

(1 Corinthians) ch.1:1-1:24

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of appreciating the good in others, correcting the bad, and being united in the local church.

Duration: 43:46

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 1:10-11, 1 Corinthians 4:4-11

Topics: "Christian Community", "The Cross"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of appreciating the good in other believers while also acknowledging their faults. He emphasizes that believers should not only see the good and never correct others, nor should they only criticize and find fault without recognizing any positive qualities. The speaker refers to the Apostle Paul's approach in Corinthians and the way Jesus addresses the churches in Revelation, where they begin by acknowledging the good before addressing the shortcomings. The sermon also highlights the danger of preaching the gospel with human cleverness and emphasizes the need for believers to continually experience salvation from sin and self through accepting the message of the cross.

Transcript

We turn today to 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, and verse 1. Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. And as in all of his letters, Paul begins this letter also by referring to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Not because he wanted any earthly honour or the respect of his fellow believers, but only with one reason, so that what he wrote would be accepted as the authoritative word of God and the inspired scriptures.

Jesus said that we were to have no titles other than brothers and servants, and Paul certainly didn't want any title other than a brother and a servant. But so that the Christians in Corinth would accept his writings as the inspired word of God, he calls himself an apostle, which he is. And this, he says, is not the result of his own choice, but by the will of God.

And Sosthenes, our brother, he joins with Sosthenes in writing this letter to the Christians in Corinth, to the church of God which is at Corinth. Corinth was a city, and though there may have been many groups of believers meeting in different homes, like there were in Rome and in other big cities, yet in that city there

was only one church. This is the New Testament pattern.

That in one town or in one city there is only one church. We see that in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3 as well. The church in each town or city.

And so to the church of God which is at Corinth, which comprises the believers born again, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, in that city. And he says that these are also sanctified in Christ Jesus. The word sanctified means set apart.

Set apart from what? Set apart from the unbelievers in Corinth to be the church. The word church means called out, called out to be separate. And sanctified means set apart.

And our Christian life is a continuing process of sanctification that begins from the time that we are converted and continues right up to the time that Jesus returns or to the time of our death, whichever is earlier. And that process of sanctification begins the moment we are converted because when we are converted God sets us apart from the darkness of the world, sets us apart from the unbelievers, sets us apart from those who are the children of the devil to be his children. But that doesn't mean that our sanctification is complete.

Far from it. It's just the beginning. So we should not think that a person when he comes to Christ is automatically fully sanctified.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 23 Paul writing to the Thessalonians says, May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely. There is such a thing as entire sanctification. But that's a lifetime process.

But here is the beginning of sanctification that we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 2 where they were set apart. And this is something that is to continue in our life where increasingly God sets us apart from worldliness and sin and everything that dishonours Christ and that is unlike Christ in our life as we get more and more light on it. To those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, those in whom the process of sanctification has begun by God's working, saints by calling are called to be holy, called to be the holy ones of God with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is of course a very common way in which Paul would greet all Christians. All Christians need grace from God if they are to live their Christian life in a way that honours Jesus Christ our Lord.

And they also need peace, peace inwardly and peace between themselves. And so these are the two things he keeps greeting people with, grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he says very sincerely in verse 4, I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.

And here is a lesson that all of us can learn. Those of us who have read the letter of Paul to the Corinthians realise that the Corinthians were a bunch of carnal Christians. They were quarrelsome, fighting with each other, making divisions on the basis of Christian leaders.

They were carnal. Jealousy and strife was found in them as we read in chapter 3. And there were many other things lacking. In fact they even permitted sin in the midst of their congregation.

They were going to court against one another. In spite of all these lacks which Paul later speaks to them about, yet it's wonderful to see that he begins with thanking God for what was good in them. It's a very common tendency of the children of Adam to find what is lacking and what is evil in other people first.

When we look at others, we tend first of all to see the evil in them rather than the good in them. And this is a preeminent characteristic of all the children of Adam. But when we allow the Spirit of God to sanctify us and renew our minds, we begin to look at believers the way God looks at them.

We don't shut our eyes to what is evil, but we begin by what is good. And this is the pattern we see in Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3 as well, where when the Lord speaks to the churches, there are many things lacking in some of those churches, many of those churches. But invariably, he begins with something good that he can find in each of those five churches whom he rebukes.

There is perhaps one or two churches in which nothing good can be found, but in the others, wherever some good can be found, he begins by appreciating the good and then rebuking the evil in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. And Paul had received the same Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. And there he sees these things lacking in the Corinthians, and he's going to write to them about it. He begins by appreciating the good that there was.

And as I said earlier, this is a healthy pattern for us to follow, because it is only in the background of expressed appreciation that we can help weaker believers to correct their faults. If we have never expressed appreciation for the good that we have seen, in another brother, it is far better that we don't find fault with him or seek to remove any blemishes that we may see in his character. The same thing applies to our children.

So many parents are quick to find fault with their children and to rebuke them and chastise them who never appreciate anything good that they see in them. And here is a very good example for us to follow from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 4. I thank my God always. Not just some of the time.

He thanked God continuously, and he wasn't telling a lie. He was speaking the truth concerning the Corinthians. Paul was a spiritual man, so he could thank God even for those who had defects in them because there was something good.

For the grace of God which is given you in Christ Jesus. He doesn't tell lies. He's not using flattery.

He's not thanking God for what doesn't exist in the Corinthians. He doesn't say, I thank God that you're a bunch of spiritual people. They were not.

But he says, I thank God for the good things I see. First of all, the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus in the sense that your sins are forgiven and you have come to Christ, you've been baptized in the Holy Spirit. And not only that, in everything you were enriched in Christ.

In all speech and in all knowledge. Now these are not the primary things in the Christian life, speech and knowledge. Character is primary and the Corinthians were lacking in that.

But yet, they had ability. Knowledge of the word of God and the ability to express themselves in sharing God's word with others. Which is a good thing, if not the primary thing.

But being a good thing, Paul appreciates it and says, I thank God that you have this ability. And also he says, I thank God, verse 6, that the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you. They had a testimony for Christ.

And that was also something that Paul could thank God for. He says, all these things, verify. The testimony which we bore to Christ when we were with you.

This is another translation. All your experience has confirmed the testimony that the apostles bore concerning Christ to them. And the result was, verse 7, they were not lacking in any spiritual gift.

This is an amazing thing. That though these Corinthian Christians were so carnal and were spiritual babes, as we read in chapter 3 and verses 1 to 4, yet they had spiritual gifts to such an extent that not one gift of the spirit was lacking in that church. Now that teaches us very clearly that spiritual gifts do not constitute spirituality.

A man can have spiritual gifts, but he may not be spiritual. But we still ought to thank God for the spiritual gifts, but seek to correct the blemishes in character. And so here is a good example that we have seen.

To appreciate that which is good in other believers, and then we can move on to correct what we see lacking in them. We turn today to 1 Corinthians 1, and verse 4. We were considering verses 4 to 7 last week, and we were seeing how Paul expressed appreciation for the Corinthian Christians before seeking to correct what he saw to be their failures. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.

And then he enumerates the things that he thanks God for. It's very easy to go through a ritual of saying that we thank God for other believers without specifically thinking of the things that we can find in others that give room to thanking God for. And he says I thank God first of all for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.

And this shows that his thanking God for the Corinthian Christians was sincere. It wasn't just hypocritical words. It wasn't just flattery that he was using to try and bring the Corinthians over to his side.

Far from it. He sincerely thanked God for that which he saw was good in the Corinthians. For example, that they had received the grace of God in terms of forgiveness of sins to begin with, and that they were enriched in Christ, particularly in speech, in knowledge of the word of God, and able to share it.

And that the testimony which Paul bore concerning Christ in their midst was thus confirmed by they themselves bearing testimony to Christ, and also that they had received all the gifts of the Spirit. They were not lacking in any spiritual gift. Later on in chapter 12, he tells us about these spiritual gifts, and it's an amazing thing that these carnal Corinthians had all these spiritual gifts, which teaches us that God can give gifts even to believers who remain carnal.

God can give a gift to a believer the day he is born again and baptized in the Holy Spirit. And if he does not grow to spiritual maturity, he can still exercise that gift, as we see in current experience around us, that there are people exercising spiritual gifts, we cannot deny that, and yet their lives are so carnal. Samson in the Old Testament was one example of that, and Balaam is another.

There are many others in the history of the Church. But still, a spiritual gift is a spiritual gift that God gives, for building His Church, and therefore it is something we thank God for. And further, something else that

Paul could thank God for in these Corinthians, was that they were awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's also a very good thing, when you find in a believer that he's eagerly looking forward to the coming of Jesus Christ in glory. There are not many people who are eagerly looking forward for the revelation of Christ in glory here in this world, but the Corinthians had that quality as well. And, Paul says, the Lord Jesus, when He comes, will confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nothing in the Christian life is automatic. God is certainly going to do His part if we do ours. And Paul comes to that later on in the letter, but he says it's the Lord who will confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And he says God is utterly dependable to do that. It's through Him that you were called to have a part in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. God has called you.

And when you read verses 4 to 9 by themselves, you get the idea that the Corinthians were really a spiritual lot of Christians, but wasn't true. It just shows something of the character of the writer, of the apostle Paul, that he had eyes to see that which was good, and he learned to appreciate the good even in carnal believers. A very important lesson for all believers today, to give thanks to God for that which is good, which they can see.

Now, there are two extremes in this matter. One is to only see the good and never rebuke or correct people for what is wrong. Such people fall over the cliff on one side.

The others are those who only criticize and find fault and never find anything that they can appreciate in other believers, except those in their own group. And even in their own group, they'll probably find fault with a number of them. But here we see verses 4 to 9, only appreciation, and then verse 10 onwards, and a number of other chapters in the letter, a number of rebukes and matters to correct.

Many, many matters in the succeeding chapters of the letter to the Corinthians. And there we see the balance. To appreciate what we see to be good, and then also to point out those areas that need correction and rectification in their life.

And so he goes on immediately after in verse 10 to say, Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's not trying to say that these are just things that I have found fault in you and you must rectify. He says, These are things which the Lord himself would want you to set right in your life.

That's why he uses the name of the Lord Jesus Christ there. He says, I exhort you, brethren, that you all agree. And this was the basic problem in Corinth, and is the basic problem in many, many Christian groups and churches today.

That they do not agree. That there are divisions right in the midst of that one church that's backbiting, schism, and competition and jealousy and various other things which are found in so many Christian groups. And so Paul writes to them saying that you all agree, that there be no divisions among you.

If you want to know what the will of God is for any local church, here it is. That there should be no divisions among the believers in that local church. That they all agree and that they be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Now it's very easy to love the brothers and sisters who live in some other country a thousand miles away or ten thousand miles away whom you never see. You may have no problem with the believers who live in China or Africa or someplace far away whom you never see. But the problem is usually with the believers whom you see day after day.

And here is where our spirituality is tested. And the spirituality of our congregation. Not in how burdened we are about the unconverted people in some village in North India.

But rather can we get along with and love fervently those believers who are in our local church. Paul was not writing to the Corinthians to love the believers in Rome or to love the believers in Galatia or in Philippi. That would have been easy.

But he was telling the Corinthian Christians that among themselves there should be no division. No schism. That they agree and that they should be made perfect and complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

They should not allow themselves to be split up into various cliques. They must be perfectly joined together and knit together. And verse 10 is a beautiful expression of God's perfect will for every single local church.

And no local church or Christian group should ever be satisfied until they have come to that place where the spirit of God is shown the will of God here in verse 10. Where they all agree. Every one.

And that there be no divisions. But they be made perfect. Perfectly joined together, knit together in the same mind in the same judgment.

Of one mind and of one opinion. That they all see things from the same point of view as the Living Bible says. That they all see things from God's point of view and not from their carnal human point of view.

In verse 11 he says, I've been informed concerning you my brethren by the household of Chloe that there are quarrels among you. Now the household of Chloe, the family of Chloe was one of the groups of believers there in Corinth. And when they saw all these problems in the midst of the Corinthian Christians they were disturbed and concerned.

And they did the most spiritual thing that any believer can do when he sees such carnality and strife in the midst of his group of believers. They did not go around backbiting to other people about it. They did not write letters to others.

They did not speak evil about these believers among others. But rather they wrote these matters to a spiritual leader. To the one who founded the church in Corinth.

To the spiritual leader of the Corinthian church. The one who had appointed the elders there. The one who founded the church there.

The Apostle Paul. And that's a very good example for us to follow as well. That when we see something lacking, instead of speaking to other people who cannot help the situation.

Instead of speaking evil behind people's backs. It's far better to go to a man of God who has authority in that particular situation. And to share the problem in confidence with that man of God so that he can set it right.

The people in Chloe's family knew that they couldn't set it right themselves. And that's why they went to Paul. And that is a very good example for us to follow.

When you see a problem with another believer or groups of believers. Go to the elder brothers or to those who have spiritual authority and share the matter with them so that they can set it right. And that also is a good example.

And he says I've been informed about this. And he says I hear that among you there are people who say I am of Paul. I am of Apollos.

I am of Cephas, that is Peter. And I am of Christ. They divided themselves according to the leaders they appreciated.

A common practice even today. People begin to follow some Christian leader. Now the difference is that when Paul saw this, he tried to break it up.

Whereas today very often many Christian leaders allow people to admire them and follow them. But Paul said nothing doing. He says has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? No.

Then how dare you call yourself a follower of me? I don't want any followers. Paul's desire was to connect people to Christ and not to himself. And there is another very good example for every Christian leader to follow.

Not to connect people to himself but to connect them to Christ. And when people try to be connected to him to discourage them and point them to Christ who has died and risen for them. We turn now to 1 Corinthians and chapter 1 and verse 12.

We were considering one of the manifestations of carnality in the church of Corinth in our study last week. And that was that they were following human leaders. If we want to understand what it means to be a carnal Christian the first letter to the Corinthians is the best book in the New Testament to study.

The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians is a manifestation of the characteristics of the carnal Christian. We could put that as a title to the whole letter. The characteristics of a carnal Christian.

And right at the top of the list is the following of human leaders. Paul, Apollos and Peter had all ministered in Corinth and there were certain people who liked Paul's ministry for various things that they saw in it. There were some others who appreciated Apollos perhaps for his eloquence and others perhaps who appreciated Peter for his simplicity for he was only a fisherman.

And there were still others who were super spiritual and who said we're the only ones who belong to Christ. That's the point of the last part of verse 12. When they said I am of Christ it doesn't mean that that was wrong but they were claiming to be exclusively belong to Christ and like the Living Bible says some say that they alone are the true followers of Christ.

That's another form of exclusiveness where we don't follow human leaders but claim to be exclusive. So there are at least two dangers that we see here in verse 12. One is the following of human leaders and the other is where we claim that we are exclusively Christ and that other people who may have some defects in them do not belong to Christ.

These are two dangers, two cliffs both of which we are to avoid. And I mentioned how many Christian leaders make this mistake of allowing people to be attached to them. A person who is attached to a Christian leader rather than to the head Jesus Christ is bound to be carnal in his life and it's quite likely that a leader who allows people to be attached to him is himself carnal.

A true man of God will never, never allow people to be attached to him. He will lead them to be attached to the head, even Christ. And he will not allow those who accept his ministry to become exclusive to think that they alone belong to Christ.

There may be things lacking in other believers, but they will accept them as believers in Christ even if there are things lacking. Verse 13 Paul says Has Christ been divided? Are you saying that Christ has been broken up into many pieces? That's the point. No, that's not possible.

There is only one body. Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Neither Peter nor Apollos. And there we see Paul trying his best to shake off these people who wanted to follow him.

You were not baptized in the name of Paul, were you? Then he says, How dare you follow me? He did not find any joy in people being attached to him. And then he goes on to say, I thank God, verse 14 that I baptize none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no man should say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanus.

Beyond that I do not know whether I baptized any other. There are some believers, when they are converted and want to take water baptism, they would like to be baptized by some particular Christian leader. And Paul knew there was a danger of people being attached to him.

And there were probably people who were converted in Corinth who said, We want Paul to baptize us. We'll wait till Paul comes and let him baptize us. Now that's carnality.

And Paul knew that and so he steered clear of that and did not baptize people. He asked someone else to baptize these believers so that they would not be attached to Paul. And that's good wisdom for Christian leaders, a good example for Christian leaders to follow.

And he says further, Christ did not send me to baptize. He says, I didn't get a calling from Christ to go around baptizing people. I believe in water baptism as essential for all born-again believers, but not something that's going to get people attached to me.

In baptism, you're not baptized to a particular congregation or a particular group of believers or a particular individual. Who baptizes you is not important. The thing is you're baptized unto the Lord, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we see here, Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel. He says, My ministry is primarily to proclaim the gospel, the good news. And the good news can save you from all this carnality.

You haven't understood the good news properly, and that's why you're still remaining carnal. And he says, this good news Christ has sent me to preach, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ should be made of none effect or seem an empty thing. And that teaches us that even though we may be preaching the pure gospel, verse 17, it is possible for us to preach the gospel with human cleverness.

Now, in the world, human cleverness is appreciated. A clever physics teacher, or a clever mathematics teacher, or a clever politician, or a clever businessman, or a clever orator, all these people are appreciated. The way they can speak, their eloquence, their cleverness, their intelligence.

But in God's work, eloquence, auditory, human intelligence, and cleverness are not only of no value, it would not be enough to say that they are of no value, this verse tells us that they can be a positive hindrance to the preaching of the gospel. I wonder how many people realize this. That cleverness of speech can be a hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel, if God's spirit is to work.

Because cleverness of speech is a human thing. You don't have to be spiritual to be clever. You don't have to be spiritual in order to be eloquent as an orator.

So anyone who is gifted in this area of eloquence or human cleverness need not think that his abilities are going to help the furtherance of the gospel. Quite the contrary, if he does not learn to put them to death, his abilities can be a hindrance to the gospel. Just like the righteousness of the pharisees hindered them from coming to Christ because it was a human righteousness.

That's why Jesus said to them that the prostitutes and tax collectors who were stealing had more chance of getting into God's kingdom because they didn't claim to be righteous. But those who claimed to be righteous had a problem. In the same way, those who are clever and those who are capable, humanly speaking, in eloquence and oratory actually have a bigger problem in preaching the gospel effectively with the anointing of the Holy Spirit than others because they will have a tendency not to depend on God, but to depend on their own ability.

Now, Peter was not such an eloquent man, but Paul was. He was a great scholar and Paul, therefore, stood in greater danger of not depending on the Holy Spirit than Peter. Peter would be cast on God, but Paul was in danger of leaning upon his own ability, and therefore he had to speak about this more than Peter.

Peter doesn't speak about human cleverness in his letters because he wasn't battling that in his own life, but Paul speaks much about it in 1 Corinthians 1, 2, and 3 because this was an area which he was battling in his own life and which he had overcome. And that's why he could advise the Corinthians on that because among the Corinthians were great scholars, among those believers, some of them anyway, and people who thought that it's only through cleverness of speech and human ability and eloquence and auditory that the gospel can be preached effectively. Let's never be impressed by a man who can speak cleverly or eloquently because when that is done, it says here, the cross of Christ is made of none effect.

How is that? Because the cross of Christ is meant to put to death not only all that is sinful, but all that is human and not divine. There is that which is evil, demonic, and there is also that which we can call soulish, human, substandard as far as God's standard is concerned. And the cross of Christ is meant to put to death everything that's human so that the pure, divine life and nature can flow forth through us.

But this word of the cross, verse 18, he says, is foolishness to those who are perishing. Those who are in the process of being destroyed, those who are on the path to hell, they cannot understand the message of the cross. And there are many believers too who haven't understood the cross and its deeper aspect of putting not only the flesh to death, but the human soul power manifested in cleverness and eloquence to death.

It is foolishness when they hear such a message about putting human cleverness and eloquence to death, but to us who are being saved. And that phrase teaches us that salvation is not just a once-for-all thing. There is a salvation from judgment, once for all, but there is a continuing process of salvation from sin and from human souliness.

To us who are being saved, there is only one way by which the power of God is manifested, and that is through our accepting the message of the cross. Through death to self we experience the power of God. Blessed are those who have years to hear and understand this truth.

We turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 18. The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And here we were considering, at the end of our study last week, that there is such a thing as a process of being saved.

Or, as another translation puts it, those who are in the path of salvation. Salvation is not just a door, it is also a path. It's not just a once-for-all experience, it is a process.

We are saved from the wrath of God the moment we come to Christ and are born again. But, we are to be continually saved also from the power of sin. And one without the other is a counterfeit salvation.

There is no door of salvation that does not lead to a way of salvation. There is no crisis of salvation that does not lead to a process. And the person who claims to have entered through the door of being saved, but does not walk the way of being saved, has got something wrong with his experience.

Jesus did say, in John chapter 10, verse 9, I am the door, if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved. But he also said in John 14, 6, I am the way. And we continue to be saved increasingly from the power of sin and from all that is human and soulish, so that we can partake of the divine nature in every part of our personality.

This is what is referred to in the last part of verse 18, to us who are being saved. And just like we enter through the door of forgiveness of sins and new birth and coming into the kingdom of God in a moment through the cross, there is no other way to come to Christ, to come to God, to come to the Father, except through Christ's death on the cross, where he bore the sins of all humanity on himself and paid the price completely. If we seek to come any other way, we can't get in.

That's the only way, through the cross. And that is a foolish message to the clever people in the world. The clever people would say, we're saved by living a good life and avoiding what's evil.

And there we see the folly of human cleverness. In exactly the same way, all through our Christian life, we need that message of the cross. Not just that Christ died for us, but, Romans 6, 6, that our old man was crucified with him.

And Romans 8, 13, that through the Spirit we are now to put to death the beads of the body, so that we might live. That is the total message of the cross. That we also are crucified with Christ.

This word of the cross is the power of God. Now there are two things mentioned to be the power of God in the letter of Paul to the Corinthians. One is the word of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1.18, and the other is the power of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2, verse 4 and 5. And it's very good for us to keep these two things together.

If people seek the power of the Holy Spirit, but do not want the word of the cross, they're going to go astray. If people seek the word of the cross, but do not appreciate the power of the Holy Spirit, again they'll be powerless. But when we have both together, we're balanced.

The power of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2, verses 4 and 5, and the word of the cross, 1 Corinthians 1.18. Both are called the power of God. It is written, 1 Corinthians 1.19, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside. This is a quotation from the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah and chapter 29 and verse 14.

And this teaches us that God has no value for human cleverness in His kingdom or in His work. For He says He's going to destroy it. And He's going to set aside the cleverness of the clever.

If we seek to engage in evangelism or Bible teaching with human cleverness, God says He's going to set it aside. If you're going to do God's work with our human wisdom, God says He's going to destroy it. And we'll come to that later on in chapter 3 when we see a lot of Christian work is going to be destroyed because it's wood, hay and straw.

Wood, hay and straw, why? Not because it was not done with sincere motives, perhaps that reason also, but even if done with sincerity, it was done according to human plans and according to human wisdom which God has promised to destroy. Remember this, dear friends. Whatever work you do for God according to your own plans, God's going to destroy.

What you do according to your own schemes, God's going to destroy because it's only going to be the will of God which is done in heaven. That's why He's going to destroy the wisdom of the ways. Would that every clever person in Christianity would understand and accept this message found in Corinthians.

We said last week that the letter to the Corinthians could be called the characteristics of a carnal Christian and here is another characteristic of a carnal Christian that he leans on his human cleverness in doing God's work, not realizing that God is going to destroy human wisdom and cleverness. Where is the wise man? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1.20. Where is the scribe? The scribe means the Bible scholar. The scribe is not the worldly scholar, it's the Bible scholar.

Where is the Bible scholar? Where is the debater? That means the great eloquent man who can get up on the stage and hold audiences spellbound. Do you think God has any use for these humanly clever people and these great Bible scholars? God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. It is not with our heads that we serve God.

God sees the heart. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks not at the head, but at the heart. We read in 1 Corinthians 16.7. And it is the condition of our heart that qualifies us to serve God, and not the capabilities of our brain.

Verse 21, it says, Since in the wisdom of God, in God's wonderful wisdom, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God. The world sought to know God, pursued after God, but never found Him, because it pursued after God in its own cleverness. And we see this in so many religions, pursuing after God in their own understanding and intelligence, and never coming to know God.

But God has been well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached, or through the foolishness of preaching the word of the cross, to save those who believe. God has made the way of salvation so simple. It is on the basis of faith.

And that is why the clever people, and the big people, and the great people, cannot receive it, because it humbles them. It brings them down to the dust, down, equal with all the other people whom they have all their life considered inferior to them. God puts every human being, whatever their caste, whatever their intelligence, down at the same level.

And says, Salvation for all of you is on the same basis. Is that nothing to do with human cleverness? It's by accepting Christ who died on the cross for you. God was pleased to save people through this.

But the Jews, they want signs. And the Greeks, they want human cleverness. But we preach Christ crucified, the word of the cross, and we ourselves crucified with Christ.

Verse 23, and this is a stumbling block to the Jews, and it is foolishness to the non-Jews. But to those who are called, called by God to be his own, whether they are Jews or non-Jews, it makes no difference. Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

And so we see here three categories of people in verses 22 and 23. One is the religious Jews, and the other is the non-religious non-Jews. And the third is the true disciples of Jesus Christ.

And we find there are certain people who are looking for signs and miracles. Certain others are looking for human cleverness. But in contrast to both of these falls, as we preach, the message of the cross.

We can find the same pursuit even in Christendom, unfortunately, today. There are those who are only interested in signs and miracles, like the Jews of verse 22. Then there are others who react against this signs and miracles, and who are only interested in an intellectual study of the word, increasing Bible knowledge, like the Greeks mentioned in verse 22.

But the true disciples of Christ are not particularly taken up with either of these two. They believe that God can do signs and miracles and experience them, but that's not what they are taken up with. They believe in the study of the word as well, but they are not taken up with that.

They are taken up with the cross. Christ crucified and their own old man crucified with Christ, their will put to death, so that the will of God can be done in their life. This is true spirituality.

The carnal Christian is one who is taken up with signs and miracles, verse 22. The carnal Christian is one who is taken up with human intellectual study of the word. The spiritual Christian is the one who is taken up with being crucified with Christ, verse 23, and who believes in Christ crucified as the central part of his message and his gospel.

And to such, this message is the power of God, but to all the others, it's a stumbling block and foolishness. If you preach the cross to the non-believer, it's a stumbling block and a foolishness to him. And if you preach our dying with Christ to many a believer, that also is a stumbling block and foolishness to many, because they are taken up with signs and wonders and human intelligence.

But the foolishness of God, verse 25, of the cross is wiser than men, and the weakness of God manifested in the cross is stronger than men.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/1-corinthians-ch11-124/>

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