

CORINTHIANS – THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY



STUDY 2

Reason, Revelation and Redemption

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:21

2a: The Folly of Human Wisdom (1:18-21)

1:18 Why is the word of the cross foolishness to the world?

'Wisdom' is the opposite of 'foolishness', and we accordingly would expect Paul to speak of the gospel as 'the wisdom of God'. Instead, as in Rom. i.16, he characterizes it as *power*. It is not simply good advice to men, telling them what they should do. Nor is it a message about God's power. It is God's power. [Morris 43]

Salvation is described by Paul as a thing done in the past, "we were saved" (Rom. 8:24), as a present state, "ye have been saved" (Eph.2:5), as a process, "ye are being saved" (1 Cor.15:2), as a future result, "thou shalt be saved" (Rom.10:9). [A.T. Robertson 77]

1:19-21 Which categories of human knowledge are made ultimately irrelevant by these words?

Greek wisdom and philosophy, says Paul, had neither led men to the knowledge of God nor brought them deliverance from sin ... by accomplishing through this message [*kerugmatos*, proclamation] what secular wisdom had been unable to accomplish, God had turned that wisdom into folly. [Bruce 35]

2b: The World's God -- Power & Wisdom (1:22-29)

1:22-24 In what ways is the cross a stumbling block [Gk. *scandalon*] and foolishness? (i.e. what do demonstrations of power and wisdom have in common?)

... we proclaim a Messiah who has been crucified, to Jews a revolting idea, and to Greeks an absurd one. ... On this subject [the cross] the Jew had to unlearn before he could learn; and so also, in a different way, had the Greek. Both had to learn the divine character of humility. Christ was not preached as a conqueror to please the one, nor as a philosopher to please the other: He was preached as the crucified Nazarene. [Robertson/Plummer 16, 22]

The mystery-religions all offered salvation by initiation and ritual as the Pharisees did by ceremonialism. Christianity reaches the heart directly by trust in Christ as the Saviour ... *Stumbling-block* ... Papyri examples mean trap or snare which here tripped the Jews who wanted a conquering Messiah with a world empire, not a condemned and crucified one (Matt. 27:42; Luke 24:21). [A.T. Robertson 79]

... each of these groups has its demand, but ... the demands are different. For the Jew it is **miracles**, the Divine materialized in external prodigies, in sensible manifestations of omnipotence. The plural [semeia] *miracles*, ought certainly to be read ... the received text reads the singular [semeion], a sign ... Paul's object is not to refer to a particular fact, but to characterize a tendency; this is indicated by the plural, signs, and yet more signs! For it is of the nature of this desire to rise higher and higher in proportion as it is satisfied ... Every stroke of POWER MUST BE SURPASSED by a following one yet more marvelous. [Godet 104, emphasis added]

1:25-29 With what word, in contrast with power and wisdom, does Paul want the Corinthians to link the gospel of Christ? (vv. 13, 17, 18, 23; compare vv. 25, 27-28)

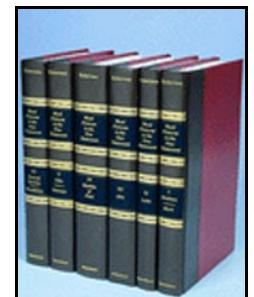
Nothing in the apprehension of rationalists can be more absurd than that the blood of the cross can remove sin, promote virtue, and secure salvation ... [Hodge 23]

2c: How Did We Get to Know God? (1:30,31)

What is Paul at pains to show about the sequence of salvation, in contrast with all man-made religion? (vv. 1, 2, 9, 18, 21, 24, 26, 27 (2), 28)

The act of calling by God [is] based not on the external condition of those called (*kletos*, v.2), but on GOD'S SOVEREIGN LOVE ... We are made righteous, holy, and redeemed in Christ Jesus. Redemption comes here last for emphasis though the foundation of the other two. In Rom.1:17 we see clearly Paul's idea of the God kind of righteousness (*dikaiosune*) in Christ. In Rom.3:24 we have Paul's conception of redemption (*apolutrosis*, setting free as a ransomed slave) in Christ. In Rom.6:19 we have Paul's notion of holiness or sanctification (*hagiasmos*) in Christ. [A.T. Robertson 80-81, emph. added]

Faith is the appropriation of His righteousness. It is imputed to us. This imputation has to do with the spirit, the essential nature of man. Sanctification is progressive. In sanctification Christ is not imputed, but imparted, and that is progressive, that has to do with the mind, the mind being transformed into His image and His likeness. The last, redemption, looks on to the ultimate. What is that?



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Christ implanted. Everything is done then. That is the final fact, and that has to do, ultimately, sacramentally with our body, when He shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory. [Morgan 39,40]

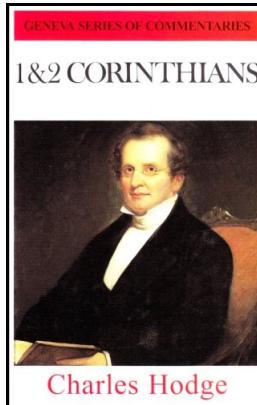
The Cross – not the world's idea of power

The power of God (dunamis theou). So in Rom.1:16. No other message has this dynamite of God (1 Cor.4:20). God's power is shown in the preaching of the Cross of Christ through all the ages, now as always. No other preaching wins men and women from sin to holiness or can save them. The judgment of Paul here is the verdict of every soul winner through all time ... The cross seemed God's defeat. It is conquering the world and is the mightiest force on earth. [A.T. Robertson 77,80]

This passage in its connection clearly teaches two great truths; first, that the cross, or the doctrine of Christ crucified, is the substance of the gospel, that in which its vitality and power consist; and secondly, that it is the preaching, or public proclamation [*kerugma*] of that doctrine which is the great means of salvation. To this all other means, however important, are either preparatory or subordinate. It is to be remembered, however, that *preaching*, in the Scriptural sense of the term, includes the inculcation of the truth ... [Hodge 22]

editor's note: In considering Paul's use of OT quotations in Romans we noted that several passages in Isaiah seemed to be the original text of his meditation. So it is here: A.T. Robertson draws our attention to Isa. 29:14, (LXX), from which the quote in v.19 is taken, and to Isaiah 33:18, not quoted but seemingly adapted in v.20. If

one reads the chapters from which these verses come, the background is the Assyrian invasion of Judah. The folly of the Jews of Isaiah's day -- their "wisdom" -- was that Egypt would save them from the Assyrians. Not in accord with such wisdom would the LORD act, and not by the power of Egypt would He save them!



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