

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN MAN'S AND GOD'S WISDOM

BIBLE TEXT : I Corinthians 1:17-31; 2:1-16.

LESSON 389 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

1 Corinthians 1:17-31

¹⁷ For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

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.

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.

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

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Inadequacy of Human Wisdom

1. It considers the preaching of the Cross as foolishness, I Corinthians 1:17, 18;

Jeremiah 36:21-24

²¹ So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king.

²² Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and *there was a fire* on the hearth burning before him.

²³ And it came to pass, *that* when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast *it* into the fire that *was* on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that *was* on the hearth.

²⁴ Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, *neither* the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.

2. It is only temporary, I Corinthians 1:19;

Isaiah 29:14

¹⁴ Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid.

3. It is inferior to God's wisdom, I Corinthians 1:20-25;

1 Corinthians 3:18-20

¹⁸ Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

²⁰ And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

James 3:13-18

¹³ Who *is* a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

¹⁴ But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

¹⁵ This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish.

¹⁶ For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

¹⁸ And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

4. Since it is not of faith it requires a physical demonstration to establish it, I Corinthians 1:22.

II The Position in the World of the Man of God

1. The "worldly wise" often overlook heavenly wisdom, I Corinthians 1:26; 2:6-8.

2. The weak in earthly knowledge, when usable by God, can confound the wise, I Corinthians 1:27, 28;

2 Corinthians 10:1

¹ Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence *am* base among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you:

2 Corinthians 10:10

¹⁰ For *his* letters, say they, *are* weighty and powerful; but *his*

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.

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

¹ And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

² For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

³ And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

⁴ And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

⁶ Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

⁸ Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

⁹ But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the

bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible.

Exodus 3:11

¹¹ And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

Exodus 4:10-12

¹⁰ And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

¹¹ And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?

¹² Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

Jeremiah 1:7-10

⁷ But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

⁸ Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

⁹ Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

¹⁰ See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

3. He labours so that God receives the glory, and not man, I Corinthians 1:29-31; 2:1-5;

1 Corinthians 3:21-23

²¹ Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;

²² Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;

²³ And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

III The Wisdom of God

1. It is spiritually discerned and reveals hidden mysteries, I Corinthians 2: 7-14;

John 16:13

¹³ Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

Romans 11:33

³³ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

2. It is promised to the believer, I Corinthians 2:15, 16;

James 1:5

⁵ If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

Ecclesiastes 2:26

²⁶ For *God* giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to *him that is* good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

NOTES:

The Greeks

Corinth was a centre of learning. There were many Greeks there who prided themselves in their worldly wisdom. The culture and learning of Greece dates back into early history. After Paul's experience at Athens, he saw the need of contrasting the wisdom of man with God's wisdom. Even today, many people look to an intellectual religion instead of a heart-experience.

Philosophy has led in that direction, and much philosophy has been incorporated into the religious views today, the same as it

things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

¹⁰ But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

¹¹ For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

¹³ Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

¹⁴ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

¹⁵ But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

¹⁶ For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

was in these Greek times. "For Christ sent me . . . to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Why would wisdom make it of none effect? If much of the wisdom of the world were used, the common people could not grasp it. When ministers lay stress on the intellectual side of the Gospel, their religion has no life in it. That kind of religion belongs to the world.

The Greeks by their philosophy made an effort to reach a knowledge of God. As deep as they went and as profound as they were, they never gained their end. Sometimes they thought they had gained their end and their conclusions were drawn, yet they came short of the saving power of Christ. To the Greeks the preaching of the Cross of Christ was foolishness. At Mars' Hill the Greeks listened very respectfully until Paul reached the point of the Resurrection. That was too much for them; they shook their heads. Worldly wisdom proceeds along the line of materialism. It excludes the supernatural altogether. The main theme of the Gospel is the Resurrection, and that is a supernatural event.

The Jews

"The Jews require a sign." Jesus commented upon a generation who seek after a sign. He called them adulterous and sinful. There are people who put emphasis upon the signs. The Bible declares that if we believe the Truth the signs will follow. The disciples went everywhere preaching, God working with them and confirming the word with signs following — not their following the signs, but the signs following them.

The Called

The Greeks made much of wisdom: it was part of their profession. Oratory was a profession with them. Paul points out two classes here — the Jews on one hand and the Gentiles on the other. Then he brings in the third class. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." The call has gone out into all the earth; no one is exempt from the call, but it is the man who responds to it who is numbered among the called.

Christ is the wisdom of God. In Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). That gives us something to think about. Christ, who walked the shores of Galilee, seeking out the men along that coast, did not go down among the scribes and Pharisees or members of the Sanhedrin to get His following, but the humblest of the people were the ones whom He chose. His was wisdom beyond degree; so much so that He was a marvel in His day, even as a boy, for what He knew and what He said.

His disciples were called ignorant and unlearned, but their words are still with us in the greatest Book of wisdom this world has ever known. Dependent upon them was the codifying of the Gospel, presenting it as we have it in the New Testament. They had been with Him under a schooling for three years and a half, for the express purpose of fitting them for that work. We are in a great school when it comes to the Gospel — the true Gospel. We are not in some scholastic group where the Gospel is analysed, dissected, and studied from an intellectual standpoint. Tests and trials are the practical schooling of the Gospel. The lessons learned in that way go down, not to where you **think**, but to "where you **live**," into the innermost parts of your being. If the lessons are not being learned, the Lord may take you through a very dark valley in order to draw you closer to Him.

Things That Are Not

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to

QUESTIONS

1. Name the three classes of people spoken of in the last half of chapter 1.
2. Why did the Gospel seem like foolishness to the Greeks?
3. Why was the preaching of Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews?
4. Who are "the called"?
5. Why should we glory in Christ alone and not in man?
6. What was the theme of Paul's preaching?
7. Why did not Paul use "enticing words of man's wisdom" in his preaching?
8. How do we know the things of God?
9. Why cannot the natural man understand the things of God?
10. What are some of the "base things" which God has chosen to "bring to nought things that are"?

confound the wise." Look at the example of the man who was born blind whom Jesus healed. He recognised the power of God and began to testify to the Pharisees who "answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out." The wise men were confounded by the poor, blind beggar.

God has chosen "things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." One time Samaria was surrounded by the army of the Assyrians. God caused a noise to be heard in their ears. They thought horsemen and chariots were coming against them. They did not wait to saddle their horses, to pack their bags, but ran on foot as fast as they could, leaving their garments strewn along the way. What were they running from? Nothing! God can take the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are.

Christ

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Now Paul turns to the called, and tells them that if they want wisdom they should get better acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ. Look what that association did for John. His writings are masterpieces of literature. Read what the rough fishermen, Peter, wrote in his two Epistles, and you will find truth there that thrills you to your very being.

We have a Redeemer, One who made the Atonement, upon whom we can lean, to whom we can look in every hour of weakness or temptation; but Jesus had no atonement to look to. He was the Atonement. He had to fulfil the Law to the letter, and He did. It is only through His death that we have sanctification and redemption. In whom else could we glory? "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." You can see to what Paul restricted his ministry and preaching. It was to Christ crucified, which is the central theme of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit

"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Whenever the Spirit and power fails, all has failed. Preaching without the Spirit is as dead as an electric motor without electricity. The only effect that a man's ministry can have is what the Spirit of God brings. If a man loses the Spirit of God out of his heart and life, he is just a lump of clay.

There is a wisdom hidden from the eyes of the world, a mystery which God reveals by His Spirit. Jesus said, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The Holy Ghost is an earnest of our inheritance, and it is through the Spirit that we receive a little glimpse of what God has prepared for them that love Him. Just as man comprehends the things of man, so the Spirit of God comprehends the things of God. It would be foolish to explain to a dog how a radio works. He may be ever so clever a dog, but it is out of his realm. Just so, the natural man cannot understand the things of God, because they are spiritually discerned. In other words, they are out of his realm.

Man by his intellect has been able to solve many difficult problems and accomplish great engineering feats; but when it comes to spiritual things, his intellect fails. The words of Jesus reveal the secret of this unto us: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matthew 11:25, 26).