

In my opinion, one of the greatest books in the bible is the Book of Romans. It has caused revolution in the hearts of men and women since the time Paul wrote it. It's a testimony of Paul's conversion, of Christ meeting this proud Pharisee who thought he had God all figured out and that his righteousness had earned his way to heaven. Paul has this incredible moment of meeting Jesus and realizing he's wrong. Paul learns of grace. So in the Book of Romans, Paul documents this amazing thing called the grace of God and how dependent we all are on it. Do you know just how dependent you and I are on the grace of God? We were dead. We were God's enemies. We could do nothing in our own power to correct it. But God, in Christ, did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Paul takes the entire book of Romans to sum up this amazing story of God's rescue of dead enemies, of which I am one. And he ends Romans with this benediction: "To the only wise God be glory forever in Jesus Christ! Amen." Paul says that God alone is wise. If you compare the wisdom of the wisest people who ever lived or any other god or philosopher or Dr. Phil or Oprah, and compare it to God and his wisdom, you find they're all ding-dongs. God alone is the only one we can actually say is wise. In comparison to God, everyone else looks like a goober.

To put this in perspective, I Googled the most foolish predictions made in history and I cherry picked my 5 favorites. Listen to these, in no particular order:

1. Decca Recording Company on declining to sign the Beatles in 1962 said this, "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out."
2. A United Artists executive after rejecting Reagan as lead in the 1964 film *The Best Man* said this, "Reagan doesn't have that presidential look."
3. Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, said this in 1943, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."
4. The president of the Michigan Savings Bank advising Henry Ford's lawyer not to invest in the Ford Motor Company said this in 1903, "The horse is here to stay but the automobile is only a novelty—a fad."
5. Newsweek, predicting popular holiday destinations for the late 1960's said this, "And for the tourist who really wants to get away from it all, safaris in Vietnam."

There's nothing like letting facts get in the way of a good opinion. You see enough of this, and you can see why Paul would say, "The only wise God." If you want the fullness of unfailing wisdom, you've got to look to God.

We're going to look at wisdom today. This is a big theme in the Old Testament. The wisdom literature, Proverbs in particular, tells us to make wisdom the highest earthly treasure that we go after. Don't chase power. Don't chase money. Put all of those goals way down the list of things you should pursue, and put all of your energy toward seeking wisdom. Dig for it, long for it, pray for it. Be a wise person. We've seen, as Solomon demonstrated, that if you make those other things your top priority, you'll be a rich idiot or a famous fool. So put wisdom at the very top, and then if that other stuff comes, you'll actually know what to do with it.

The book of Proverbs takes 9 chapters to double and triple this call to seek wisdom: Make it the thing that matters most to you. Go diligently after it. Don't let up. Treasure it when you get it. Young people especially, listen up! Go after wisdom. Folly wants to seduce you with all the ways of the world. He dangles them in front of you and makes them very attractive, but Folly's ways are a death trap.

After 9 chapters of that, we get 21 chapters of wisdom for living through little sayings. You can find wisdom on how to deal with a crazy boss, how to handle a nagging wife, how to handle a wayward child, how to walk through certain financial situations.

What we find as we look at wisdom as understood in the Old Testament is that wisdom isn't so much intellectual, it's not brainpower, though you do have to have enough understanding to know what's going on, but wisdom is the art of living well. It's about what you do with the things you know. If you look at how the Proverbs describe wisdom, the wisest person in the room is hardly ever the one with the highest IQ. Often, the one with the highest IQ is the one called the mocker and is a menace on the face of the earth. We know some people like that, right? This person is very intelligent and he uses all that so-called intelligence to attack God and the things that matter most to Him. The people who really have wisdom are not necessarily those with the high IQ, but they live well.

So that's the other part that the Old Testament adds to wisdom. It's not simply about capacity of mind, but it's about capacity of soul. It's character. It's goodness. It's

righteousness. It's being rebuked and responding with, "Thank you so much. Do you know how that saved me from doing something stupid?" instead of "What do you mean I did something wrong?" That would be folly, the Bible says. Folly rages at rebuke and correction.

That's the principle teaching about wisdom in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament also acknowledges the only wise God that Paul mentions in Romans. The wisdom of God is way above anything that we would call wisdom. One example is Isaiah 55:8-9. God says: *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"* In the Book of Job, which is part of the wisdom literature, Job asks this question twice: *"Where can wisdom be found, and where does understanding dwell?"* Is humanity in possession of real wisdom? It takes 11 verses at the beginning of Job 28 to talk about how clever we humans are. There's no question that humanity is clever. Just think of all the gadgets and technology we've come up with! So the Bible actually says that man is really innovative, but where is **wisdom** found, where does understanding dwell? The Book of Job faces the fact that all of our cleverness doesn't add up to this thing called wisdom. The book ends by pointing to God—that God alone is the source and God alone is the embodiment of wisdom—and chapter 28 ends with this: *"Therefore, fear God. That is wisdom."*

In other words, you're going to come to the end of yourself. It doesn't matter big your IQ is, you will come to the end of yourself. And then what? God. The only wise God. There is a wisdom that transcends anything, anywhere, and anytime. This prediction I can make with boldness. It doesn't matter how many more nifty things we come up with on this earth; we will still be desperately in need of this wisdom, because we will always come to the end of ourselves. That's why James says, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, ask God."* Ask God.

The Old Testament has two primary spheres in which there is unmistakable evidence that God is wise beyond us. The two spheres are creation and law. The Old Testament says that if you are having doubts about whether God is wise and wiser than us, just go outside. Look at creation. At night, go outside and look up.

I love looking up at the stars at night and watching documentaries about space and learning about the vastness of the universe. The more I learn and the more I discover about the universe, the more in awe I am of God. Think about it. With all of this world's knowledge and ingenuity and technology, can we create a planet? NO! But God did it just by speaking. God is the only wise God.

God's law also shows his absolute wisdom. There are the physical laws that run the universe, but the moral law is a sign, a testimony, of the wisdom of God. Creation and the law have this in common: both are divine acts where God creates order and beauty out of chaos and nothingness. Then God spoke. Out of that came order and beauty. That's called creation.

And then God came to this stiff-necked, stubborn, desert people. They were steeped in paganism, and God came and spoke the law. Out of that emerged a sense of God, fair play, righteousness, and justice. That's wisdom.

Here's where this shifts in the New Testament, and it's a dramatic shift. I think most people would agree that bringing order out of chaos and beauty out of mess takes incredible wisdom, and that creation and law are great demonstrations of the wisdom of God. But in the New Testament, these two demonstrations fade into the background. They're still there, but they're not nearly as prominent as two other displays of divine wisdom that move to the foreground: the Cross and the church. Let's look at our key text for the day, 1 Corinthians 1, starting with verse 18:

¹⁸ For the message of 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;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."*

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom

God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

So the wisdom of God displayed on the Cross looks like foolishness to us. Paul then deals with the wisdom of God displayed to the church that looks like foolishness to us. He goes on,

²⁶ Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Paul realizes how foolish this sounds to his audience. Creation and law make sense. People get those. But to the people Paul was writing this letter to, the Cross and the church are foolish evidence for the wisdom of God. Paul understands this. To the Greeks who value human wisdom and to the Jews who want signs from heaven, it didn't make sense. The Cross is scandalous to the Greeks. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst of the worst criminals. It was a humiliation to the one being crucified. How could the Cross somehow be the wisdom of God? To the unbelieving Jews, who wanted to see miraculous signs from heaven as validation of God's message, the idea of a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms because crucifixion expressed not the power and blessing of God but his curse.

If what Paul said about the Cross wasn't foolish enough, he goes on to say that the **church** is where God's wisdom really shines forth! Is he crazy? I mean, this thing called the church has become the laughingstock of the world. Look around! Look up here! Who's phoning up the church saying, "Hey, we've got a political crisis and we need you to come and tell us what to do." Still waiting for that phone call. We're not perceived by the world as a beacon of divine wisdom.

The key phrase in this passage is that the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom. You can take the most foolish looking thing God has ever done and it will still beat out anything that the highest human wisdom could ever come up with. God's wisdom wins every time. Think about it: when faced with humanity's greatest plight, how do we get saved? How do we overcome the problem of sin and death? How do we get into heaven? The world answers these questions in one of two ways. The world either says that the answer is love, and that God is love. The world believes that God simply says, "Come on in everybody; however you choose to get here!" That, of course, means Hitler's included, but that doesn't matter. The world says that love wins out. It's a love without justice.

If the world doesn't go the love route, it goes the justice route. You've got to be good. But how good is good? The problem with the justice solution is that the world just doesn't know what the standard of goodness is. The symbol of justice is a pair of scales. If we bring our pile of good stuff and our pile of bad stuff, our good stuff will be outweighed every time, if we're honest. We've all messed up. Do we want only fairness? We will never be saved through fairness.

At the Cross there is level ground. At the Cross God's not interested in your pile of good or your pile of bad. At the Cross God is perfectly loving and perfectly just. He doesn't turn a blind eye to evil, yet he loves infinitely. At the Cross God takes it all—all of our sin, the whole pile—and he pours out his wrath on it, consuming it completely. Justice is done on the Cross. And when justice is done, God turns and pours out love and mercy. Perfect justice, perfect love. That's wisdom. Man's wisdom is nothing compared to this wisdom of God.

But we should also remember that human "wisdom" has a way of coming and going. How many Stoic or Epicurean philosophers have you met recently? Belonging to groups like these was like having a PhD from Harvard or Yale today. But so many of the things they taught now seem ridiculous to us, even if some of their errors are still around today in groups from our own time. It is not that we cannot find gems of truth in the thinking of these ancient groups, but their schools have closed. Christianity has survived.

Say you were given a job to build a company and it had to be sustained 2,000 years running and it had to be global. Your business has to be found in the slums of the world as well as in the highest places of society. Not only does it have to have this incredible reach, but it has to do a work of transforming lives with which the world can't do anything. So you've got to take addicts and prostitutes and criminals, and you have to turn them inside out. That's your job.

If anybody in the business world was given that job, how would they begin? They'd go to the biggest corporations and recruit their top executives. They'd go after the top grads from Harvard and Yale, the best and brightest. Those are the people to start with. But God says: I'll take Justin. You know, Justin, the kid that stuttered as a child. The kid that was shy. The kid that hated getting up in front of people because he knew he'd get made fun of.

My parents never had a bumper sticker that said, "My child is an honor student," because I never was. I was an average student at best. In high school I was an average athlete at best. I got a lot of 4th, 5th, and 6th place ribbons in track. Until I was in my late 20's, I knew one thing above all: I knew that God would never, ever call me into anything involving public speaking. Even in college at OCU I was not a student that the faculty and staff looked at and praised as the next Stan Toler or John Maxwell. I was average in college. But the funny thing is many of my fellow students who were praised and touted as the next great preacher to come out of OCU didn't last more than a year or two in ministry if at all. But here I am, by God's grace almost 10 years later, God's prank played on you. God chooses unlikely people. God loves using ordinary people.

The reality is that everyone is going to look back and say, "How did you do that one, God, with those kinds of people and with that kind of clientele?" You've heard people who argue against the church saying it's full of hypocrites and misfits. But no other organization could have survived for as long or had the sweeping scope it has if it weren't made up of the likes of us. The only thing that can explain us, the church, is the only wise God.

To the only wise God, be glory forever. And if you accept his invitation, his wisdom of how to come into that glory, you get to enjoy it forever. Let's stand for prayer...