

LESSON 7

The Wisdom and Power of God

1 Corinthians 1:18—2:5

“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The Bible says, “Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). This verse defines Jesus as Lord. God has put in Jesus everything that we need. We are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). Christianity is Christ. The Christian’s power is in God’s Christ, not in man’s method. The abundant life can only be built upon Jesus. Christianity is radical and demanding. Man does face-lifts and makeovers; God only does heart transplants. Christianity is a Person, not a program.

Sin drains the gospel’s power out of our lives (1 Corinthians 1:17; NIV). Christianity makes a person a new creation and gives him a new life and mind (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:1–7; Galatians 2:20, 21; Philippians 2:5–11). Jesus calls us to die to sin that we might live to God.

The cross turns our normal way of thinking upside down. It says that we die to live and we give to get. It says that the way up is down and the last shall be first.

A crucified God is an oxymoron. He is almighty, but He has allowed Himself to be human. A Christian also is an oxymoron. He is a living dead man. He has died, yet he is fully alive! People want life—but the cross offers death as the way to life. People crave victory—but the cross is a defeat that leads to victory. People want comfort—but the cross is humiliation that opens the door to forgiveness. People want peace—but the cross brings us to a war that results in peace. People honor beauty—but the cross, crude and ugly, expresses a beauty that excels all other beauties. If we wish for the power and wisdom of God, we begin with Christ upon a cross.

Christ, the Power of God

Paul said that “the power of God for salvation” is in the gospel (Romans 1:16). What kind of God would save sinners through a cross? A God of grace and forgiveness! Our world worships brute power. God’s power is greater than all other powers combined. It is awesome, everlasting, and full of mercy.

God created and upholds the world by His Word (Genesis 1; 2; Hebrews 1:3). He has providential power, for He works out all things for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). However, God’s greatest strength is revealed in the cross. It is a power that is described as His weakness! Paul said that He “has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

He is a God of infinite humility. He provides salvation for us, but He lets us choose whether or not we will take it. He does not force His way into our lives—He stands at the door and knocks (Revelation 3:20). In the free choice that He gives us, we see the humility of God. He teaches in His approach to us that we cannot make anything grow by pounding it with a sledgehammer. Nothing is more helpless than a naked man dying on a cross, but God’s greatest work was done through a Man, His Son, on a cross. Consider the power of the cross: There is no sinner for whom Jesus did not die; and there is no sin the cross cannot take away.

Jesus’ death at Calvary was not a freak experience. It was the fulfillment of an eternal truth that was announced before the world began. Jesus was not on the cross for merely six hours. In a sense, He was there for thirty-three years. He faced it every day of His earthly life.

Jesus is the source of our salvation; the cross was the means of our salvation. God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:6–10). Although crucified through weakness, Jesus exhibits the power of God (2 Corinthians 13:4). All we can do with it is to receive it humbly. If we reject it, we will do so to our eternal destruction.

The German philosopher and atheist Friedrich Nietzsche idolized power. He despised Jesus because he thought He was weak. Nietzsche is dead; the gospel is still being preached. Christ crucified is the embodiment of the wisdom of God. What a God!

Christ, the Wisdom of God

Paul said that Jesus “became to us wisdom from God” (1 Corinthians 1:30). God’s great power is guided by His wisdom. His great plan for our salvation is an expression of His great wisdom. God, in His wisdom, put a cross at the center of Christianity. Man thinks the cross is grotesque, but God says that it is the fullness of His glory.

The sin that underlies all sin is presumption (Psalm 19:13; 2 Peter 2:10). Man presumes that the way he thinks is the way God thinks, or should think. Psychology promises to make life better. Christ gives sinners life, period! Dead men need life, not rehabilitation (Ephesians 2). The power of God has always been to raise the dead. At the cross God raises sinners from the dead.

Man wants salvation from war, poverty, and disease. Christ on the cross saves us from sin. Man cannot solve war, mistreatment of others, or social unrest until he is saved from sin. Sin can be cured only at the cross.

To the intellectually proud, the cross is still folly. Man wants power, not wisdom—enlightenment, not faith. One cannot hold to the cross and at the same time hold to pride, hatred, and sin. No one can stand at the cross and boast.

At the cross Jesus died to save a world that did not want to be saved. What a Savior! Paul determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1–5). Believe it and teach it! Never lose faith in the power of the gospel! Let us quit trying to be godly without God, to be Christians without Christ, to be spiritual without the Spirit. Let us not “try” to live the Christian life—let us live life as Christians.

Only God could take an instrument of execution (the cross) and make it into the greatest motivation upon earth. Apart from the cross, there is no power to die to self, and there is no wisdom with which to live life to the fullest. Jesus said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). He was able to draw all men to Himself because the cross is invested with God’s wisdom and power.

Six Miracles Connected with the Cross

Matthew 27:45-54; Mark 15:33-39; Luke 23:44-47

“And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” (Matthew 27:51, 52).

God warned the Jews time and time again. There was no excuse for them not to become believers. Jewish leaders knew that Jesus was divine; but, in their hate and blindness, they killed Him anyway. Even Pilate knew who He was, and pronounced Him “not guilty” (Matthew 27:18).

Consider what took place before the crucifixion. During the arrest in the garden, when Jesus said, “I am He,” many in the mob drew back and fell on the ground (John 18:6). Awesome! This should have stopped the whole sordid affair!

Then there was the healing of Malchus’ ear! Let us not be too harsh with Peter. He was willing to fight and die for Jesus. He knew how to use that sword. What statement was Peter making by swinging it? “Yes, we are outnumbered, and we will lose—but some of you will die,” he was saying. He flicked off Malchus’ ear, but Jesus healed it. This was the last miracle for the Jews before Jesus went to the cross. Jesus could manage anything!

We must not forget the miracle that never happened! Jesus said to Peter, “I could ask for legions of angels to help us, but I won’t.” Read and reread Matthew 26:50–56; Mark 14:46–50; Luke 22:50, 51; John 18:10–14. Jesus used this occasion to present Himself to God as our atoning sacrifice for sin.

1. Darkness

Those who do not want to believe, after a time, cannot believe. Why have we neglected and overlooked the miracles?

Jesus was on the cross six hours. The first three belonged to the crowd; the last three belonged to God! The darkness was a preview of hell (Matthew 8:12; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6, 13). It is Christ or hell! This darkness was not an eclipse of the sun. An eclipse lasts only a few minutes and cannot happen during a full moon. Passover came during a full moon. The darkness was eerie, providing prevailing quietness, except for the

moans of three dying men and the voices of those who were wondering out loud what was happening (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). The shame of Calvary smothered the sun. Those present could see only darkness and hear only silence.

2. The Veil

At 3:00 p.m. the priests were on duty at the temple. Jesus cried with a loud voice. Before their startled eyes, the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). God had removed Himself from an earthly location. The law of Moses was gone; the Levitical priesthood was gone. No wonder many priests later obeyed the gospel (Acts 6:7).

3. The Earthquake

The earthquake brought a suspense that was surely terrifying. Even Roman soldiers were awed at the earthquake (Matthew 27:51, 54). Rocks, some of the hardest substances on earth, were split. Everything shook except the cross!

4. The Opened Graves

Earlier, the Jews had demanded of Jesus a sign. God gave them six miracles at Calvary. The splitting of the rocks was brute force; the opening of the graves was brilliant design (Matthew 27:52, 53). What an unusual earthquake! Only selected graves were opened! “And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts” (Luke 23:48). God was still teaching, warning, and reaching out to the Jews. This also proves that the events on the Day of Pentecost (the beginning of the church in Acts 2) were no accident. Peter began the first gospel sermon, testifying, “. . . as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). Before that occasion, God had given them fifty days to think about the cross. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter gave them the solution to their guilt—Christ.

5. The Grave Clothes

John outran Peter, yet he stopped at the tomb’s entrance and looked in. He found only an empty tomb. When he followed Peter into the tomb, he saw evidence of a resurrected Savior (John 20:1–9; Luke 24:1–12). The last thing the enemies wanted was an empty tomb. The disciples would have clothed Jesus; they would not have disrobed Him. Enemies would not have taken the time to disrobe Him. Grave clothes were enough evidence for John. He was the first to believe! We, too, must think logically about this!

6. The Resurrected Saints

The graves were opened on Friday (Matthew 27:50–53). The resurrected saints did not walk in Jerusalem until Sunday. To remain ceremonially clean, the Jews could not greet their loved ones. What a monumental miracle! What would you have done if you had been there?

These six miracles connected with the cross provide evidence that the One crucified was God’s dear Son. They give indisputable proof. Whoever believes the Source, that is, the New Testament writings, has to be convinced by these amazing wonders.

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*