

# CHRIST AS WISDOM TO US FROM GOD: RIGHTEOUSNESS, SANCTIFICATION, AND REDEMPTION

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On his second ministry journey the apostle Paul visited the city of Corinth, a center of culture and learning in ancient Greece that was inhabited by many highly educated and philosophically minded people. He remained there for one year and six months, announcing the gospel to the Corinthians and teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:1, 11; 1 Cor. 1:17). Although the Corinthians honored rhetorical excellence and esteemed philosophical wisdom, Paul did not go to Corinth to exhibit superior speech or lofty human reasoning; instead, he proclaimed the mystery of God—Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the expression of Christ—not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (2:4), determining to not know anything among them except “Jesus Christ, and this One crucified” (v. 2). Through Paul’s faithful ministering of Christ, a number of philosophical Corinthians, being called into the fellowship of God’s Son, believed and were baptized into the name of Christ, and the church of God in Corinth was raised up (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:2-3, 6-7, 9, 13). However, in contrast to the apostle who desired to know only the all-inclusive Christ (and this One crucified), the believers in Corinth became distracted from the fellowship of God’s Son by the pursuit of worldly wisdom. Consequently, instead of growing unto maturity to be spiritual men blended together in the Body of Christ, the Corinthians remained soulish and even fleshly infants in Christ, being individualistic, self-centered, and divisive (2:14; 3:3; 11:18; 12:24; 14:20; 16:13). It was against such a backdrop that Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians to expose the vanity of the wisdom of this age and disclose the depths of the wisdom of God.

In order to recover the saints in Corinth from their distraction, Paul devotes much of the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians to contrasting the wisdom of men with the wisdom of God, belittling the former and uplifting the latter. He says that the wisdom of God so far surpasses the wisdom of men that even “the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1:25). Furthermore, he quotes Isaiah 29:14 concerning God’s strong intention to annihilate worldly wisdom: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of those who understand I will set aside” (1 Cor. 1:19). The apostle declares that God has purposefully made the wisdom of the world foolish (v. 20) and that in the eyes of God “the wisdom of the world is foolishness,” for in His unparalleled wisdom He “grasps the wise in their craftiness” (3:19). The apostles contrasted themselves with the “prudent” Corinthians by calling themselves “the foolish things of the world” whom God had chosen in order to shame the haughty boasters, “those who are wise” according to the flesh (4:10; 1:27).

Because they had abandoned their natural wisdom for the sake of Christ, the apostles were willing to appear foolish in the eyes of the wisdom-seeking Corinthians. Denouncing worldly wisdom as an impotent means of knowing God and as treacherous ground for the believers’ faith (1:21; 2:5), Paul proclaimed the gospel concerning