

1 Corinthians series: #4
Sense and Nonsense
Text: 1 Corinthians 1: 19-25
Introduction

Confusion reigns in our world. The cause of this confusion is a mystery to many people.

The Bible says it is caused in part by God's sense being regarded by man's nonsense, and man's sense being dismissed as nonsense by God.

So as we look at this portion of scripture this morning, we are dealing with 'sense' and 'nonsense'. And the two main points are as follows:

1. The sense that is nonsense and
2. The nonsense that makes sense.

So pull out your Bible, turn to 1 Corinthians and join with me as we grapple with verses 19-25 of chapter 1.

1. **THE SENSE THAT IS NONSENSE** – 'Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world' [v. 20]

The birth of worldly wisdom [Rom 1: 18-23]

If we want to know where human 'wisdom' has its beginnings, its birth, we need to turn to another passage. Turn with me to Romans 1: 18-23. Romans 1:18-23 ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Clearly three things are shown to us about how worldly wisdom have come about:

- **Resistance to righteousness of God** [v. 18]

men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. The natural inclination of mankind is to suppress truth for what we would naturally want to believe.

- **Rejection of revelation of God** [vv. 19-20]

¹⁹ **For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.** ²⁰ **For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.**

In the 1980's Papua New Guinea missionary Don Richardson wrote a book '**eternity in their hearts**' in which his premise was: '**that in every culture God has preserved for Himself a testimony. In His mercy, He has permitted every culture in the world to retain a portion of the truth.**' So all cultures have moved from knowledge of 'one God' to where they are today believing in multi gods or lesser gods.

- **Refusal to recognize God**

²¹ **For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.** ²² **Claiming to be wise, they became fools,**

When people follow their own path of resistance to God's righteousness, and then the rejection of His revelation they end up with a refusal to recognize God – which the Bible says leads to the futility of their thinking – or worldly wisdom!

The growth of worldly wisdom

So then how does worldly wisdom grow? Let me suggest that there are two tracks that people go down.

The first is: **The practical approach** – 'the Jews seek signs' [1 Cor 1:22a]

Now how does that play out? Well in two 'isms' that are very prominent in our world today.

Materialism:

1. *Philosophy*. The theory that physical matter is the only reality and that everything, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of matter and physical phenomena.
2. The theory or attitude that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life.
3. A great or excessive regard for worldly concerns.

Secularism:

1. Religious skepticism or indifference.
2. The view that religious considerations should be excluded from civil affairs or public education.

The second is **The philosophical approach** – ‘the Greeks seek wisdom’ [v. 22b]

Idealism

1. The act or practice of envisioning things in an ideal form.
2. Pursuit of one's ideals.
3. Idealized treatment of a subject in literature or art.
4. *Philosophy*. The theory that the object of external perception, in itself or as perceived, consists of ideas.

Naturalism – here is an explanation from ‘the center for naturalism’

The naturalist understands not only that we are not exceptions to natural laws, but that we don't need to be in order to secure any central value (freedom, human rights, morality, moral responsibility) or capacity (reason, empathy, ingenuity, originality). We can positively affirm and celebrate the fact that *nature is enough*. Indeed, the realization that we are fully natural creatures has profoundly positive effects, increasing our sense of connection to the world and others, fostering tolerance, compassion and humility, and giving us greater control over our circumstances. This realization supports a progressive and effective engagement with the human condition in all its dimensions. So we can justly call it **worldview naturalism: an overarching cognitive, ethical and existential framework that serves the same function as supernatural worldviews, but without trafficking in illusions**. By staying true to science, our most reliable means of representing reality, naturalists find

themselves at home in the cosmos, astonished at the sheer scope and complexity of the natural world, and grateful for the chance to participate in the grand project of nature coming to know herself.

Existentialism

a chiefly 20th century philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines but centering on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad

The death of worldly wisdom

It cannot meet man's deepest needs [v. 20] – always questions and few answers:

1 Corinthians 1:20 ²⁰ 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?

It cannot lead to man's highest end [v. 21] – no assurance of man's ultimate eternal end

1 Corinthians 1:21 ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

It cannot heal the world's greatest ills [James 3: 13-18] – see what James says is the fruit of genuine wisdom from God versus man's wisdom:

James 3:13-18 ¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

II. THE NONSENSE THAT MAKES SENSE –

1 Corinthians 1:23²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

As any of us who have made any public profession of our faith know by bitter experience the categories of people we have just described find the message of the cross either a stumbling block that they can't get past or sheer folly that doesn't make intellectual sense to them.

But look what Paul says here about God's wisdom:

The scope of God's wisdom

- It offers salvation to all who believe [v. 21]

1 Corinthians 1:21²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

- It calls to God all who respond [v.24]

1 Corinthians 1:24²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- It unites in Christ all who are saved [v. 24a]

1 Corinthians 1:24²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- It releases blessing to all who receive [v. 24b]

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The scandal of God's wisdom

- An insult to the practical

For those in the 'practical' camp – God's wisdom, God's solution, God's view is an insult – because it tells them that their solution doesn't work and they must look beyond, back to someone who has provided the solution and the power for them.

- A nonsense to the sophisticated

For **those in the philosophical and ‘sophisticated’ camp** – the wisdom of God is nonsense – because it requires them to look beyond into an order that requires faith.

The **scale of the wisdom of God** [v. 25]

1 Corinthians 1:25²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

God’s **foolishness** solves more than man’s wisdom

God’s **weakness** achieves more than man’s power

Conclusion:

We have not finished this topic – simply laid down the knowledge base about it which Paul then illustrates for the Corinthian believers in the next section – to which we will return in two weeks.

So hold these thoughts – recognizing that in Christ you have the mind of Christ, you have been told to ask for wisdom whenever you need it, and you have a greater resource than all the brilliant and philosophical minds of our day that do not know Him. And thank God that His wisdom can be understood by simple, ordinary human beings like us.