

**The Finality of Church Success:
“Worldly Wisdom”
1 Corinthians 1:18-31 Message 3
Jerry Grey - 1/17/10 p.m.**

Introduction:

Recap The Churches main problems.

1. Divisions, quarrels, strife
2. Following human leaders
3. Worldly walking
4. ..and tonight, "Worldly Wisdom"

The Final Nail in the Coffin.

READ TEXT: 1: vv. 18-31

If you want to put the final nail in the coffin of a church – allow worldly wisdom to make the decisions.

The church is different from any other entity that exists. It functions on a different plane. It survives on different food. It thrives by difference means. It succeeds by different rules. Answers to a higher power. Exists for a different purpose. It is not to be secular. It is not a business. It does not prosper by quotas – It's mysterious by nature, unstoppable through the spirit; has its origin in God Himself and breathes life by way of the Holy Spirit.

It has its security in God Himself through the promises in Holy Writ. It's eternal and secure. It's the womb of Christian activity. It's my family. It's important. We belong to it, and it will never have success via Worldly Wisdom.

The Proof: Worldly Wisdom

1. It's void of spiritual significance. It is powerless spiritually. It misses the power of the Gospel.
2. It has God for an enemy. God will destroy it.
3. God will make it foolish.
4. It is misguided. Seeks its own.
5. It cannot see true value. Has no way of knowing what is good or bad.
6. It is built on pride and self-satisfaction.

Let's go verse by verse to see Paul's answer to Worldly Wisdom

Verse 18: The **Message** of the **Cross**

The *message* is the word **λόγος**. It refers to preaching. It is the **message** of the **cross**.

It is a serious matter to disregard the cross.

Greek: σταυρός - self-denial, atonement or cross.

Our most precious message is that He brought atonement to us via the cross. The cross represent self-denial.

Our main message is - "Give up your life." "Come to Jesus
"Relinquish your control and give Him your control."

* The cross is a symbol of shame, a curse, our sin, and God's greatest gift to us.

Matthew 16:24-27

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow

me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Colossians 1:19-20

¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

~Worldly Wisdom says that the word of the cross is folly or foolishness.

Greek: μωρία - Folly – We get our word moron from this word. Now get this, the people that are perishing – present - middle – part, think that the very thing that can save them is foolish or moronic. We are all a bunch of morons for believing in the message of the cross.

Hebrews 10:26

"If we keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left."

They are perishing due to their own choice (middle passive verb) and reject the very power of God that could save them.

* The power of God is the ability of God.

Ability to understand and receive the message of the cross.

The Power of God:

Draws, saves, sanctifies, removes sin, breaks bondage and on and on and on-

I have experienced the power of the cross and anybody who thinks that's folly is the moron – Not me!!

If Worldly Wisdom is so wise, how come it missed the message of the cross as moronic.

The power of the cross is continual. Notice the phrase, “**being**” saved. **Sozo**- present- pass- part. We are not perishing, but we are **being saved** by the power or ability of God- **dunamis**. Eternal security.

Verse 19: *A quote from Isaiah 29:14. “It is written.” Where?

Isa 29:14

14 Therefore once more I will astound these people
with wonder upon wonder;
the wisdom of the wise will perish,
the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”

NIV

God has set down in His administration of the church and the universe, to destroy man's **Wisdom** and **Intelligence**.

By these two, man thinks he is bigger, better, and more powerful than God.

I take you back to verse 7 of the Chapter 3. “The one who plants or waters is nothing. Only God who makes it grow.”

You see, intelligent people can forget where their smarts come from. It will be frustrated or brought to nothing.

How does God bring human wisdom to nothing?

By showing us it is limited! *Only God is Omniscient.

Illustration:

The origin of the universe! *Worldly Wisdom* says the dumbest things about this. Cracks me up listening to them.

They **can't** tell you what the weather will do tomorrow but they can tell you what happened 10 billion years ago? Right!

The destruction of man's wisdom and understanding tells us how important it is. The Greek word is **apollumi**. This means to destroy or perish. To understand is **sunesis**. This is to pull together mentally. This refers to the ability to comprehend. God says that He is going to destroy the ability of men to comprehend or understand. God will (**atheteo**) set aside, cast off, disannul, and frustrate the ability of man to be prudent and understand.

It is my opinion that Paul is speaking spiritually as well. In other words, men will not be able to understand the way of salvation.

Verse 20: Great Question?

Where is the wise man, the historian, the debater?
For one, he's dead.

We still have ignorance, disease, hunger, war, etc. Why has man's wisdom not fixed all this? Why can we not fix cancer? Why no peace? Why does the scholar not record the history so we do not make these mistakes again? Why is our government unable to balance the budget? Why corruption? Why can man not control his tongue and his loins?

It all points to one answer - God has made fools of them all. Secular humanism is a joke. Men think they can solve their own problems and rescue their own souls.

* It's often the poor, the simpleminded and frugal men who possess the greatest wisdom and riches.

Three Examples of Worldly Wisdom

1. The Philosopher- σοφος. We get our word sophist from this word. This was man from any class of professional teachers in ancient Greece who gave instructions in various fields, as in general culture, rhetoric, politics, or disputation (debating). These are men who disregard faith for reasoning. This is why Jesus called Himself the word or logos. Worldly philosophy claims to be the champion of reasoning. Jesus was the original reasoner. From a Greek standpoint John made the ultimate statement about Jesus by calling Him the Word.

Acts 17:2-4

2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned (**διαλεγομαι– to preach, reason, dispute, argue, exhort**) with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

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The philosopher will take many people to hell with them.

2. The Scholar- γραμματευς. This was the scribe which is also known as the town clerk, scholar, writer, or secretary. In the strictest sense Paul was referring to the scholars of the Word of God and the educational system. Paul was educated in Sicily and was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Paul explains the difference between secular education and spiritual life. Just because you are

a Christian does not mean you have to bow down or apologize due to your faith. Scholarship has drawn many a great Christian away from his faith due to worldly wisdom. Many of my professors were brilliant men with great faith. As a matter of fact, the godly man should put his hand to the plow and be more scholarly in theology than any other.

Phil 3:4-10

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh,
 I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

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Many scholars have missed the joy and rewards of faith. Reasoning and faith should enhance scholarship; scholarship should enhance reasoning and faith. They should never destroy a man's spirit.

Many scholars will take people with them to hell.

3. The debater- συζητητης **root is συζητω.** The root describes our meaning a bit better. This refers to one who will dispute, inquire, question, cavil, controvert or reason. The idea is that one has another to jointly dispute with. My personal opinion is that Paul is talking about one who questions nit picky stuff and likes to debate just to be right. If you will look at the definition of a

sophist you will see that part of the allure of the sophist is described as arguing adroitly (cleverly, skillfully, or ingeniously) and debating speciously (rightly though lacking merit, pleasing to the eye but deceptive, superficially or plausible). This is a professional quibbler.

My answer to this is that God gives each saved man the Holy Spirit. A person with a testimony is never at the mercy of a man with an argument. You may out debate me and prove my points wrong but you will never get Jesus out of my heart. Just because your IQ is higher than mine does not mean I'm wrong about God. He saves sinners, not just intelligent and beautiful people.

Many a person will be taken to hell with the debaters.

Verse 21: Man's wisdom does not recognize God.

In John 1:10 –

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.”

How ironic that the wisdom of man missed the creator of the universe. They actually called Him the Devil. They called him a drunk. A Sinner. That's how wise man is.

* God even makes it even more ironic. He chose to save people through preaching.

Greek: *kerugma* - The essential of the gospel. To herald, to cry out, to proclaim, a sermon or message. The death, burial, resurrection of Christ.

“Preaching Truth” Results in People Believing in Jesus
If a preacher substitutes preaching for *Worldly Wisdom*, he does not know God! Period!

James 3:13-16

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

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Prov 3:7

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.

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Prov 16:25

25 There is a way that seems right to a man,
but in the end it leads to death.

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Ecccl 10:2-3

2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right,
but the heart of the fool to the left.

3 Even as he walks along the road,
the fool lacks sense
and shows everyone how stupid he is.

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Rom 1:21-23

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their *foolish* hearts were darkened.

22 Although they claimed to be *wise*, they became *fools* 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

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Illustration: Pilgrim's Progress: Mr. Worldly Wiseman

Soon, **Christian** crosses paths with a gentleman named **Mr. Worldly Wiseman**, who is from the nearby town of Carnal Policy. Mr. Worldly Wiseman asks Christian where he's headed, and Christian explains that he's going to the **Wicket-gate** in order to be rid of his **burden**, as per **Evangelist**'s advice. Mr. Worldly Wiseman condemns Evangelist's counsel. The Slough of Despond, he warns Christian, is only the beginning of the troubles he'll meet if he heeds Evangelist.

“Carnal Policy” roughly means “the way the world thinks,” so Worldly Wiseman is a representative of worldly thinking. Unsurprisingly, then, he flatly rejects Evangelist's recommendation for how Christian should deal with his burden—mainly because Evangelist's way will involve danger and discomfort.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman says he is older than **Christian**. If Christian heedlessly follows **Evangelist**'s advice, stories testify that he will encounter weariness, pain, peril, and even death. Christian argues that, no matter what, none of these things are worse than his **burden**.

Worldly Wiseman also argues that since he's older, he understands the ways of the world better than Christian does. With this, though, the book is suggesting that a Christian shouldn't automatically equate age with wisdom. Also, note that Wiseman advises Christian on the basis of "stories"—basically hearsay—not firsthand knowledge. Christian is so focused on getting rid of his burden that the very worst that the "world" fears—death—cannot deter him.

Mr. Worldly Wiseman asks **Christian** how he got this **burden**. Christian explains that he got it by reading the Book he carries. Mr. Worldly Wiseman says that Christian has fallen into the trap of other weak men, meddling in things he doesn't understand. He adds that he can direct Christian onto a safer, friendlier path to get his burden relieved—he should go to the nearby village of Morality and visit an honest man named **Legality**. Legality is skilled at removing the burdens of men like Christian. If Legality isn't there, his son **Civility** can help Christian just as well.

Worldly Wiseman tries to undercut Christian's conviction of sin. He does so by arguing that weak people read the Bible and get in over their heads, needlessly worrying about things they don't understand. He argues that it's better to just live a moral life and be a good citizen instead of worrying about sin. In other words, the world discredits the Bible's view of sin and sees good behavior as the right solution.

Christian decides to follow **Mr. Worldly Wiseman**'s advice. He walks past the high hill that Mr. Worldly Wiseman had indicated, but Christian becomes frightened that the overhanging hill will fall on his head and crush him. His **burden** only grows heavier. Just as Christian is growing distressed, **Evangelist** finds him again.

Man exchanged the worship of the great designer God and creator of the universe for a stick.

Verse 22-23: You get what you ask for!

People today want miracles, safety, comfort. Jews want miracles, Greeks are prideful and want intelligence for selfish reasons. Paul addressed his comments to Jews and Gentiles. The Jews looked for miraculous signs and the Gentiles wanted the sophists.

But I'm preaching a crucified Christ, bloody, beaten and asking for all your passion and energy. He's not just a bell hop or room service miracle man – He's God Almighty and He's asking us to take up our Cross.

*** If that's a stumbling block or foolish, then so be it?
Better to get on the rock than be crushed by it.**

Greek: (σκάνδαλον - offense, stumbling block). The preaching of the cross and the message of truth is a stumbling block to disobedient people who are wise in their own eyes. The church of the NT today thinks it knows better than God. The modern preachers believe in their own resources and skill in the pulpit. ***The average Baptist can't take the truth.*** Emotional truth crybabies fill our churches. No wonder we can't have revival. The Holy Spirit is rejected when conviction comes to the hearts of people.

Many call this time of the week foolishness. I have tried with all my heart to teach you to lean into the conviction and be glad you

are hearing the truth. Don't let the cross be a stumbling block in your life. ***Everybody tells me to preach it brother Jerry. Then they get convicted by the Holy Spirit and get mad. The truth becomes a stumbling block.***

Of all the lies and ungodly things you hear during the week, you would think God's people would be glad to hear the truth for at least one hour during the week!

The Preacher's Imperative

2 Tim 4:1-5

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom,

I give you this charge: 2 **Preach the Word**; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, **to suit their own desires**, they will gather around them a great number of teachers **to say what their itching ears want to hear**. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

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The hardest hour of the week for us all is the hour of preaching. You will need to listen, hear and obey the Holy Spirit about what applies to you. Will it be a stumbling block or a welcomed opportunity for spiritual health.

Verse 24: To the called — He is *Power* and *Wisdom*. He is not a stumbling block to the saved. If the truth is a **scandelon** to you, maybe you are not saved.

Remember 1:2: "To the called." Man what a verse! In 17 words Paul claims that Jews and Gentiles can be saved. He claims

that Jesus is God's power and wisdom "for the called," and that if you are saved that will be good enough.

Power and wisdom are a person not a thing. Look at 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. We will get to this soon but take a gander.

1 Cor 2:1-5

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

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To preach man's wisdom is to ask the listeners to put their faith and trust in the preachers wisdom and homiletical skills and not the gospel. I refuse to do that.

Col 2:8-11

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

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Man's wisdom corrupts his mind, education, spirit, religion, economics, philosophy, world view, his ability, success, power... and God will show it for what it is.

Verse 25: Not to say God is weak or foolish. God does not define weakness as we do. That's the wisdom in it.

This verse is “case in point.” To attach weakness and foolishness to God is arresting (striking).

Yet, use your spiritual eye.

- His wisdom, advice, peace, etc. is not as the world gives, but it is preferable. His wisdom is always best.
- His weakness is strength. He came in weakness and look what it produced. Wisdom can be used to avoid conflict. That’s real power.

Prov 16:32

32 Better a patient man than a warrior,
a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.
NIV

- Man’s strength says take. God’s weakness says give.
- Man’s wisdom says rational prudence and calculated research is best – God says walk by faith.
- Give me a man full of Jesus, relying on the spirit, over an intellectually strong man any day.

Verse 26:

Paul’s not being cruel. He is serious. Go back and think about what shape you were in when Jesus found you. When you got called. What you were capable of – not much. Look at you now!

* Tell your neighbor – “You something else man.”

* Tell ‘em, “I can’t believe what God is doing in your life.” Tell them they are a king.

Before Christ you were void of spiritual wisdom and power. Now, you have both and you have the royal blood of Christ as yours. You are born again into the blood line of a king. We are now

nobility. Before, Paul says we were not even wise according to the flesh (sarx). We had not power or influence in the world, and we surely were not a blue blood. Now look at you!

Verse 27-28:

I'm foolish and weak! I'm **not** tootin' my own horn, but folk that knew me 20 years ago don't believe I'm a Pastor. They can't believe God uses me to counsel, preach, do funerals, weddings, administration, leading –

Guess what? I can't either. I'm a Shephard Boy God is using to shame the wise. I'm foolish and weak, but the power of God rests on me – I feel it and know it. God speaks to me. I have His spiritual power and wisdom now.

I'm Bro. Jerry, called to be a Pastor of Christ Jesus by the will of God – to the church at WBC – those sanctified and called to be Holy together with all the Saints everywhere who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ! – their Lord and ours.

Verse 27:

Greek: Lowly is base, insignificant (agenes)– That's a nobody! God uses nobodies. Those without kin. No descent, ignoble.

Greek: Despised things – least esteemed!

Greek: Kataischuno- to confound, shame, dishonor.

Things that are not to make the things that are! He uses the insignificant, despised, and the weak to shame the strong.

Give me the least esteemed nobody you can find and lead him to Jesus – Let him answer the call of God, get spiritual gifts, learn discipline and obedience for Jesus – Have the power of God fall on him and watch him step on hell, shame

the wisdom of this world and make the Devil look on and say, “how’d he do that?”

~Notice how Paul describes himself a bit further in chapter 4. Also, don’t miss the sarcasm in Paul’s words.

1 Cor 4:8-16

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings — and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! 9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. 15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

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Verse 29: Why would God do this?

God will not allow man to take His Glory. So, He gets the Glory. Give Him Glory and leave the “turning the water to wine” up to Him. God gets praise from using the insignificant, weak and powerless to change the world.

2 Cor 12:9-10

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

NIV

Verse 30: Man's wisdom cannot do this! This is what comes from God.

- (1) True Spiritual Wisdom
- (2) Righteousness – Justified
- (3) Holiness – Purity
- (4) Redemption – Deliverance, Ransomed

Did man's wisdom ever do this for you?

Verse 31: I like the way this reads in the original.

"That, as according it is written, He that glorieth in the Lord. Let him Glory."

He gets glory from the weak and insignificant.

Closing:

Divisions, quarrels, following worldly leaders, Worldly Wisdom – It's the end of a successful church.

CHS on wisdom:

- The doorstep of the palace of wisdom is a humble sense of ignorance.

- Truly wise men are never above asking questions, because they are wise men.
- True religion is sanctified common sense. Attention to the things of heaven does not necessitate the neglect of the affairs of earth: On the contrary, he who has learned how to transact business with God ought to be able to do business with men.
- Wisdom, I suppose, is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the more fools for what they know. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool.
- Our creator is infinitely good, and his will is love: to submit to one who is “too wise to err and too good to be unkind,” should not be hard.
- I will give you a little bit of worldly wisdom; it is this... “whenever you do not know what to do, do not do it.”

CHS on truth:

- The safest truth is the simplest.
- If truth is optional, error is justifiable.
- Truth is never stronger than when it walks with charity.
- He who hates truth soon hates its advocate.
- False doctrines cannot be proved, and you need not make the attempt. It is only the truth which is capable of proof
- Every precious thing in this world is sure to be counterfeited.
- Some people say, why are you in such a small minority. Yes yes, but as a general rule minorities are right. Up until now, the majority has never been on the side of Christ, the majority has never been for God, the majority has never been with the truth.

- The truth is as old as the everlasting hills. Therefore, dear friends, be not touched with the Athenian madness of always seeking after some new thing. Did you ever hear of new gold? To all intents and purposes, all gold that is worth having is old.
- One man abiding in the truth has more weight in his witness than millions under the power of the father of lies.
- It is a strange thing that if the old evangelistic doctrines should have for one moment to be beaten in debate, they always conquer and results.

7528 A Greater Enemy

Long ago, William Law warned that the world is now a greater enemy to the Christian than it was in apostolic times.

It is a greater enemy, because it has greater power over Christians by its favours, riches, honors, rewards, and protection than it had by the fire and fury of its persecutors.

It is a more dangerous enemy, by having lost its appearance of enmity. Its outward profession of Christianity makes it no longer considered as an enemy, and therefore the people are easily persuaded to resign themselves up to be governed and directed by it.

- Robert H. Lauer

7516 Typical American

A United Press survey found that the “typical American” is a twenty-seven-year-old who does not read one book a year. He is materialistic, satisfied with small pleasures, bored with theological disputations. Although he may attend church twenty-seven times a year, he is not interested in the supernatural. He is concerned with neither heaven nor hell. In fact, he has no interest

whatever in immortality. His principal interests are football, hunting, fishing and car tinkering.

- Lon Woodreum