

The believers at Corinth were experiencing contentions and tending to split up into small groups. They were choosing sides on doctrinal issues and following separate leaders rather than following Christ together. Late in his life Paul declares regarding the last days:

*2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*

The Corinthians hadn't reached this point yet but they were headed that way. They tended to have pet doctrines they liked to emphasize and pet teachers they liked to hear, and scorned seemingly "inept" teachers that are difficult to listen to. We need to beware of this very human tendency as well.

Paul has the remedy. The Gospel. Christ, and Him crucified. The Corinthian assembly included believers of Jewish background and those of Gentile background. Like all of us they tended to "have inherited" or brought along with them their values, traditions and thinking from before becoming saved. As disciples of Christ we are to follow Him and secondarily those (like Paul) that followed Him. The Corinthians, being Greek by nationality and culture, tended to overvalue wisdom. Actually it was the wisdom of man not God's wisdom, for God certainly values wisdom. See Proverbs for God's wisdom and see Ecclesiastes for an example of man's wisdom displayed in contrast to God's wisdom. But the preaching of the cross was to the unsaved but foolishness. It appears foolish both to deep thinkers and to the "ordinary man on the street." But the preaching of the cross of Christ is powerful to convict hearts of unbelievers.

*Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

The Holy Spirit has been pleased to use what men count foolishness as a means to bring them to Christ. God has confounded the wisdom of the wise who pompously declare it to be nonsense by using this "nonsense" to convict men and draw them to Christ. It is too simple, too free (to man), too costly (to Christ and God), too condemning to man's proud heart for men to even dream of such a thing, much less accept it even when they hear it. Yet through the gentle power of the Spirit working upon in their hearts some do, despite themselves. Praise the Lord.

But Paul says the Jews desire a sign, the Gentiles

wisdom. Most men fall into these categories today as well. Some demand God show Himself **to them** personally though some sign or miracle. Others demand the right to **choose**, or even to concoct, the **religion of their choice**. Both are proud, wrong and fall short of what God has for us. (Rom 3:23)

What are signs? A sign is some supernatural incident that accompanies a messenger purporting to be bring God's message.

*Hebrews 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; 4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?*

The necessary signs have already been given and dutifully recorded in scripture. What more do we need? Do we demand new signs? Weren't the first signs convincing enough? Can't we believe the historical record? (It takes faith to take another's word for something.) Aren't the writers of the New Testament good, honest, reliable witnesses? The signs have been given, the miracles worked, the gospel preached and still they hesitate. There is another aspect to this issue which Paul is going to treat later in the letter. The Corinthian believers were overvaluing signs and sign gifts, tongues, miracles, healing. So Paul lays the foundation for his admonishment regarding performance of signs and use of sign gifts for personal glory and congregational excitement. The necessary signs had been given. The sign gifts would soon cease (ch 13:8).

But what about wisdom. We, rightly, greatly value wisdom, but Paul says wisdom of words can make the cross of Christ without effect. What does he mean? The saving message is embodied in the faithful preaching of the cross, not in human persuasiveness, human eloquence or human reasoning. The preaching, as produced by the Holy Spirit through the servant He chooses, may indeed contain some wisdom, some rationale, and be delivered with intense personal conviction and power. May it be so always. But preaching the cross of Christ is not a mere sermon. The preacher's reputation, his abilities or even his earnestness and sincerity are not what convinces men of sin. It is the preaching of Christ and Him crucified that is the power of God unto salvation. Stick with that, be personally full of Christ, and open your mouth and let the power of the Holy Spirit fill it.

By Ron Canner, October 2, 2002