

Wisdom and Power of God

#1026

Study given by W.D. Frazee—September 2, 1967

1 Corinthians, the 1st chapter, beginning with the 17th verse—1 Corinthians, the 1st chapter, beginning with the 17th verse. As we sing praises to God, we worship Him. As we bow in prayer, we worship Him. As we bring our gifts of love, we worship Him, but in response, He loves to speak to us, and through His word, we hear His message.

Paul is writing to the Corinthians, reviewing his experiences with them as he led them from heathenism into the glorious light of the gospel. He says:

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” 1 Corinthians 1:17-31.

Now, if these words were the expression of some uneducated person, and also uninspired, we might dismiss them as the result of his lack of exposure to the

wisdom of this world. We might say, Well, that fellow, of course, he has no particular interest in education. He never had very much. What does he know about it anyway?

But aside from the basic fact that this is the inspired word of God, it would be worth our while to note that the scribe, the penman, in this case is the apostle Paul, and there's nobody in all the history of the scriptures that was better educated than Paul. He was a scholar, both in the Jewish literature and education and in Greek culture, and the Greeks were *the* educators of the time.

How does it come, then, that Paul writes what he does here? Precisely *because* he knew by experience, as well as by inspiration, the folly of worldly wisdom, the futility of worldly education.

And so, he says, Brethren, when I came to you, I came not with the wisdom that I learned from Gamaliel in Jerusalem. I did not come to you repeating and echoing the sayings of the Grecian philosophers. I came to you with fear and trembling, pleading with God, that none of the knowledge and wisdom that I had gathered in the years before I knew my Lord, should eclipse the simple and powerful message of the cross.

Note again, that 17th verse:

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” 1 Corinthians 1:17.

One of the modern translations puts it this way:

“Not in the language of philosophy, lest the cross of Christ should be robbed of its power” 1 Corinthians 1:17 (modern translation).

How angels must weep to see those who have been so fortunate as to grow up *without* the impress of Grecian education, *without* contact with the world's wisdom—I say, how angels must weep to see such privileged individuals, panting after the world's education, and longing to get out and get a taste of it, or more than a taste. I say, how angels must weep.

But that is not my subject this morning. That merely introduces it. The subject, I find, in the 23rd and 24th verses:

“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” 1 Corinthians 23-24.

There are two things that man needs—he needs to know what to do, and he needs power to do it. Don't you think that's what we need? Isn't that what you need this morning? You need to know what to do and have power to do it.

You know, when we take a trip, there are two things we need. We need a map that shows us where to go, but that alone will never get us there. We need an automobile or an airplane or a horse or something that can carry us from where we are to where we're going. Right?

And that airplane or that automobile or that horse needs fuel. It needs motive power. Right? Without that, they're all valueless. I'd rather have a horse that had had a good dish of oats for breakfast than the greatest jet plane in the world without fuel. What do you say? I'd get there faster. Yes, we need power. But remember, back of power, we need wisdom, for unless we know where to go, the more power we have, the worse off we may be.

Someone was telling me about a man who was traveling across the country somewhere out in Texas. As they were driving along, the wife spoke to her husband and said—she was studying the map—Why, honey, we're on the wrong road. We're clear off our route. He continued to drive along. He says, you know, I hate to turn around, we're making such good time.

Yes, I say, we need not only power, but direction. We need not only the ability to do something, we need guidance as to what to do. Or do we? Do we need guidance? Well, I suppose our sense of that need this morning might differ. There is an age, and it's not always measured by the calendar, when a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, they know what they want to do, and they haven't any question about it. All they want is the money to get there.

And there are two ways to learn that that just isn't so. One is the hard way. That's the way of experience. The other is the easy way. That's listening to God. Let's turn to Jeremiah, the 10th chapter, and the 23rd verse—Jeremiah 10:23. And the earlier a person learns this, the more pain he saves himself and others, but it's possible to reach the age of 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 or 80, and still not learn it.

So, young and old, I challenge you with this text this morning—do you believe it? Jeremiah says:

“O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” Jeremiah 10:23.

Do you believe that? Well, somebody says, of course I believe it. It's in the Bible. I believe everything in the Bible. Well, that's fine. I hope you believe this. I hope you don't believe it with your fingers crossed. In other words, Yes, I believe that, *but* I think I know what I want to do all right. My dear friends, we don't even know what we *want* to do, let alone what we *should* do. May I repeat that. We don't even know what we *want* to do, let alone know what we *should* do.

Most of the people of this world are spending their lives trying this thing, another thing, another thing, another thing, hoping to find that which really pleases and satisfies. Any of you who are past 30 years old, am I telling the truth? Yes. And you folks that aren't 30 yet, I hope you'll take God's word for it and save yourself a lot of pain and pitfall.

“O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” Jeremiah 10:23.

But thank God, He knows the way and is willing to direct us. He’s perfectly capable and perfectly willing. He made us. He made the universe. He knows every road on the map, and He knows the swamps and the jungles where there are no trails. And He longs to guide each child of humanity in the successful way.

And so, as our opening text said, Christ is, to those who *let* Him be, the wisdom of God—the wisdom of God.

But now, let us be very practical. How can I acquaint that wisdom? Just as a child acquires the wisdom of its father and mother. Very simple. I hold this up, and I ask you, What do you see? What do you see? A book. Okay. You’re all agreed on that, aren’t you. How many of you say, That’s a book. Don’t be afraid. I’m not going to trap you.

But now, my next question. How did you come to say that that’s a book? Whatever gave you the idea that that’s a book? Somebody told you, probably your mother, perhaps your father. Could be somebody else.

But that’s only half of it. While that mother or the father or the other one told you, something else happened. What was that? Yes, you believed it, but you did something. What did you do? You can’t remember back that far, can you. Ah, yes, but there’s something else. What did you say? You probably said it? You know you said it, don’t you?

How many times have you repeated that word, “Book”? If you had a dollar for every time, you could help us build that new sanitarium, couldn’t you. Mama said “Book,” and you and I said, “Book.” Now, we may not have pronounced it exactly right to start with, but over and over again, “Book,” “Book,” “Book,” “Book.”

And that’s the way we learn knife and fork and spoon and table and chair and piano and organ and car and a thousand other things. Am I right? And the great Father above looks down upon us and says, Will you let me do with you what fathers and mothers do with their babies? Will you let me tell you what is, and will you repeat it after me?

Come now. Suppose that the first time that mother points to the volume and says, “Book,” the little precocious youngster says, Mother would you please prove that for me. You surely wouldn’t expect me to repeat that merely on your statement. No. Fortunately, at that age, we are not so gifted with doubts, are we. No.

Ah, but somebody says, that’s because we are immature. Yes. But it is written:

“...Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 18:3.

And tell me how did we become mature? How did we? As babies, how did we grow up and become mature? Was it by doubting or was it by believing? Was it by arguing or was it by accepting and repeating?

Now, I know that we can carry it too far with men—this matter of echoing. I realize that. I wouldn't leave you to think that all our lives we are to merely echo and parrot the words of men, and even in the things of God, He desires us to exercise our reasoning powers. He has given us those, and He tells us in Isaiah 1:18:

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD...”
Isaiah 1:18.

So there's plenty of room to exercise the reason, and every other function of the mind, but the beginnings of life, the beginnings of development, are a matter of faith. The little child accepts with unquestioning simplicity, the words of the mother, “Book,” “Book,” “Book,” “Book.”

Oh, I repeat, let's be that way with God. What do you say? That is faith—to accept what God says and repeat it after Him—and until we have repeated it after Him again and again, we have not really learned it, and that's why people can listen to sermons all their lives and never be either wiser or better for it.

Somewhere along the line, the mind must step across the gulf, bridge the gap, and say, This is it. I believe it. It *is* so because God says so. It is what God says, and it is what I say. Two and two are four. A-B-C. And so, with all the great facts of the Bible.

Now, friends, think what a wonderful advantage that is compared with the program of trial and error. Why, even if we were not to die of experimenting with poisons and all the other transgressions of nature's laws, a lifetime in this world would not be long enough to experiment with all the different byways.

Those who accept what God says and do it—they can learn rapidly. God is demonstrating this for all the universe. Let's let Him do it with us. What do you say? But let me tell you, God will not compel the reason of anyone any more than He will compel the obedience of anyone. Let me illustrate.

A number of years ago, I was holding a meeting with another minister, and there was, among others attending the meetings in the tent, a woman of another religious body. She came night after night, and finally, she heard the Sabbath presented. She accepted the Sabbath.

One morning, one of our ministers gave an invitation at the tent—Sabbath morning service. This woman, among others, came forward, giving her decision fully to Jesus to keep the Sabbath. She believed it. She was going to obey it.

Not long after that, we missed her at an evening meeting. Another meeting came and went and she wasn't there. I went down to see her. Knocked at the door. Nobody came. Knocked again. Presently, the door opened just about so much, but she finally, rather reluctantly, let me in, and we talked a little bit.

And presently, after I told her we'd been missing her at the meetings, she finally came out with the story. She said, you know, Mr. Frazee, I came down there to the tent, and I heard you and the other minister speak, and she said, finally, it seemed to me that Saturday was the Sabbath all right. I was going to keep it.

But, you know, she said, as I thought about it, I thought, Oh, my. What are my friends going to say, and I know how my family feel about it and my church, and I thought, Do I have to? Do I have to separate from all of them on this thing?

So, she said, I went to the Lord in prayer, and I prayed about this thing, and the Lord has showed me that I don't need to do that. And friends, she never came back—she never came back.

How do you explain that? She prayed. I don't doubt she prayed earnestly. I have no question but what the tears ran down her face as she wrestled over this matter. I have no question she got an answer. I don't doubt but what the answer satisfied her. It was the answer she wanted. That's what she got.

Let's turn to Ezekiel 14. Oh, this is so important, dear friends—Ezekiel, the 14th chapter, beginning with the first verse:

“Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me” Ezekiel 14:1.

And notice, these weren't heathen. These are the elders of Israel.

“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols” Ezekiel 14:2-4.

Very interesting, isn't it. Have you got an idol this morning? My dear friend, if you dare go to God and pray with that idol before your face, the answer you get will not take you to heaven, it'll lead you to hell. Don't forget it. And it doesn't make any difference what the idol is.

Prayer is not for the purpose of convincing God that what we want is what He ought to do. The real purpose of prayer is to come with open mind and longing hearts to find out heaven's best will for outside.

Balaam is an example of what this chapter is talking about. You remember the messengers came from Balak, the king of Moab, to Balaam, Come and curse Israel for me, and I'll give you great rewards. What did Balaam want to do? He

wanted to go. Not that he particularly was interested in cursing Israel. He wasn't. What did he want? He wanted the wages, he wanted the money. If he could have gotten the money a better way, he would never have had any thought of cursing Israel.

But he dared to get down and pray about it. Think of it. He dared to get down and pray to God about cursing God's people, God's church. There's some people that do that today, friends. They're just as sanctimonious as Balaam was, and they get an answer and they think they're called of God to reform the church. They get the answer that they want. They get a commission.

Did God finally let Balaam go? Oh, yes. Why? Because he wanted to. My dear friends, if what you want is what you want more than what God wants, that, you will get. **Forget it.** But it won't lead you to happiness or blessing in this life or the life to come. That idol must be crashed and smashed. That stumblingblock must be put out of the way. The purpose of prayer is, all broken before God, to say, Lord, there's just one thing I want. It's what you want.

That's the place Saul came to on the Damascus road where he met Jesus. He had been convicted at the stoning of Stephen, but he banished those convictions by plunging more earnestly into persecution. And I don't doubt a bit but what he had a season of prayer before he set out on that road to Damascus, that the Lord would help him to catch as many Christians as possible and put them in jail. I don't question that at all.

But oh, thank God, he saw something different, as he neared that Syrian city. He met Jesus, and his life was never again the same. From that moment, there was just one thing he wanted:

“...that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” 2 Timothy 2:4.

From that moment, he laid aside all his philosophy—both Jewish and Grecian—and he accepted in simple faith the simple words of Christ, and he repeated them after Him. Thank God for the hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of souls that were blessed through his ministry.

God is looking *today* for men and women who, like Paul, will put aside their worldly philosophy, who will put aside their selfish desires, who will put aside their human opinion, and who will say, Lord, Jesus, show me the way. I am but a little child. I know not how to go out or come in. Lead me in the path of life. Jesus will teach those who want to be taught.

But now, our text back there in Corinthians said that Jesus is not only the wisdom of God but what else? The power of God—the power of God. He is not only the answer to the question of what to do. He is the answer to the question of how to do it:

“All His biddings are enablings” *Christ Object Lessons*, page 333.

In this word, we find not only guidance, but motivation. We find not only direction, but power. Oh, I'm so glad for that, friends, and it's all in the same package. Man can't do that.

A man can show me the road to Birmingham, but his mere showing me the road doesn't give me a tiny bit of power to get there. Right? But when God shows me the road, if I accept His direction, in the very acceptance of the direction lies the power to accomplish that which God commands. We need to learn that secret.

Jesus taught it again and again in His ministry as he dealt with the sick. There was that poor man at the pool of Bethesda. Walking there one Sabbath morning, you remember, Jesus saw those helpless, hopeless people, and one case was especially needy. For 38 years, the poor fellow had been there—38 years—at least for 38 years, he'd been helpless. For some time, he'd been there.

Jesus said to him, Would you like to get well? Would you be made whole? Oh, he said, I would, but I have nobody to help me to put me in the water. He thought he'd get well if he got in the water at a certain time, when the waters were stirred. That wasn't where his help lay. Little did he realize that the One who could help him was right there.

But somehow as he heard Jesus and looked at the Savior, hope was kindled in his heart, faith began to rise, and when Jesus—mark the word—when Jesus said to him:

“...Rise, take up thy bed, and walk” John 5:8.

He did it, and muscles that hadn't moved for 38 years responded. How could that be? A miracle, you say. Indeed, but why? Don't lose this point. The man might have said, for he had power of speech even though he couldn't walk—he might have said, Well, Jesus, you tell me to rise and walk and there's nothing in the world I'd rather do than that. I'm agreed with you that it would be a good thing, a nice thing, a desirable thing. I *want* it more than anything in this world, but you can see I can't do it, and if you'll ever do something for me so I can, believe me, I'll bound away like a deer, and he could have remained just lying there.

And my friends, if he had done that, he wouldn't have been healed. There is something about faith—simple faith—that lays hold *upon* the Word of God, and in doing that lies the power.

Let me illustrate it in another way. Something that I haven't thought of for a long time comes echoing back along the halls of memory. When dear Elder Tindall and I were together in San Francisco 40 years ago, he, of course, was the evangelist leading out. I was his young helper.

One Sunday night, as Elder Tindall preached, there were cards handed in of people that wanted literature, and there was a place on the card to check for an interview with Evangelist Tindall, and sorting through the cards, I came to this one of a certain man, lived out in the mission district of San Francisco, and he'd checked to

see Elder Tindall. We found out afterwards his wife had checked for him, but we didn't know that. We thought he'd checked it.

And this was Monday night, and I said to Elder Tindall at the close of our day at the church office, Would you like to go by and see this man tonight? So away we went. We came to the house. The man met us and invited us in, and as I say, we had supposed that he had asked us to come. It was his wife that had checked it.

And he told us afterward that he was just wishing through the evening that we'd leave so he could light a cigarette. He was just anxious to smoke, but we sat there and we studied. And Elder Tindall pled with him and reasoned with him and read the scriptures with him, and finally, he came to the point where he was willing to have prayer and ask for help.

And as we knelt and prayed, Elder Tindall reached across to him, and he said, Now, *will* you give yourself fully to God? And let me tell you something of the problems this man was facing. He was not only a confirmed smoker, smoking several packs of cigarettes a day. He was also an alcoholic. He'd get drunk. Hard on the family. He also had a terrible temper and he'd curse and swear and kick things around the house, whether he was drunk or sober.

Beside all those problems, he had a job with the afternoon newspaper there in San Francisco, and he knew he'd lose that job if he accepted the Sabbath. Now, that's about enough for one man, isn't it—cigarettes, liquor, a terrible temper, lose his job if he accepted Jesus and the message.

But as we were kneeling there, the Spirit of God was present, Elder Tindall reached across and asked him, *Will* you? He said, I'll try. But Elder Tindall knew better than to think that that would solve a thing. And Elder Tindall kept working with him and pleading with him, we prayed, and finally—and I shall never forget the look in his face as he literally clenched his fist—and he said, I will. My dear friends, the power of sin was broken.

We had a prayer of thanksgiving, as he committed himself to the Lord. I had the joy of seeing him baptized sometime later, after he'd gone through a baptismal class. I came back to that church a bit later, and he was a deacon in the church.

Thank God, friends, something happened when he said what God said and put his whole soul on the side of faith and obedience. Do you see what I mean, my friend? It is not enough to read what God says and think, Oh, wouldn't that be nice. We need to say, What God says, I say. What God tells me to believe, that I believe, and what God tells me to do, that, by his grace, I do.

How do I know it's so? Because He says so. How do I know I can do it? Because He tells me to do it, and my Father would not tell me to do anything that He wouldn't give me grace to do. That's faith, friend, and it's that simple. Will you do it this morning? How many of you, by the grace of God, will send Jesus the word this morning, Lord, whatever you say to me through your word, that I will believe. May I see your hands? Is that settled? Is that clear? Thank God.

All right. Now, another thing, friend. Will you by faith take the next step? That's the real acid test. Will you not only say what God says. By His grace, will you *do* it?

Now, wait a minute. You say, Oh, I'll try. That's what the man said, and he wasn't even to first base, believe me, when he said that. The Devil will let you off easy on that one. He knows all about what he's going to do after you just try. He's got that all fixed up and figured out.

It's going to take more than try. It's going to take a faith that says, I'm not only going to try. By God's grace, I'm going to *do* it. Jesus tells me to, and my Father wouldn't tell me to do it unless He knew I *could* do it by His grace.

Now, of course, we can never do it without Him. He says:

"...without me ye can do..." John 15:5.

What?

"...nothing" John 15:5.

But faith says:

"I *can* do..." Philippians 4:13

How much?

"...all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"
Philippians 4:13.

How many of you, by the grace of God, would like to say to Jesus, Jesus I know you won't tell me to do anything but what you'll give me strength to do, so by your grace, I'm going to *do* whatever you make clear to me. I'm going to *do* it. I'm not just going to *try* to do it, experiment with it, see if I can. I *know* I can because God says so, and by your grace, I'll do anything you make plain to me. If you'd like to send that word to Jesus, raise your hand this morning. Will you do that, friend? Thank God. That'll make Him happy—oh, so happy. All right.

Brother, I wish we could sing a song:

Come every soul by sin oppressed,
There's mercy with the Lord,
And He will surely give you rest,
By trusting in His word.

What's the number? Five sixty-seven. All right. Now, notice these beautiful words. This is a hymn of invitation, and I'm giving a call. Oh, friends, I love to give calls. I love to give invitations. Why not? What a chance to pass from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom, from sin to victory.

There may be some soul this morning that, as you hear this message, you realize that you need the saving power of Jesus in your life. You realize that you've been listening to doubts or fears or the enticements of sin, one way or another. You may not be a member of the church. This invitation is for you.

You may be a member of the church, but if you need the saving power of Jesus to lift you through some problem, to give you victory over some sin, this invitation is for you. If you need some special help this morning, some special victory that God is convicting you of, come up here and kneel. I want to kneel with you and pray for you as we close this service. Let's stand.

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