

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

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Introduction: In this passage Paul continues to be concerned about the report he heard from Chloe's people concerning divisions within the Corinthian Church. He has pleaded with them to agree with one another. Today's passage, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, may not seem related to his plea for agreement among the Corinthians, at first reading. However, this passage is integral to his argument. The Church must not think as does the world. The Church must not put its faith in people. The Church must boast only in Christ and what God is doing through Christ in their midst. If they focus on Christ and Christ alone and boast only in Him, the members of the congregation will be united.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Verses 18-19

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."

- Paul's point is that God's plans do not make sense against human logic. The truth of that statement is found in the plan of salvation itself. To those who do not believe in Jesus Christ the cross of Christ makes no sense. That is because they are thinking logically and not spiritually. But for those who believe and who think spiritually, the cross, a sign of death and weakness, is God's power and the source of life.
- Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 to prove his point.

Verses 20-25

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. 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.

- “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” Though the thought is expressed as a question, the answer is obvious to those who believe in Jesus. God’s ways are not the ways of the world.
- Through its own methods and by its understanding, the world did not know God nor can it understand God. It was through the “foolishness of the cross” that God reconciled the world to himself by the blood of His son.
- The Jews want signs to prove things. Greeks want everything to be logical. But God is found through believing that Jesus is the only begotten Son. The Jews rejected the signs which proved this and the Greeks claimed it was illogical. But in Jesus the power and wisdom of God is revealed. To people who think with the wisdom of the world God’s plan for our salvation is not acceptable.

Verses 26-30

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.

- Paul then reminded the Corinthians that before God revealed his plan to them, by the standard of the world they were not much. They were not influential nor of noble birth. But God chose them. He chose the weak to expose the strong. Therefore, they cannot boast before God. It is only through their relationship with him through Jesus that they are redeemed and holy. It is all His doing and not their own.

Verse 31

³¹ ***Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."***

- Therefore? ... Because God rejects worldly wisdom and chooses to use people who are unimpressive by worldly standards ... Christians should not rely on worldly arguments to advance their case. Nor should they think more highly of themselves than they should. They should always and only boast in the Lord and in what God is doing among them.
- Arguments and division are signs that the people of the Church are acting and thinking like the people of the world.

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