

# Proverbs: Skillful Living - Christ, the Wisdom of God

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Preacher: Scott Liddell

[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Well, good morning and Merry Christmas to you. Today we are concluding, if you're a guest with us today, a final message in the book of Proverbs. And we have been walking through the book of Proverbs looking at what wisdom looks like for a person's life, how God has instructed us what wisdom looks like. And we have defined wisdom as one who is skilled at living.

So what does skillful living look like found in the book of Proverbs? And just in way of review, briefly, we looked at what God's word says about one who is cheerful, contentment, kindness, diligence, humility, generosity, friendship, family, decision-making, purity, righteousness, truthfulness. And last week Pastor Jay spoke to us and what Proverbs has to say about our words.

Today we're going to pivot just a little bit. And so we're concluding our study in the book of Proverbs in 1 Corinthians. And so if you have a copy of God's word with you, if you could turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and there's a pew Bible in front of you if you would like to use one of those as well. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we're going to look at 1 Corinthians chapter 18 in a moment. And you say, how is it that we're pivoting today? And I would say we have looked at what does wisdom look like in our life as an expression as we live skilled living.

But what is it that is an expression of God's wisdom? What is it that is an expression of God's power? And so today we're going to find that it is indeed what is the full expression of God's wisdom and power? And what would be good for us to embrace in our hearts is this.

Jesus Christ and Him crucified on the cross is the full expression of God's wisdom and power. And so we are going to now read the passage of Scripture that I referenced earlier.

[ 2 : 22 ] 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we're going to begin reading in verse 18 and conclude in verse 25. And in these verses before I read, we're going to find today four things of why God, a full expression of God's wisdom is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

There's four reasons that we're going to look at in this passage. Look with me beginning in verse 18. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning. I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, and it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. To the Jews demand signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.

But to those who are called, both the Jews and the Greeks Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

[ 3 : 50 ] To help us appreciate the context in which these verses are found, I want to reference and go back to verse 10. If you can look back with me a little bit. The church at Corinth is full of divisions, and we looked at this over a year ago.

We preached through this book, and you'll recall that there were a lot of divisions, and one of them is, Paul opens his letter and appeals to them, let there be no divisions. We read in verse 10, I appeal to you brothers by the name of the Lord Jesus, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you are united in the same mind and in the same judgment. So he says, I want you, church at Corinth, to be united and have unity.

And what was one of the concerns, we find one of the concerns of division in verse 12. What I mean is that each of you, one says, I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, I follow Cephas, who is Peter, and I follow Christ.

So there's these divisions that are starting about who they chiefly follow. Have all these great teachers and pastors and missionaries, and they're all taking allegiances, well, I follow this person, and I have an affinity toward this person, I follow them.

In verse 17, we read, for Christ did not send me, this is Paul speaking, to baptize you, but to preach the gospel, not with eloquent words of wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

[ 5 : 31 ] So his concern is, listen, I didn't come to you to speak these eloquent words of wisdom that you would be persuaded by the eloquence of my speech to believe in Christ.

No, I just preached the gospel. And the reason why I didn't use these eloquent words and these wise words of this age, because I didn't want the cross to be emptied of its power. That's his motivation.

And so we come to verse 18, and 18 I believe to be Paul's thesis statement. And the thesis statement is basically this, it's communicating that this is the point number one, the message of the cross is the power of God.

He was concerned that he didn't want them to follow him and be persuaded by these incredible words. He wanted them to believe in the gospel, that the gospel would not be emptied of its power. And then he comes to 18, this thesis statement of our section.

And it says, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

[ 6 : 39 ] The word of the cross, the message of the cross, the message preached by Paul, which is the gospel, is that Jesus lived perfectly.

He died sacrificially. He rose victoriously, forgiving sin for all those who repent and believe. That is the message of the cross. And Paul is saying that message, it is a demonstration of the power of God for those who are saved.

And it is folly to those who are perishing. Those who are on the path of folly or the broad road, as in Matthew 7, 13, are the way of death and eternal death.

It's sobering that no human in their right mind would have dreamed up God's scheme for redemption through a crucified Messiah.

It is too preposterous, too humiliating for any deity to do that, to be born in a manger, to condescend to earth, to die a death that no one would think of, particularly in the first century.

[ 7 : 59 ] It's common for Christians today to have a cross that they wear around their neck, and it's encased in gold, or it may be even gold itself, as a symbolic jewelry of the faith we believe.

However, in the first century, the cross was the most shameful mode of execution. It would not have been something you would have held around your neck. It is relegated for the worst of the non-Roman citizens, the criminals.

The cross was repugnant in ancient sensibilities. They would have never dreamed that that was God's redemptive plan of utilizing a cross.

That God's condescension, His coming down of any kind, would have included a cross at all. Oh, the folly that that would have been in the minds, and we read, of those who are perishing.

That's true in the first century. It's true today. Oh, how contrary is the contrast, though, but to those of us being saved? It is a demonstration of the power of God.

[ 9 : 15 ] This is why Paul says in Romans 1.16, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation, for the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The crucifixion was the lowest point of the humiliation of God. We read in Philippians about Christ, he says, He made himself nothing, having taken the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, being found in appearance as a man. It's Christmas.

What are we celebrating here? This Christmas. We're celebrating that God condescended. He came down and He was born. He was laid in a manger.

He was born of a virgin for the purpose of redeeming mankind. That's step one of His condescension.

Philippians goes on and he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death. That's step two. Then the verse concludes what's even worse is it was death on a cross.

[ 10 : 23 ] That's the lowest point of His condescension. He came to earth. He died, but He died on a cross. That's the lowest. And that cross of Christ, because it doesn't end there, it ends with His resurrection, is the power of God for those who are saved.

That cross, notice the contrast, the folly of the world's wisdom compared to the cross for those who are being saved.

What is the cross for the world that is folly? The Roman world, the cross was a symbol of dominant authority of an empire.

The Roman empire, the power to condemn someone to death. And it was the means of the most humiliating form of execution. Contrast that for the cross for those who are being saved.

This says the cross represents God's great mercy, not dominant authority. By which He manifested His love to unworthy people.

[ 11 : 40 ] And He provided for them a gracious gift of life, not death. And that message is the power of God for those who are being saved.

That is the thesis statement for which Paul is communicating. So we read in verse 18, the message of the cross is a demonstration of the power of God.

Next point Paul is going to make here is that through the cross, the wisdom of God has been made foolish, the wisdom of this world. So we read in verse 19, this section of 19, 20, and 21 is where Paul is going to cement his argument, his thesis statement.

He begins in verse 19 by quoting a verse in Isaiah 29, verse 14. It reads, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning, I will thwart.

And that is indeed a quote from Isaiah 29, verse 14. Here's what the context though, if we were to go back to Isaiah 29, verse 14, here's the greater context where that verse is found. The greater context is Isaiah is in Jerusalem, the 10 northern tribes of Israel that have been taken captive to Assyria.

[ 13 : 05 ] Assyria is marching and they are now at the front door of the southern kingdom of Israel, Judah. And Isaiah and Jerusalem is only a stone throw away from where the Assyrian army is at that point.

And Isaiah and they're hearing all of these threats. You don't want to be taken captive by the Assyrians. They're ruthless people. This is why Jonah, the prophet of God, didn't want to go to the Assyrians.

They were unredeemable. That group of people is on the doorstep. And here is Isaiah in Jerusalem. And God has assured them through the prophet Isaiah saying basically, I will save Jerusalem unilaterally myself.

Don't worry. Because what was happening in the minds of people and in the counselors of the people of that day is surely they would want to go to their neighbor and sign some peace treaty. If you help us out with the Assyrians, if you ever get, if ever an enemy comes to your border, we're there for you too. And so surely there's these schemings that would have been, all of us would have been thinking, how can we save ourselves?

[ 14 : 21 ] And God has already said, I've got it. Stop. And to make his point, this is the quote from Isaiah. He says, I will destroy the wisdom otherwise.

All of your counselors that are trying to save you through the scheming that they have going on. I will destroy what you perceive to be wise and the discernment of the discerning that you think you have in your nation of Israel.

I'm going to thwart it. It's going to come to nothing. I myself will save you. God is saying. And so he's saying, those who are saved, it is the power of God.

And only the power of God by which someone can save, just like in Isaiah's day, when God unilaterally said, I'll save you from the Assyrians. And all your little counselors and all your little wisdom, it's going to come to nothing.

It's going to be a demonstration of my power and my wisdom that you are saved. And just to spotlight the wisdom of God, Isaiah later in his book, God is speaking through his prophet.

[ 15 : 39 ] He says, who has measured the waters in the halo of his hand? So take all of the world's oceans. And God has just said, it's just that much.

That's how much water. Who's done that? What man has done that? And who has, with the breath of his hand, marked the heavens? Heavens are ye far.

We call that the universe that we know and see. But God has just said, it's right there. Right there. That's how far it should go. Right there. Who did that?

Oh, and he's not done. And who has held the dust of the earth in a basket? All the farmland. And who has weighed the mountains and the scales and the hills on the other side? Who has weighed those?

So it's just so. And he's not done. Who can fathom the spirit of the Lord, who is the counselor, and instruct the Lord as his counselor? You know, the spirit of the Lord, give counsel to the Lord.

[16:39] Who is that? Who can give counsel to the Lord? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him? And who taught him the right way?

Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

If I was being questioned like this, I would be feeling pretty small. Where one second ago I may have been feeling pretty big.

Could you enlighten the Lord with your understanding and give him wisdom? Could you measure the water and the palm of your hand?

The message of the cross is in reality a message filled with and epitomizes the divine wisdom.

When we share the gospel, the message of the cross, you are sharing the divine reality of God's wisdom.

[17:47] And it has the power to save. The message that God condescended to earth was born of a virgin, lived perfectly, died sacrificially, rose victoriously, forgiving sin for all those who believe.

It's the power of God that saves for those who... And so what is the height of folly? The height of folly is to reject God's wisdom, is to reject God's power.

That's the height of folly. And for those who are perishing, they reject it.

So then in verse 20 to further cement this argument that the cross is folly to those who are perishing, he asks four questions.

The first three questions imply or have the anticipated answer is nowhere. So here at fourth, sometimes we have a participatory sermon and so you're going to be saying nowhere.

[19:03] So look with me in verse 20 and we're going to answer the first three questions with nowhere. Are we ready? Okay, so here we go. Where is the one who is wise?

Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Nowhere. And then the last question anticipates the response, yes, he has.

And so here's the last question. Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? Yes, he has. That's the anticipated answer of those questions.

And he is using that device as a way to cement his argument even further.

Paul's rhetorical question makes the point the Lord is unmasking the people who falsely suppose they are wise, along with their purported wisdom.

[20:08] And he is cementing the argument in verse 18, the thesis statement, that the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God.

In verse 21, then, Paul now explains, if you will, an explanation of his rhetorical questions in verse 20.

He says in verse 21, for since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, but it pleased God that through folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

If you will, this is a summary statement of what Paul earlier wrote in the book of Romans, for we read this in Romans.

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.

[21:13] And although they claimed to be wise, they became foolish and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal humans, being, mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

Human beings are deficient of this wisdom that God has. So God in his genuine wisdom chooses a means that the world regarded as foolish, the cross of Christ, in order to save those who would believe in Him.

The words are flavored with irony, if you read verse 21. For it pleased God that through the foolishness of what we preached to save those who believe, it's filled with irony.

We come to our third point that Paul is making, and that's how he cements his argument of the thesis statement. Then he moves on and he further solidifies his thesis, and it says that in these

next three verses, rather, it says Christ crucified will learn this, that Christ crucified is the wisdom and the power of God in contrast with human wisdom.

So we read in verse 22, the Jews demand signs, and the Greeks seek wisdom. The Jews demand signs. If you think of yourself as a Jewish person in the first century, you have been groomed on signs and wonders.

[ 22 : 44 ] You have been groomed to believe that God, if something is of God, it should be evidenced, if you will, by a miracle, to truly know that it is evidenced of a work of God.

You have been groomed on miracles. Let me just walk you through Israel's history. God created everything out of nothing. You know that from your Hebrew Scriptures in Genesis 1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Secondly, God flooded the earth in Noah's day and saved eight people on a big boat, along with the other animals. Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac, well past childbearing day, years.

God saved Israel out of a global famine by placing them and taking them down to Egypt with Joseph. God saved Israel out of Egypt through the ten plagues and parted the Red Sea for them on, brought them out into the wilderness.

He provided manna for them to eat for 40 years. He brought forth water by striking of a rock. He led them to the promised land and stopped the Jordan River once the leaders of Israel stepped foot.

[ 23 : 59 ] God accepted Elijah's waterlogged sacrifice with fire from heaven. God raised the widow at Zarephath at the hand of Elijah. God raised the Shunammite woman's son through the servant Elisha.

God closed the mouth of lions for Daniel. God protected Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. God provided a big fish or a whale for Jonah to preserve his life for three days and spit him up on dry ground.

And we can go on. This is just a thimble's worth of the miracles that we know from the Old Scripture. So when it says that Jews seek for signs, demand signs, is this a work of God?

They're demanding signs. Then we come to the New Testament. Jesus was born of a virgin. That's a miracle. Jesus calmed the storms. He walked on water. He turned water into wine. He fed the 5,000. Jesus healed the nobleman's son, the leper, the paralytic, the woman with the flow of blood.

[ 25 : 08 ] He raised from the dead the widow of Nain's son, Jerus' daughter, and his friend Lazarus, and he himself rose from the grave. And then we find to conclude the book of John.

John writes these words. And think with me what Jews wanted. They demand signs. They demand signs. And this is how the Gospel of John concludes.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these, the miracles that are recorded in the book of John, these were written that you may believe in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Even the signs that Jesus did perform that Jews did not believe. But they still demand signs. And the Greek seek after wisdom.

In Acts 17 we have Mars Hill debate with the apostle Paul. But in verse 23, so Jews are seeking for signs.

[ 26 : 16 ] And Greeks are seeking after wisdom. If you will, the signs would be a symbol of the power of God and the wisdom would be the wisdom of this world. The Greeks are seeking for wisdom.

That's what they're looking for. And so Paul says, I am showing you the power and the wisdom of God because look what I'm doing. But we preach Christ crucified.

And that is the wisdom and the power of God that we already have seen. But it's a stumbling block to the Jews and it's foolishness or folly to the Gentiles.

And look how these verses are building on each other. In verse 24, But to those who are called both Jews and Greek Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Christ and the cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We have one message. Jesus Christ and him crucified on the cross.

[ 27 : 28 ] And that is the wisdom and the power of God. Jews are looking for signs as evidence of his power. I'm telling you Jesus Christ and him crucified to forgive sin, to give you a new nature, to inhabit you with the Holy Spirit, to be redeemed, to be forgiven of sin.

That is the expression of the power of God and his wisdom to redeem you. That's it. He is communicating the wisdom and the power of God in proclaiming Christ. I want to pause here for one moment. And I see Karris and Tyler here today and I see Danny and these folks have prepared and are preparing themselves to go and be sent and reach the most unreached.

And we get to be a part of that and Pastor Eric will go to the South Hill and plant a church and we get to be a part of sending him. But those are not the only folks that I see today.

I see you. I see you. And we have one message. What is it that will save though?

[ 28 : 49 ] What message is it? And by what power is it that the most unreached in this world who have never heard his name will believe?

One thing. Jesus Christ and him crucified. That message has the power to save. That's it. What is it that Pastor Eric and those who will be sent to the South Hill? What message is it that will save? One message that is a demonstration of the power and the wisdom of God and it's Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And what is it that all of us have this message that we have that will, it's a demonstration of God's power and his wisdom and not just a demonstration.

It is the power and the wisdom to save. Jesus Christ and him crucified. You may know that next Sunday we will not be meeting.

[ 29 : 55 ] And among the reasons for that is you will have the opportunity to spend time with friends and family on that day.

You may. And you will have the opportunity, by the way, this is a bag that is out in the foyer as you're dismissed.

We ask that every family take one of these. There's some ornaments and things like this. You may hear a little bit later. But among the things that are in here, I want to express appreciation to Heather and Josh for putting these together.

It is this Christmas devotional. It has songs to sing as a family, as you gather or as you find yourself. And on Christmas morning, take this and read this through this week and see how you can incorporate this because you'll have the opportunity to have one message with your friends and family.

And it's Jesus Christ and him crucified. Yes, we celebrate his birth during this time, but you have the opportunity to be incredible witnesses to your family. And this is just a helpful tool for you to do that.

[ 31 : 11 ] And I look forward to all of us, no matter where we find ourselves this Christmas, having the opportunity to spend time with the Lord using a little tool and to potentially proclaim this wonderful message that is a demonstration of the power of God that saves Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Would you believe in him? Paul lastly concludes the paragraph with his thesis statement in verse 18.

We read, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God. It is a demonstration of the wisdom and power of God. In verse 25, he concludes, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

So lastly, the last point that he makes here in verse 25 is in the cross, God surpasses human wisdom and he surpasses human power.

It's amazing to me, this week or last week, I forget which day it occurred, but for the first time in human history, scientists in California produced the first fusion reaction that we have ever been able to do.

[ 32 : 41 ] We've had nuclear fission, but now we produced that which occurs in the sun fusion and it lasted a millisecond. It occurred and it was gone. I remember reading about this and I was thinking, God has done that in the stars that we see at night and it's been going on for years.

We think we're so powerful, it lasted that long and it was gone. It's taken us to this day to finally be able to do that. And I just, nuclear fusion, I just don't understand it in two words, it's complicated, I don't, I'm not saying it's a little cakewalk and so sorry, Kamesh, you don't want to give credit to those people who understand things a little more than I do, it's just complicated.

But I'm thinking, we think we're so powerful and just look in the stars, feel the warmth of the sun and God has been doing that a long time.

But here's what I want us to see, the wisdom and the power of God is not in this text related to what he created, but what he does to redeem humanity, to forgive sin.

You want to know what it is that is the full expression, what it is that is the wisdom and the power of God, it is the person of Jesus Christ and his work on the cross that is the expression.

[ 34 : 17 ] And we need to be unashamed in sharing that good news and you think, well, what if they express it? It's to their folly they reject it. If they reject it, it's to their folly and we ought not to gloat if and when someone rejects the gospel.

Here's why we read that in 2 Corinthians said, it is the God of this age that blinds people from seeing the light of the gospel. It is the God of this age, but then you think, well, who is stronger than the God of this age?

Satan, the one who created Satan, he's just the fallen angel. And the one who is more powerful than Satan, who can overcome that with the good news of the gospel, the expression of the wisdom and the power of God is the gospel.

So the very thing that blinds people, God has the ability to overcome with the articulation of the gospel.

And for those who are being saved, it is the wisdom and the power of God. I think we have no greater message. We know, I don't think we have no greater message than the gospel of Jesus Christ, the person Jesus Christ and his work on the cross is the greatest thing we have.

[ 35 : 49 ] So this Christmas, this next year, may we be diligent in sharing this good news that has the power to save.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for being entrusted with this good news, the good news of Jesus Christ.

We thank you that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We thank you that no one is saved apart from you.

Lord, forgive us for thinking we are wise when the height of human wisdom pales in comparison to yours and the height of human ingenuity and creation and all that we think we're powerful about pales.

I cannot forgive sin. I cannot die on a cross to forgive anyone. I cannot redeem humanity. No one can but you.

[ 37 : 02 ] So may we be excellent communicators of what you have done. And it's in your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.