

Lent Devotional March 9, 2025

Scripture

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

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? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Devotion

The Rev. Dr. Graham D. S. Deans '06

It seems decidedly odd that such a brilliant scholar as the Apostle Paul should appear to be so disparaging of wisdom. The truth is, however, that he had realized that what often passes for wisdom amounts to mere intellectual snobbery, such as he had previously encountered amongst the Athenian intelligentsia, who had a reputation for seeking out the latest novelty for discussion and debate (Acts 17:21).

Following in that tradition would be Scotland's King James VI, who was said to be "possessed of an overweening intellectual arrogance...as though he had been over-educated." No wonder that he was described as "the wisest fool in Christendom." He seems to have known too much, but to have understood too little.

While the Church has always valued an educated clergy, it should be alert to the problem of highly qualified ministers who empty their churches by degrees! Preachers who regularly get carried away with the sound of their own rhetoric—which few can understand—will only succeed in driving people from the pews, while the gospel of the Cross of Christ is emptied of its power.

What the Apostle deplored at Corinth was the pretentious attitude of those intellectuals who spent too much time providing clever answers to questions that nobody was actually asking, or who were meddling in affairs that were none of their concern, thereby making their supposed wisdom irrelevant. Scholarship should never be paraded shamelessly. As Alexander Pope reminds us, "A little learning is a dangerous thing!"

Like the prophet before him (Jer 9:23), Paul knew that boasting about the extent of one's wisdom was inadvisable. As a positive virtue, it remained highly elusive (Job 28:12). It begins only with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7), Whose perfect wisdom, as the apostle concludes, really is something to celebrate!

Prayer

God of all truth;
guide us through each perplexing path of life,
that we may grow in wisdom and understanding,
until we reach full maturity of faith,
that at the last,
we may enter into the joy of our salvation
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.