thinks the message is “the power of God”
This group recognizes that God has the power to forgive sins
God used the worst punishment as a means to bring salvation
This contrast is the center point in what Paul says in the rest of the passage
2. vs. 19: God says He will “destroy the wisdom of the wise”
This is referring to human-based wisdom as the foundation for beliefs and actions
Those who believe that human reasoning is the highest thinking will be the perishing
There is a huge contrast between man's thinking and God's thinking
3. vs. 20: This verse has Paul pointing out the groups who are supposedly wise, but deny the cross
He points these groups out in rhetorical questions—“Where is the...?”
--the wise person
These are people who follow the Greek philosophical tradition
--the teacher of the law
These are Jewish scholars who know the law but rejected Jesus as Messiah
--the philosopher of this age
These are people who love to debate everything, and to prove they are right
All three of these groups are to be found among the perishing

Paul finishes with a question which has an implied or understood answer
“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”
Several OT Bible books have this same theme in them
This idea is the conclusion of Job

This is the conclusion of Ecclesiastes
--wisdom is meaningless without God
This is the basis of several sections in Daniel
--true wisdom must come from God

4. vs. 21: Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of God
There is a huge difference between these two “wisdoms”
The world’s wisdom does not lead to a knowledge of God, but away from Him
It glorifies human thinking over Godly thinking
God sees this human failing and says “Alright then. You can have your “wisdom”. I’m going to use the “foolish things” (as you see them) to bring salvation to those who will hear it.”
To the world, the cross and the salvation it brings are foolish things
There is no God, in their eyes and “wisdom”
If there’s no God, then He couldn’t have provided a means of salvation
Besides, why do I even need to be saved? I’m a good person
These are the elements of the world’s “wisdom”

5. vs. 22: Paul specifically notes two groups and their incorrect views
“Jews demand signs”
The Gospels show the many times Jesus was asked to do miracles for them
They “wouldn’t believe” unless they saw another sign, and another, etc
Jesus did many miracles which were well known
He healed people on the Sabbath in the synagogue!
There wasn’t a lack of signs to prevent belief
“Greeks look for wisdom”
The wisdom that wanted was a human-centered thought model
It didn’t allow for God to be considered
Therefore, they were unable to find a way to faith, since they rejected God

6. vs. 23: Paul starts by saying “but”—a contrast to what the Greeks and Jews were doing/thinking
Paul and other believers “preach Christ crucified”
This is the gospel message
Paul says this message is a “stumbling block” to the Jews
They can’t accept this gospel for many reasons
Jesus was a peasant-teacher, not an educated rabbi
Jesus was from an insignificant backwater town, not from Jerusalem
Jesus died on a cross in the manner of the lowest type of criminal
Jesus wasn’t a powerful military leader who opposed / overthrew Rome
The word for “stumbling block” here is the word we get “scandal” from
The cross was “scandalous”, a stumbling block, for most Jews
They couldn’t accept that the Messiah would be this type of person
The Gentiles (Greeks) see the cross as “foolishness”
They dismiss it as something too ridiculous to believe or accept
Think of your reaction to someone saying “Pirates attacked my house”
You would just dismiss it as something ridiculous
This message was a waste of time to the Greeks, who sought human wisdom
What happened in Jerusalem 20 years ago was not something important to them

7. vs. 24: However, Paul notes that not all Greeks and Romans thought these ways about the cross
Paul says that there are some from both groups who have accepted the message
It is “the power of God and the wisdom of God”
Paul uses the word “called”—“but to those whom God has called”
The calling Paul talks about here is the call to receive salvation, given to all people
The Holy Spirit confronts the world about sin (John 15:26, John 16:8)
This call can be resisted, as it unfortunately often has been
But some from every group will hear and respond to that call
That is true in our world today; we don’t know who will hear and respond
All must be told so that those who choose can inherit salvation

8. vs. 25: Paul now makes a comparison between God’s wisdom and strength, and man’s
Whatever the foolishness of God is, it’s wiser than man’s best wisdom
Whatever the weakness of God is, it’s stronger than man’s best strength
Think of an Olympic caliber runner
He might have an off day, where he was weak compared to usual
However, even on his weakest day, he’s probably faster than almost all others
This is what God is like, only God doesn’t have off days
Whatever man might consider a weakness or foolishness in God’s plans, His plans are still
far greater than anything man can think up or accomplish

9. vs. 26: Paul asks the Corinthians to consider their status before God’s salvation call to them
He says, “Not many of you were wise...not many of you were...of noble birth”
The two big categories for status in our world are wisdom and power
They were big categories in Paul’s world as well
But Paul says that “Not many of you...”
There were some who came from those categories, not “not many”
However, most of the church came from people outside of those groups
Most were not people considered wise by human standards
Most were not people of influence, from noble (higher-class) families

10. vs. 27: Paul brings out one of the bedrock concepts about how God works in the world
He does things very different to accomplish His ends than we would choose
“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise”
God uses things that seem impractical to human thinking
It would seem that the wisest people should be sought after
But God uses people who have humble hearts bent toward Him
The wise generally have proud hearts bent towards self
God uses “foolish” people for good purposes, and that shames the wise
The scribes and Pharisees wondered “Who are these men?” about the apostles
The apostles were “learned” in the traditional sense
Their “foolishness” put the learning of the wise to shame, however
In the same way, God uses “the weak things of the world to shame the strong”
God doesn’t want people who are already strong and proud of their strength
He wants people who know they are weak and rely on Him for strength
When the “strong” see the weak one’s successes, it shames them
God can use this contrast to draw others to Himself

11. vs. 28-29: Paul says that “God chose the lowly things of the world”

The idea of “lowly” is directly opposite to “noble birth” in vs. 26

God doesn’t recognize human traditions of noble birth vs. lowly birth

There are no caste systems or hierarchies in God’s world

Paul also notes that the lowly are “despised” in the world

people and things looked down upon by the world’s standards of success

Paul is not saying that wealthy and influential people should not be in the church

The church is open to all who will come to Christ on his terms

All need to recognize their spiritual poverty

None are to boast before God

Boasting comes from pride, not humility

Boasting says, “Look what **I** did!”

Our salvation was worked out without us doing anything to make it happen

We had nothing to do with it

Therefore, we have no reason to boast about saving ourselves

12. vs. 30-31: Paul summarizes this section by concluding that Christ has become our wisdom from God

He connects wisdom with Christ’s righteousness, holiness, and redemption

We are to boast only about Christ and what He’s done for us, not about ourselves

We glory in His redemption from our human weaknesses and failings

Application: Paul has reminded the Corinthians, and all believers still today, of the difference between worldly wisdom and God’s wisdom. Worldly wisdom brings about pride and arrogance; God’s wisdom produces humility and thankfulness. The church today, just like the 1st Century church, is not to seek the world’s approval or ways of thinking and doing things, but to seek Christ and His way, to follow His example of humility and being despised in the world’s eyes to accomplish God’s will in the world. We all need to examine ourselves on occasion to see if we’ve adopted the world’s view of glorifying self/church. If we see any of that attitude in ourselves, we are called to ask forgiveness for it and re-commit ourselves to Christ’s way.

Prayer: Father God, Your ways and thoughts are far beyond the ways and thoughts of human wisdom.

May we continually rely on Your strength and wisdom as we put our trust in Your Son. In Jesus’ name, Amen.