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The Foolishness of Worldly Wisdom

1: 18-31

The foolishness of worldly wisdom DIG: What makes the message of the gospel foolish in the eyes of the world? Why did ADONAI ordain a gospel that the world would find foolish? How do Yeshua's life and death reveal the wisdom and power of YHVH? In what ways is God's wisdom different from worldly "wisdom?" What does Paul ask the Corinthian believers to remember in verse 26? Why do you think Paul feels the need to point this out to them? What does Paul mean in verse 27 when he says, "God chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the strong?" So, what do believers brag about?

REFLECT: Which aspects of the gospel - Yeshua's life, death, and resurrection - do you think are difficult for the modern mind to understand and accept? Why? In what ways has the world tried to convince you that believing in ADONAI is foolish? How have you sought God's guidance rather than relying on your intellect or the advice of others? Explain the circumstances and outcome. How can you better ignore the false messages around you and think more like YHVH? How can you determine if an idea is worldly "wisdom?" What are some benefits of living according to God's wisdom instead of worldly "wisdom?"

God works best when I consider my weakness.

Some things don't change. Today, as in **Paul's** day, believing in **Yeshua** is a stumbling block for some people. Especially "educated" people, with degrees behind their names. They label **the gospel** message as too simple, too unbelievable, or too unrealistic.⁴¹



The superiority of God's wisdom (1:18): When the worldly wise elevate their own "wisdom," they automatically attempt to lower **God's wisdom**, which to them looks like **foolishness**, because it conflicts with their own way of thinking. That one man (even **the Son of God**) could die on a piece of wood, on an ordinary hill, in an unremarkable part of the world and thereby determine the destiny of every person who has ever lived seems stupid to them. It allows no place for their ability, accomplishments, understanding or pride. **For the message about the cross is foolishness** (Greek: *moria*, where the English word *moron* comes from) **to those in the process of being destroyed, but to us in the process of being saved it is the power of God (1:18)**. Everyone is either in **the process of being saved** (sanctified until we are glorified), or being **destroyed**. One's view of **the cross** determines which.

The permanence of God's wisdom: Indeed, God says: **I will destroy the "wisdom" of the wise and frustrate the intelligence of the intelligent (1:19-20)**. Paul uses a quote from **Isaiah 29:14** to emphasize that the "wisdom" of mankind will be destroyed (see the commentary on **Isaiah**, to see link click [Ep - Woe to Those Who Go to Great Depths to Hide Their Plans from the LORD](#)). **Isaiah's** teaching will have its ultimate fulfillment in the last days, when all the world's philosophies and objections to **the gospel** will be swept away (see the commentary on **Revelation Ex - The Eight Stage Campaign of Armageddon**), and all the world's "wisdom" will become ashes.⁴²

Where does that leave the philosopher, the Torah-teacher, or any of today's thinkers? Hasn't God made this world's "wisdom" look pretty foolish (First Corinthians 1:20; Isaiah 19:12, 33:18 and 44:25; Job 12:17)? One cannot help but read between the lines in **Paul's** indictment of those who consider themselves to be worldly "wise." **He** no doubt remembered the days, not so long ago, when **he himself** fell into that

category. I mean, if ever a guy thought he had the corner on the market when it came to being “wise,” Paul was that guy (**Philippians 3:4-6**)! He was one of Judaism’s brightest scholars. Don’t get me wrong. To be a student of the Scriptures is a good thing. But to be a student of the Scriptures apart from **the Messiah** of the Scriptures is meaningless. **Yeshua Himself** said: **You keep examining the TaNaKh because you think that in it you have eternal life. Those very Scriptures bear witness to me (John 5:39).**⁴³ Peace, joy, hope, harmony, and every other desire of mankind is out of reach as long as **any of today’s thinkers** have **their** own way in trying to achieve them. **Those** who see **the cross** as **foolishness** are doomed by **their own foolishness**.

The power of God’s wisdom (1:21-25): For God’s wisdom ordained that the world, using its own “wisdom,” would not come to know Him. Therefore, God decided to use the foolishness of what we proclaim as his means of saving those who come to trust in it (1:21). ADONAI chose to use what the world’s “wisdom” counts as foolishness, to save those of the world who would simply trust in it. Trusting implies complete agreement to all the truth of the saving Good News. For those who will exchange their “wisdom” for His, the Lord offers a new birth and eternal life (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). This foolishness is the only hope of mankind.⁴⁴

Dear Heavenly Father, Praise Your great love and wisdom to give Your holy and perfect righteousness to those who love and follow You. He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21). There is no way in any religion for a sinner to be made righteous and so be able to enter heaven. You are so holy that You cannot allow someone to enter your perfect heaven who had even one tiny sinful thought. No one is perfect, so getting to heaven by works is a foolish thought.

What a joy that You not only give us Your righteousness, but You adopt us as Your children! But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (Jn 1:12). We run to You as a young child would, and climb up on Your lap, giving you a big hug of thanks for Your overwhelming kindness, for the wonderful relationship and for saving us from sin’s penalty (Rom 10:9-10). You are Awesome and what a wise thing it is to trust and to follow You in every detail of our lives! In Yeshua’s name and the power of His resurrection. Amen

Precisely because Jews ask for signs of God’s power as proof of His Messiahship (1:22a). But Yeshua, during His time on earth, repeatedly refused to give a sign on

demand, except for predicting **His** resurrection (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Fv - The Pharisees and Sadducees Ask for a Sign](#)), so disbelieving **Jews** asserted that no **sign** of **Yeshua's** Messiahship had been given. Even today, Orthodox **Jews** demand a **sign**, saying, "Until **the Messiah** does the works of **the Messiah**, we cannot call **him the Messiah**." However, some of **His** miracles were regarded in Judaism specifically as Messianic **signs** (see the commentary on [Isaiah G1 - The Three Messianic Miracles](#)). Others seek a **sign** not from **Yeshua** directly, but from those who claim to act in **His name**. Yet, a miracle, in and of itself, is not proof **Yeshua** is **the Messiah**, for there are demonic miracles (**Matthew 24:24; Second Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:3-4**). Nor are miracles necessary for **trust** (**John 20:28**). Therefore, no one has to wait for a **sign** before **trusting Yeshua Messiah**.

And Greeks try to find "wisdom" (1:22b). Paul frequently used the word **Greeks** as a synonym for "Gentiles." But here, **he** is probably speaking of a trait characteristic of the ancient **Greeks**, **their** desire to increase control over **their** surroundings through acquiring knowledge. Though useful if properly applied (like scientific advances), the presumption that **God** can be contacted, **sin** forgiven, or ultimate meaning attained through "**wisdom**" is itself an act of **faith** and a misplaced one that is known as Gnosticism. It is targeted in the B'rit Chadashah as an enemy of the Good News, especially in the letter to the church at Colosse.

Today there is a revival of Gnosticism under various names. Also, there are many **Jews** and Gentiles who believe that worldly "**wisdom**" is the key to everything; to deal with their intellectual objection to the Good News requires endless rounds of philosophical demonstration. But no amount of worldly "**wisdom**" is enough to bring them to **faith** in **ADONAI** and **His Messiah**. On the contrary, the intellectual objections will melt away once the intellect itself has been brought to obey **God's** truth. For **YHVH**, who created the intellect, has not set it in opposition to **trust**. For **the person who is righteous will live his life by trust (Rom 1:17)**.⁴⁵

Those who put their trust in modern **signs** and miracles are not saved by that **faith**, no matter how earnestly they call on the name of **the Lord**. The object of genuine **faith** is **the Lord Yeshua Messiah**, not anyone's **signs** or miracles (**Galatians 2:16**). Paul made it **his** goal to **proclaim a Messiah executed** (Greek: *estavromenon*, meaning *crucified*) **on a stake as a criminal! To Jews this is an obstacle** (Greek: *skandalon*, from which we get the English word *scandal*), or a stumbling stone (**1:23a**), because all Jewish hopes in the Messiah centered on **His** restoring **self-rule to Isra'el (Acts 1:6-7)** and ushering in the Messianic Kingdom (see the commentary on [Isaiah Ap - They Will Beat Their Swords](#)

into Plowshares). Given such expectations, a **Messiah executed** by Roman oppressors, seems to be an insurmountable **obstacle**. But a careful reading of the TaNaKh shows that the obstacle is removed by understanding that the prophets predicted an inglorious First Coming of **Messiah** to die for the **sins** of the world (**Isaiah 52:11 to 53:10; Zechariah 9:9 and 12:10**) before being resurrected (**Isaiah 53:10 and Psalm 16:10**), returning to **the Father in Heaven (Psalm 110:1)** and coming again in glory to fulfill these hopes (see the commentary on **Isaiah Kg - The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**).

And at the same time, **to Greeks it is nonsense (1:23b)**. The entire concept of a **Messiah** who acts in history even to bring peace, let alone be an atonement for **sin**, is foolishness to those whose gnostic **“wisdom”** leads them to a more abstract, pseudo-spiritual concept of **God**, or show skepticism makes them deny **God** altogether. Many of today’s **Jews** and Gentiles are in this regard, **“Greeks”** in **their** thinking.⁴⁶ **Yeshua** said that those who reject Scripture will not believe, even if they witness a resurrection: **If they won’t listen to Moshe and the Prophets, they won’t be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (Lk 16:31)!⁴⁷**

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, this same Messiah is God’s power and God’s wisdom! For God’s “nonsense” is wiser than humanity’s “wisdom,” and God’s “weakness” is stronger than humanity’s “strength” (1:24-25). Paul now brings closure to **his** argument by stating that **ADONAI** is both **wiser** and more powerful than mere **human beings**. In **the cross God “outsmarted” His human beings** and thereby nullified **their “wisdom.”** One can scarcely conceive of a more important - and more difficult - message for people today who simply cannot stand for **God** doing things **His** own way without help. Such **“weakness”** is a disgrace to those who think of themselves as righteous and not needing forgiveness; but to those who recognize themselves as in need of mercy, this is the Good News that sets us free to follow our **Savior**. Thus, this **weakness** is also the ultimate power, and therefore the true **wisdom of God.⁴⁸**

The paradox of God’s wisdom (1:26-28): Just look at yourselves, brothers — look at those whom God has called! Not many of you are wise by the world’s standards, not many wield power or boast noble birth (1:26). Those who consider themselves wise, powerful or rich often despise the Good News because of **Yeshua’s** humble origins; but the teachings of **Messiah** lend no support to such conceit or arrogance. **The Kingdom of God** is for **the poor (Luke 6:20)** and **the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3)**, who are willing to set aside vested economic and academic interests in order to come as **little children (Luke 14:26-33)**. Simple people often have less faulty-education to overcome and less attachment to the status quo that might be a hindrance to their coming to **faith**.

Uniquely, **Jews** have a Scriptural reason not to hold the powerless in contempt. **Moses** told the Israelites: **ADONAI didn't set his heart on you or choose you because you numbered more than any other people - on the contrary, you were the fewest of all peoples. Rather, it was because Adonai loved you, and because he wanted to keep the oath which he had sworn to your ancestors, that Adonai brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).**

Nevertheless, one finds some non-Messianic Jews looking down on Messianic Judaism as attracting only **Jews** who are ignorant, emotionally unstable or poor, and only '*am-ha'aretz* (**Acts 4:13**), meaning *rabble* or *hicks* are fooled by it. But the truth of the matter is that some Messianic **Jews** are wealthy, socially prominent, well-adjusted, well-educated, and a number of rabbis have come to **faith**.⁴⁹ But the non-Messianic Jews aren't the only ones who look down on Messianic Judaism. The Gentile Church, by-and-large, also ignores Messianic congregations (see the commentary on **Romans Cy - The Jealousy of the Gentile Believers**).

But God chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise; God chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the strong; and God chose what the world looks down on as common or regarded as nothing in order to bring to nothing what the world considers important (1:27-28). God is not looking for geniuses to save and do **His** work. Nor is **He** looking for millionaires, famous athletes, entertainers or politicians. His salvation is open to them just as surely as it is to others, but only on the basis of **faith**. The very things that put them ahead in the world may actually put them behind with **God**. It is the feeling of inadequacy that makes people aware that they have a need, and that need often draws them to **Yeshua**.⁵⁰

The purpose of God's wisdom (1:29-31): The first and primary purpose of **the wisdom of God** that produces salvation is that **He** be glorified. **No one** will ever have a reason to **boast before God** because **He** has done everything for us: **For you have been delivered by grace through trusting, and even this is not your accomplishment but God's gift. You were not delivered by your own actions; therefore no one should boast (Ephesians 2:9).** But **ADONAI** also has a purpose for those who are saved. **God's** purpose for **His children** has many aspects, **four** of which are mentioned here. **It is his doing that you are united with the Messiah Yeshua. He has become wisdom for us from God, and righteousness and holiness and redemption as well (1:29-30)!**

First, believers are given God's wisdom: We are not only saved by **God's wisdom** rather than our own, but are given **God's wisdom** to replace our own. **Now if any of**

you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously and without reproach; and it will be given to him (James 1:5). Believers can say, without pride of self-boasting, that they have become **wise** in **Yeshua Messiah**. We stand as a testimony for all time, that **God**, in **His wisdom**, chose the **sinful, the weak**, and the unwise in order to make them **righteous, strong, and wise**. **ADONAI** gives us **His wisdom** so that **He** might be glorified. That it might be clearly seen that our **wisdom** is not our own, but is by **His** power and grace.

Second, believers receive God's righteousness: We are **justified** in **His** sight (see the commentary [Romans Ba - The Picture of Justification](#)) and participate in **His righteousness**. When we **trust** in **His Son**, all the **righteousness** of **Messiah** is transferred to our spiritual bank account (**Phil 3:9**). **God made Yeshua who had no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21)**. When **God** looks down at us, **He** doesn't see our **sin**, **He** sees **His Son's righteousness**. Man can never generate his own **righteousness**. The only **righteousness** we have is that which **God** gives through **His Son**. It is the only **righteousness** we need because it is perfect **righteousness**.

Third, believers receive God's sanctification: In **Messiah** we are **sanctified**, or set apart, and made **holy**. It is as if we have one foot in this world and one foot in heaven. With the flesh still present, we can slip into **sin**, but only intermittently. As we spiritually mature the frequency of **sin** decreases without ever reaching perfection. But our positional righteousness gradually becomes more and more of a reality. As we are given life in **the Spirit**, we begin to **walk in the Spirit (Romans 8:4-11)**. We begin to bear **the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)** as we are being **transformed into the image of Messiah (Second Corinthians 3:18)**. **For we are of God's making, created in union with Messiah Yeshua for a life of good actions already prepared by God for us to do (Ephesians 2:10)**.

Fourth, believers receive God's redemption: To **redeem** means *to buy back*. **God the Father** through **God the Son**, with the ministry of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** purchased us from the power of **sin**. **Messiah guarantees our inheritance until we come into possession of it and thus bring Him praise commensurate with His glory (Ephesians 1:14)**. **Peter** reminds us that we **were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (First Peter 1:18-19)**.⁵¹

Although we have received **Messiah's wisdom, righteousness, holiness** and

redemption, we have no grounds for pride or **boasting**, because we did not deserve, earn, or produce any of them. The “**wisdom**” of the world cannot produce any of these. It can only produce pride, misunderstanding, strife, and division. As **Jeremiah** had written hundreds of years earlier (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Bt - Let Not the Wise Boast of Their Wisdom**) before **Paul** quoted him, “**Let anyone who wants to boast, boast about ADONAI**” (1:31). “**May it never be,**” he wrote the **Galatians**, “**that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Galatians 6:14 NASB).

God’s power in your weakness: As Rick Warren relates in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, **God** loves to use **weak** people. Everyone has **weaknesses**. In fact, you have a bundle of flaws and imperfections: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. You may also have uncontrollable circumstances that weaken you, such as financial or relational limitations. The more important issue is what you do with these. Usually we deny our **weaknesses**, defend **them**, excuse **them**, hide **them**, and resent **them**. This prevents **the Lord** from using **them** in the way **He** desires.

ADONAI has a different perspective on your **weaknesses**. **He** says: **My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways (Isaiah 55:8)**. So often **He** acts in ways that are the exact opposite of what we expect. We think that **God** only wants to use our strengths, but **He** also wants to use our **weaknesses** for **His** glory. Above, Paul says that **God chose . . . what the world considers weak in order to shame the strong (1:27)**. Your **weaknesses** are not an accident. **YHVH** deliberately allowed them in your life for the purpose of demonstrating **His** power through you.

God has never been impressed with the strength of self-sufficiency. In fact, **He** is drawn to people who are weak and admit it. **Yeshua** regarded this recognition of our need as being **poor in spirit**. It’s the number one attitude **He** blesses (**Matthew 5:3**). The Bible is filled with examples of how **ADONAI** loves to use imperfect, ordinary people to do extraordinary things in spite of their **weaknesses**. If **God** only used perfect people, nothing would ever get done, because none of us are perfect. That **the Lord** uses imperfect people is encouraging news for all of us.

A weakness, or thorn, as **Paul** called it (**2 Cor 12:7**), is not a **sin** or a vice or a character defect that you can change, such as overeating or impatience. A weakness is any limitation that you inherited or have no power to change. It may be a physical limitation, like a handicap, a chronic illness like asthma, naturally low energy, or a disability. It may be an emotional limitation, such as a trauma scar, a hurtful memory, a personality quirk, or a hereditary disposition. Or it may be a talent or intellectual limitation. We’re not all super bright or talented.

When you think of a limitation in your life, you may be tempted to conclude, “**God** could never use me.” But **ADONAI** is never limited by our limitations. In fact, **He** enjoys putting **His** great power into ordinary containers. Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) was born blind, but she wrote more than 9,000 hymns, some of which are the most popular in the congregations of **God** today. The Bible says: **We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us (Second Corinthians 4:7 CEV).** Like common pottery, we are fragile and flawed and break easily. But **the Lord** will use it if we allow **Him** to work through our **weaknesses**.⁵²