

## 1. Two Views of Power and Knowledge – Word of Wisdom &amp; Word of the Cross

## a. Wisdom Words of the World – Discovery of Truth

i. The essence of Man's wisdom is that "I can, by my thought, reason, intuition, meditation, or observation, *discover* ultimate reality."

1. Thus, Man perceives that his wisdom is equal to the wisdom which designed the world.
2. The ability to judge rightly exists within him, so he has the power to determine what is ultimately real, good, wise, and true
3. MAN is POWERFUL ENOUGH TO KNOW BY HIMSELF

## ii. Creature and Creator are ONE Substance

1. Plato delineated between two spheres of reality:

- a. The Logos – Reason, Plan, and Form as Ideal
- b. Matter – Eternal, Formless, Flux)
- c. Wisdom, in this system, was the pursuit of knowledge of the above sphere alone as having any good or virtue in it
  - i. Yet, the Matter, the stuff of the "earthy" was eternal and changeless, thus there was distinction between the "earthy" man (evil) and the "heavenly" man (virtuous)
  - ii. All the suffering in the world was due to Matter, the things seen, and only by getting rid of Matter could one be free from its evil and suffering

d. This is why resurrection was foolish to the Greeks: it restored Matter, which seemed stupid to them

2. Aristotle tried to soften his mentor's views

- a. Introduced "potentiality"
- b. Knowledge can only be achieved by recognizing this potentiality and the progressive stages of causation manipulated by speech (words)
- c. Yet, Matter still ruled, so suffering still existed

3. The Enlightenment maintained the unity of substance between Creature and Creator, but moved the dividing line between "spirituality" and "reason"

- a. Kant moved it even further: There is autonomy (self-law) in the spiritual, or ideal, or divine sphere, but one must adhere to Natural Law in the earthly sphere
- b. The result of this is that we have made wisdom out to be two co-existent and unrelated spheres of truth
  - i. The sphere of FACTS (lower sphere) – whereby only reason and science can give knowledge
  - ii. The sphere of FAITH (upper sphere) – whereby I am self-determined and able to make any truth my potential
- c. Thus, even Christians have swallowed the wisdom of the world and delineated between these two spheres, separating "earthly" from "heavenly" in such a way that they don't influence one another

## iii. This "wisdom" is assumed, not proven

1. The world presents the truth claim that Naturalism and Autonomy are absolutely proven, obvious, and self-evident

2. Yet, the presupposition which underlies all these “wisdoms” of history, that Man has the power to discover, observe, and judge reality accurately and without constraint is an assumption not proven
  - a. In other words, it is a religious claim, not a “scientific” claim
- iv. Paul quotes from Isaiah 29
  1. Prophecy of judgment b/c Israel was seeking a plan w/o looking and listening to God as their *functional* Savior
    - a. They turned to another power: Egypt
    - b. They perceived this power to be *functionally* more capable than God
  2. Yet, they still maintained their outward forms of worship
    - a. They said all the right “churchy” answers, but their functional trust was in Man, not God
    - b. “They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
    - c. They abandoned God as Center, moving His Word to serve their “wise” purposes
  3. God responded by telling them that he would “astound” them by “making the wisdom of the wise perish”
    - a. These are the words Paul uses with the Corinthian church
    - b. Anything that promises power, insight, knowledge, and wisdom but does not begin with nor depend upon God’s revelation through Christ crucified is NOT wisdom
  4. Man cannot see all variables or know all things, but God does
    - a. Even the post-modern straw man argument of the three blind men and the elephant presupposes a Narrator who can see all things
    - b. In this analogy, God is the Narrator and He TELLS the blind men that it’s an elephant, but they trust their blind eyes and faulty assumptions more than His declaration
    - c. Romans 1:18-32 – “they suppress the Truth in unrighteousness...knowing what God made plain to them...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator.”
- v. Paul shows the Corinthian church, a people composed of those who came to “make it” in a new city of opportunity, that the world’s methods and philosophies of power and status lead only to ruin (“to those being destroyed”)
- b. Word of the Cross – Revelation of Our Inability
  - i. The Cross is the epitome of God’s revelation of Truth
    1. You don’t figure it out, discover it, attain some measure of understanding by which you are then able to save yourself
    2. You are absolutely, sovereignly, divinely rescued from your sin by the sheer powerful working of God in Christ Jesus
      - a. The Holy Spirit regenerates your dead heart which hated God, refused His Word, and which cried out “let us break their chains” to God and to His Son (Psalm 2)
      - b. Jesus Christ atones for your sins, paying down your great debt of evil against God, against Man, and against Creation, with His own holy blood
      - c. The Father raises the Son up again to rule the world, to restore the brokenness and chaos instituted and cursed by the Fall b/c of MY sin, thus redeeming the entire Creation through the Cross

- d. It's ALL from GOD and is revealed by Him, not discovered by us.
  - 3. It is, in the irony of the world, in submission and divine rescue, dependence (faith), that leads to salvation ("to those being saved")
- ii. The Cross reveals the complete redemption of every aspect of Creation by Christ alone
  - 1. Opposed to the "wisdom" of the Greeks and the duality of reality, God has made both spirit and body in one creation, so that all is redeemed by Him through the Christ
    - a. The Platonic duality of Ideal/Matter influenced the church greatly over the years, and still today
      - i. Clergy/Laity division of importance
      - ii. The biblical view is that the Cobbler is just as spiritual an endeavor as the Monk
    - b. The Cross of Christ redeems ALL things, not just "spiritual" things
      - i. Nature
      - ii. Culture
      - iii. Work
      - iv. Recreation
      - v. Social relationships
      - vi. "Nothing is unclean in itself" (Romans 14:14), but only becomes so when we use it in rebellion to God and His revealed purposes
  - 2. Thus, the gospel should redeem every one of these spheres within the Church (and fully when Jesus returns)
    - a. Music – glorifying God or glorifying Creation?
    - b. Art – conveying the beauty of the Creator or telling another competing story?
    - c. Science – Good vocation from God can be used to see more of the wonders of His great and diverse creation, but can also be used to undermine humble dependence upon Him
    - d. Sexuality – gloriously good and reflective of His oneness and joy, or can be used to serve ourselves and undermine His revelation by reflecting that which is opposed to Him
    - e. State – servant of God to bring order and flourishing, or can be abused to promote and establish Man's kingdom in opposition to God
  - 3. It is not the *structure* of each of these things that are bad, but the *direction* to which we use them
    - a. The Cross of Christ restores the direction of all these structures back to God
    - b. God did not just save us from our sins; He saved us *to Himself* in propriety to His design which He revealed to us
- c. The Cross reveals that God is the only Source of Truth and Knowledge, and whatever we may know of Truth, ethics, morality, nature, work, play, etc. is because He has revealed it to be so.
  - i. We have no power – He has all the power
  - ii. In our redemption, too

## 2. Two Means of Redemption – With a Cross or Without a Cross

- a. Wisdom Words of the World
  - i. The Jews demand signs

1. They believe that power is in the overthrow of their oppressors
  - a. They viewed salvation, power, success, life, by Moses' deliverance, the freedom of a nation and a land through miraculous signs and wonders
2. Thus, the Cross was a stumbling block b/c they didn't see Jesus overthrowing Rome, delivering them from Egypt, but bring crushed and humiliated by it
  - a. This sense of humiliation was unbearable for them
  - b. For, a crucified Messiah is a powerless loser
3. In what ways do we demand that God deliver us from our oppressions before we will believe His Word?
  - a. Ordained suffering – "I can't believe in a God who would do that."
  - b. This is because we presume that nothing is worth suffering...yet there is something more valuable which makes ordained suffering worthwhile:

"Our vision is so limited that we can hardly imagine a love that doesn't show itself in protection from suffering....The love of God did not protect His own Son [from the Cross]....He will not necessarily protect us – not from anything it takes to make us like His Son."

"To be a follower of The Crucified means, sooner or later, a personal encounter with the cross. And the cross always entails loss." – Elisabeth Elliot

- c. When we determine that suffering cannot come from God, we are making a judgment based upon our own self-determined moral ruling, not the Word of the Cross, and this is not wisdom, but folly in the eyes of God.
- ii. The Greeks seek wisdom
1. They were looking for a plan, a reason, an eloquent speech which would move them progressively from actuality to potentiality
  2. Yet, the Cross of Christ was not a powerful plan of progress, but a shameful weakness and wordless defeat of Matter
    - a. Thus, the cross is foolishness to this worldview
  3. How do we expect power to come in progressive iterations of power?
    - a. Do we not doubt God when we recognize that my sin runs deeper than I even imagine, and that I still need the grace of God just as much today as I did when I first believed?
    - b. Do we not fall for the world's parlance of "more education will cure the world of its ills?"
  4. When we determine that Man just needs more knowledge in order to become virtuous, we have cut the heart out of the necessity of the redemption of sinners through the Cross of Christ.
- iii. Both of these are means of power which are accomplished without the Cross of Christ
1. Thus, we have to examples which are particulars which argue for the general conclusion
  2. Any means of power which we expect and depend upon to bring about restoration, redemption, or to fix the primary problems of humanity, but which

does not center upon the cross of Christ is the world's wisdom which belongs to "those who are being destroyed"

b. Word of the Cross

i. Revelation of God

1. The Cross exposes us

a. It exposes our need for redemption *from outside of ourselves*

b. It exposes our hypocrisy of wisdom

i. We believe that we can do it, and God had to send His Son to die in our place

ii. That stings our pride and reveals our *inability*, not our ability

c. It exposes our great evil

i. We believe that if we are given the best education, data, information, etc. that we will choose wisely and virtuously

ii. Yet, we were given the best data in Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the perfect revelation of the One True God...and we hated him and killed him.

1. We don't want to submit to anyone, even God, and surely not a crucified God

2. We approve of our strength, our righteousness, our successful moral judgment

a. This leads to factions, divisions, comparing and defending our righteousness, wisdom, and holiness

b. Knowledge puffs up – we are no more puffed up than when we crucified God's Son

2. The Cross reveals God

a. It reveals a God who is so holy and with such animosity towards evil, sin, and its consequential destruction of His creation that He sent His Son to atone for it

b. It reveals a God who is so loving and with such mercy towards the perpetrators of such evil that He DID send Son to redeem His Creation

c. At the Cross we see the perfect Justice and perfect Mercies of God fully displayed as He showed Himself both Just and the Justifier of those who depend upon Jesus (Rom 4:25)

ii. Redemption by God

1. Salvation comes from without, not from within

2. We are not autonomous, as we think

3. The Crux of Salvation (v21) – It Pleased God to Save Through Preaching the Cross

a. We did not come to know God *through our wisdom*

i. Our sight and assessment are limited by nature and by sin

ii. The fact that we are created should humble us, but it hasn't, for we reject the reality of what this means so that we can maintain power and a false sense of control in a world of chaos

iii. The cross shows us that we are not really seekers of wisdom or honest seekers of Truth, or we would not have killed the Son of God.

iv. Rather, we are lovers of ourselves, seekers of power and a righteousness without God's terms

- b. It pleased God to save through the preaching of foolishness
  - i. Look at the parallels
    - 1. Knowledge of God and Salvation:
      - a. the salvation with God wrought in Christ Jesus is direction turn toward knowing God
      - b. This is something that our wisdom could not accomplish
    - 2. Wisdom and Preaching:
      - a. Wisdom is knowledge from Man to God – upward discovery
      - b. Preaching is knowledge from God to Man – revelation by grace
  - ii. It pleased God to reveal Himself apart from Man’s wisdom
    - 1. Though the world deems it foolishness, God is pleased to do it, and this is “astounding” to the wise
  - iii. Remember that to you who are being saved, to all whom He has called, the gospel of weakness, of your inability, of your powerlessness and power and accomplishment of Christ crucified and risen, is the power of God to rescue you from this chaotic world and return you to the knowledge of your Creator for whom you were made
    - 1. Don’t be surprised that world hates you – it hates Him – or that the world things the gospel foolish
    - 2. Don’t appeal to the wisdom of the world to make the gospel more attractive, for they are opposing and incompatible kingdoms – announce it! Proclaim it! For the power of God is in the proclamation that Man is incapable, but God has provided a Capable Crucified One to rescue you from divine wrath and the curse of sin and death to restore all things

Let us live our lives, our entire lives (social, sexual, vocational, philosophical, political, ethical, etc.) in the light of this great truth that God’s power and wisdom are in Christ Jesus crucified to redeem the fallen Creation. Let us reject the world’s wisdom that dependence, morality, ethics, and ideals should be relegated to the private life of the inner person, and let us bring our dependence upon God’s revelation to every sphere of life. Let us work in the light of the Crucified One, seeking to know and understand His Creation as His Creation. Let us enjoy sexual relationships within the bounds of what He has revealed to be His design for our joy as marriage between one man and one woman, the necessary two-gendered expression of His image as revealed at the beginning. Let us create art and music and literature that are subservient to Him, expressing His grand story of Creation, Fall, and Redemption through the Crucified One with all the colors of light and darkness that this story has bled onto the pages of history. Let us no longer assume that the world’s presuppositions are any more than that: presuppositions, and let us proclaim the great God who has revealed Himself, His designs, and His works that we might know Him, honor Him, and enjoy Him forever. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” May we hear and heed Him today. Amen.