

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part IV: Avoiding Divisions By Replacing The Exaltation Of Worldly Wisdom With God's Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5)

I. Introduction

- A. Functioning by means of the sin nature, what we term "carnality," is an ongoing challenge in today's churches.
- B. 1 Corinthians was directed to carnal believers (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), and 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 revealed that their divisions were fostered by the exaltation of worldly wisdom instead of God's wisdom in grace.
- C. We thus view this passage to understand the superiority of the wisdom of God's grace over worldly wisdom:

II. Avoiding Divisions By Replacing The Exaltation Of Worldly Wisdom With God's Wisdom.

- A. When Paul wrote that Christ had sent him to preach the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17a), he added that it was not with the wisdom of man's words, lest the cross of Christ be made of none effect, 1 Corinthians 1:17b.
- B. The cause for mentioning the wisdom of man's words was that Paul's readers faced divisions in their midst since they exalted worldly wisdom (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to 1 Cor. 1:18-25), so he countered their exaltation of worldly wisdom by extolling God's wisdom over man's wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5:
 1. Paul stated that the wisdom of God was far superior to man's wisdom, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31:
 - a. The Apostle claimed that the preaching of the cross of Christ is to them that perish foolishness, but to those of us who are saved by trusting in Christ, it is the power of God, 1 Corinthians 1:18.
 - b. This truth is verified by Isaiah 29:14 where God said He would destroy the wisdom of the humanly wise and thwart the discernment of the humanly discerning, 1 Cor. 1:19 ESV; *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to 1 Cor. 1:19.
 - c. Paul then noted that God has made foolish the wisdom of this world by the preaching of the cross of Christ to save those who believe because the world by its wisdom did not know God, 1 Cor. 1:20-21.
 - d. This state is evidenced by the reaction of men to the Gospel: the Jews required signs and the Greek's sought wisdom, but the preaching of the cross was a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but to those of any lineage who believe, the Gospel is the power and wisdom of God, 1 Corinthians 1:22-24.
 - e. This state existed since the "foolishness" of God in the world's estimation is wiser than the wisdom of men, and the "weakness" of God in the world's eyes is stronger than man's power, 1 Corinthians 1:25.
 - f. To illustrate his point, Paul wrote of the Corinthian believers themselves, noting not many of them were wise according to the world's standards, not many were powerful or of noble birth, 1 Corinthians 1:26. However, God had chosen what was foolish to the world to shame its wise, what was weak to the world to shame its strong, what was low and despised in the world and even what did not exist to bring to nothing what existed in the world, that no man might boast in the presence of God, 1 Corinthians 1:27-29.
 - g. Paul turned to dwell on God's greatness in being the Source of his reader's life in Christ Jesus, Whom God had made their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, 1 Cor. 1:30. For this reason, as taught in Jeremiah 9:24, Paul wrote that he who boasts should boast in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 1:31.
 2. Paul then explained that his ministry of evangelizing the Corinthians had been an exhibition of God's wisdom in His power in contrast to his own lack of wisdom and might in the world's eyes, 1 Cor. 2:1-5:
 - a. In Paul's evangelizing his readers, he testified that he had not come with lofty speech or wisdom in the worldly sense when proclaiming the testimony of God (1 Cor. 2:1), for he had decided to act as if he knew nothing of the world's wisdom among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, 1 Corinthians 2:2.
 - b. Along with this style of simple preaching, Paul was with his readers in human weakness, fear and much trembling, and his speech and message were not in eloquent or persuasive words of worldly wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and His power, 1 Corinthians 2:3-4 NIV.
 - c. The reason for this demonstration of human weakness and the absence of human wisdom was that the faith of his Corinthian readers might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, 1 Cor. 2:5.

Lesson: *Man's worldly wisdom and power is foolishness and weakness compared to God's wisdom and power, so practicing divisions in the local body of Christ over exalting worldly wisdom and power over someone's foolishness and weakness in the world's estimation counters the salvation process that is designed of God to glorify Himself and not any mortal human being. Thus, we should never divide over exalting worldly wisdom and might over another party's human foolishness and weakness, but unite under the exaltation of God's wisdom and power.*

Application: *May we make our boast not in human wisdom and might, but in the wisdom and might of the Lord that we might be united as believers in the humility that is grounded in the grace of God.*