

“The Wisdom of God”
 Pastor Sam Richards
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 Text: 1 Cor. 1:1-12

Who was crucified for you? (Jesus was.) ***Why did He die for me?*** (To address the penalty of sin, my condemnation to the second death.) Paul writes that the *slightest wisdom* of God is vastly greater than the wisest of human wisdom. Therefore, it is belief in the crucified Christ, ***in the power of the cross*** which results in salvation.

The cross, through God, has the power of salvation.

Indeed, one’s entire spiritual standing is determined by one’s stance on the cross—its significance, its meaning. *Those who can receive this truth are saved; those who cannot are damned to perish!* As a result we can set to one side all man-centered approaches (yes, all philosophy, reasoning, theology, argumentation and science)—one cannot intellectually achieve salvation (or work one’s way to God, to final truth, or salvation). ***It is what Christ achieved on the cross that really matters***, and not what one thinks about the transaction that saves—or, to put it another way, it is not the sense that one makes of Christ’s work on the cross that counts for salvation.

There are two chief benefits to this reality: unity in the cross, and power, the power to deliver from sin, to transform lives through the power of God in the cross!

If we receive that our sins were dealt with on the cross, we are saved; if we receive that full atonement was made through the cross (and, therefore, we are justified by the cross, we are declared righteous by faith in the cross.) And we are reconciled to God by the sacrifice of His Son on the cross,; our faith is saving faith indeed. **There is salvation in no other name** and there is no other way to be saved than by **the foolishness of the cross** which Paul preached, and I preach. The cross, the foolishness of the cross, is the wisdom of God enacted.

The Jews looked for signs and everyone else (Greek, or Gentile) looked for wisdom. The quest for signs to substantiate the credentials of the Messiah was/is interminable (there will *never be sufficient miraculous proof* because of the demand for more). When Jesus rebuked this line of proof, saying there will be no sign given this generation apart from the sign of Jonah He was saying two things:

First, that the only proof of messiahship that mattered was that of death and resurrection (His own). Redemption was neither political, nor philosophical—neither human power, nor human wisdom would bring it about—only the cross.

Second, that the rescue mission of God ends with the Second Coming when Christ appears as judge of the living and the dead. In the Day of the Lord resolution would be achieved; all loose ends would be tied up. I mean that justice would prevail, all evil be punished and all righteousness rewarded with eternal life. There will be one day, one judge and one standard of righteousness—leading to a final outcome! We are all followers of Jesus, we perform acts of mercy because we are His disciples and mercy is what we do.

Paul, as an apostle and founding authority of the Corinthian church, hearing of the factions which divided that fellowship; there were four chief divisions: some claiming to be followers of Paul in his dedication to the Gentile mission; secondly, others claiming *Cephas*, or Peter, and his mission to the Jews; a third faction enamored of the eloquent preaching and reasoning of the

illustrious Apollo (Paul’s successor in Corinth) and, fourthly, the “Jesus only” folks who stood on their relationship to the Lord as their defining distinctive—which led to pride and regarding others as inferior, to hold them in contempt. This last group may have seeded the Arian controversy, an early heresy.

The first thing to be said about this rather neat division of the Corinthian church into four camps is that it clarifies and it obscures. It clarifies that there were theological differences present in the church; then it obscures because the fact remains that the differences weren’t very precise—some folks were divided in their theology and straddled two, or more of the main emphases. For the straddlers the distinctions are not particularly helpful. One could be a Jesus only follower of Paul, or of Peter minimally.

Paul introduces the matter of baptism to underscore *the core unity* of the church membership. Baptism was not of Paul, Peter, or Apollos—it was instituted of God *in the name of Jesus*. There was no efficacy to baptism that could legitimately be ascribed to the baptizer! We are baptized into the body of Christ not into the cult following of the one who baptizes us! It is a testimony of witness of the transforming power of the cross—it expressed saving faith and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit—or, more broadly of the three-fold name of God. It was heaven sent, and implemented on earth in the believer’s heart.

So it was not the doctrine of Paul, Peter, or Apollos that mattered any more than it is the peculiar doctrine of any of a number of denominations that matters. What matters is the power of the cross to save lost sinners. Yes, Christ crucified. . . dead, buried and raised to life! Resurrection power brought to bear on those who God prepared to receive salvation—some from among the Jews, and some from among the Gentiles (or “everyone else” which is how Paul would have us take “Greek” in this instance).

Baptism was the public testimony of a changed life—the power of God activated in a believer—and not cleverness of speech, or a well-formed theology; not even a reasoned explanation of divine activity! Baptism’s might result as a consequence of preaching the cross, but for Paul the ordinance always took second place to proclamation! ***My task is to preach Christ crucified, the cross, because the death of Christ has continuous, vicarious effects in the lives who receive that power by faith!***

This repudiation of science, philosophy and reason (which at best can only reach a partial and incomplete version of the truth) is necessary *because the cross is the foolishness and wisdom of God*; that is absolutely intentional. Each of these endeavors, these humanistic endeavors either alone, or by totality, must fall short of the goal of saving man—Paul says, that by worldly wisdom mankind did not come into saving knowledge of God. We can know about God: His eternal nature, His infinite power, His providence and His governance of Creation; but knowing about God is not knowing God. Unsaved Jews found this to be a stumbling block; it was offensive to them—even scandalous. That is because they were earth-bound in their imaginations expecting a political deliverer—a military/conquering king who would liberate them from the Romans and put them back on top of the heap of nations. To expect anything less was foolish.

But the cross is equally foolish to non-Jews. The cross was reserved for criminals. The concept of the innocent laying down his life for the guilty (the higher law of Aslan who is humiliated and slain in Narnia—The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by CS Lewis)—only to rise in triumph over the forces of evil), that concept is alien to Gentiles. Significantly, that they don’t get it doesn’t detract from the efficacy of the cross in the least! What unbelievers think about the cross is actually

irrelevant to our redemption. God's preference for exalting the lowest of the low, His desire to invert the power structures of the present world order is unsettling and perplexing to the unsaved.

Inversion, reversal(!), is hardly a balancing act! If Jesus was a crucified Sophist, a religious mystic, a traveling preacher and wonderworker, Gentiles do not find in His atoning sacrifice any moral philosophical standard which could move a person forward toward salvation! It is irrelevant and unimportant *to those who are perishing* that Jesus died on a cross. Besides, Greeks wondered how a spirit could become incarnate¹ and thus provide a God-Man atonement! And we can note this despite the Grecian view that the Olympians had "human characteristics" (including sin, sickness and death!); despite begetting and being begotten by humankind! The paradoxes and inconsistencies of polytheistic religion were the stuff of myths and stories—always—and, to my mind, can never be intellectually resolved. It is impossible for unreality to reach even that high. Not so with the cross, there and then Christ dealt with all of human sin, cancelling our debt entirely—for those who believe.

For there is, besides the fundamental division of the world into Jews and Gentiles, this further category of "the Chosen (the *kletous*, (Gk) see v. 24) whose calling and election are from God. The cross has the effectual power to save this group, the redeemed of the Lord—and the wisdom of God has brought this about! How great is the wisdom of God and how great is the folly of humanity. For God is great enough to have both foolishness and weakness in His armory, under His dominion. His littlest and most insignificant thought is weightier, more worthwhile than that wisest thought, or plan of man . . . the thoughts and acts of man compared to those of God are as: "*nothing*."

Amen.

¹ This seed thought issued in the Docetic heresy which taught that Jesus only "appeared" to be human.