

**Notes on the Greek New Testament**  
**Day 217 – August 5<sup>th</sup> – 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5**

**Works frequently referenced in these notes on 1 Corinthians**

John Drane	<i>Paul</i> , Lion Publishing, Berkhamstead, 1976
Leon Morris	<i>The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians</i> , Tyndale New Testament Commentary, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ed., IVP, Leicester, 1985
Anthony C Thistleton	<i>The First Epistle to the Corinthians</i> , The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000

**1:18-2:5**

This section is entitled by Thistleton, "The Contrast between Human Wisdom and the Transformational Power of the Cross as God's Wisdom." C Blomberg says, "1:18-2:5 explains ... how genuine, full-orbed Christianity stands opposed to the foundational values of a fallen, sinful world but provides the necessary antidote to the self-centred functionalism of the Corinthians." And Thistleton, quoting Martyn, remarks concerning the pride some of the Corinthians place in 'spiritual knowledge', "The 'spiritual elite' monopolise and pre-empt the hitherto Pauline contrast between 'secular' or *ordinary* (ψυχικός or κατά σάρκα) knowledge and *spiritual* (πνευματικός or κατά πνεύμα) knowledge. But amidst the continuing struggles and realities of Christian experience *before* the eschaton (cf. 1:26-31; 2:1-5; 4:8-13) in Paul's judgment in the context of this letter 'the implied opposite of knowing κατά σάρκα is not knowing κατά πνεύμα, but rather knowing κατά σταυρόν. He who recognises his life to be God's *gift* at the *junction of the ages* recognises also that until he is completely and exclusively in the new age, his knowing κατά πνεύμα can only be in the form of knowing κατά σταυρόν.' ... The cross projects a new world which Paul defines in terms of 'having the mind of Christ' (2:16)."

**Verse 18**

Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν, τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν.

λογος here is parallel with κηρυγματος in v.21. The meaning is 'proclamation'. "The phrase serves, in effect, as Paul's definition of the gospel." Thistleton

σταυρος, ου m cross  
ἀπολλυμι destroy, kill, lose; midd be lost,  
perish, die

'Those on their way to destruction.'

μωρια, ας f foolishness

Thistleton suggests 'wisdom' and 'folly' were theological slogans or catchwords at Corinth. "Hence Paul transposes the wisdom-folly contrast into that between what is humanly self-defeating, stultifying, and foolish on one side and what becomes effective, operative, powerful and transformative by divine agency. Paul uses this rhetorical technique of transposition or 'code-switching' elsewhere."

σωζω save, rescue, heal

The present participles express a continuing process. "The temptation to assume that Christians have already 'arrived' nourishes a mood of self-congratulation which is entirely at odds with the proclamation of the cross: a Christ wounded, humiliated, and done-to-death." Thistleton

δυναμις θεου ἐστιν "The cross, then, constitutes the point at which, and/or the means through which, God's presence and promise becomes operative as that which actualises and transforms. It differs from human weakness and folly not in degree but in kind. For as we noted in our reading of v.17, a merely rhetorical or psychological exercise in communicating some belief system remains empty if it fails to engage with the cross precisely as a saving proclamation, but reflects some degree of human achievement in gaining and communicating 'wisdom.' Such play with words may seem to be wise and sophisticated, but only to those who are on their way to ruin. Those who are on our way to salvation perceive it as sheer folly." Thistleton  
And Bonhoeffer writes that wisdom or grace without the cross is what is "sold on the market like a cheapjack's wares." "Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner ... forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline ... the world goes on in the same old way ... grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."

**Verse 19**

γέγραπται γάρ· Ἀπολῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν,  
καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν ἀθετήσω.

γέγραπται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s γραφω

Isa 29:14 LXX

ἀπολῶ Verb, fut act indic, 1 s ἀπολλυμι  
destroy

σοφία, ας f wisdom, insight, intelligence  
σοφος, η, ον wise, experienced

In the context of the original quotation,  
particularly the wisdom of the learned and  
politically dominant classes.

συνεσις, εως f understanding, insight  
συνετος, η, ον intelligent, possessing  
understanding

"Properly, the former denotes mental  
excellence in general, the latter the intelligent  
critical discerning of ... things." Morris  
Thistleton thinks 'shrewd' for συνετος conveys  
the required sense of "street-wise political life  
skills."

ἀθετεω reject, set aside, refuse

**Verse 20**

ποῦ σοφός; ποῦ γραμματεὺς; ποῦ συζητητῆς  
τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; οὐχὶ ἐμῶρανεν ὁ θεὸς τὴν  
σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου;

που σοθος i.e. 'where does that now place the  
sage?'

γραμματευς, εως m scribe, expert in  
Jewish law, scholar

The expert, the person of letters, the  
professional.

συζητητης, ου m skilful debater, reasoner

The scholar, debater.

αἰῶνος Noun, gen s αἰων, αἰωνος m age,  
world order

The use of αἰων indicates the passing nature of  
this world – 'this current world order.' "The  
world is but a passing show and its wisdom  
passes with it." Morris

οὐχι (emphatic form of οὐ) not, no; used in  
questions expecting an affirmative answer.

μωραυνω make foolish, make tasteless

'Has not God made a fool of this world's  
wisdom.' The cross provides a radically new  
frame of reference for Christian understanding.

**Verse 21**

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ  
κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ  
θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι  
τοὺς πιστεύοντας.

ἐπειδη since, because, for

ἔγνω Verb, aor act indic, 3 s γινωσκω

εὐδοκεω be pleased, take pleasure in

"By God's design human wisdom did not lead  
to the saving experience of God." Collins.

The wisdom of this world order is "fallible,  
temporary, short-term, and self-absorbed."  
Thistleton.

For Paul's own commentary on the first half of  
this verse cf. Rom 1:18-3:20.

μωρία, ας f see v.18

κηρυγμα, τος n what is preached,  
message, proclamation

This word denotes not the act of preaching or  
the method of communicating the Gospel but  
the content of the message. "It has nothing to  
do with whether the mode of communication is  
in a pulpit rather than a variety of modes which  
may or may not include lectures, dialogue,  
disputation, or living the gospel out... God's  
self-disclosure, however, is, as Barth points  
out, not simply about God, but 'the Word of  
God is itself the act of God,' an 'address' which  
presupposes God's own presence." Thistleton

πιστεω believe (in), have faith (in)

**Verse 22**

ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖα αἰτοῦσιν καὶ  
Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν·

Ἰουδαίος, α, ον a Jew, Jewish, Judean

σημειον, ου n miraculous sign, sign

αἰτεω ask, request, demand

Ἕλλην, ηνος m a Greek, non-Jew

ζητεω seek, search for, look for

Highlights a difference between the two  
cultures: the Jewish, with its focus on the  
concrete – what can be seen and touched; the  
Greek with its love of speculative philosophy.  
"The respective role of signs and wisdom in  
relation to Jews and Gentiles is not accidental.  
Jews already had access to 'wisdom' in the  
scriptures, but required signs to locate their  
situation within the promised purposes of  
salvation history. In one sense they were right.  
For the resurrection of Christ constitutes the  
sign that the cosmic turning point has arrived  
and casts essential light on the christological  
and cosmic significance of Jesus of Nazareth.  
Paul expounds God's power as an  
'eschatological motif.' On the other hand, the  
Gentile 'Greeks' go on seeking what will bring  
success in politics, the courtroom, philosophy,  
or in everyday affairs of trade, love, or the  
household: what will bring 'mastery' of life and  
especially the approval or admiration of  
patrons, masters and their own peer group."  
Thistleton

**Verse 23**

ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον,  
 Ἰουδαίους μὲν σκάνδαλον ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν,  
 κηρύσσω preach, proclaim  
 ἐσταυρωμένον perf pass ptc. σταυροῶ  
 crucify

The perfect implies that Christ "continues in the character of the crucified one. The crucifixion is permanent in its efficacy and effects." Morris

σκάνδαλον, οὐ n that which causes sin/  
 offence, obstacle

"It was an affront to those who ask for signs since the disgraceful and humiliating execution of a Jewish teacher by the occupying power hardly seemed to constitute a sign of God's saving action." Thistleton  
 Cf Matt 16:23 – Peter's suggestion that Jesus should avoid the cross is itself a σκάνδαλον to Jesus.

ἔθνεσιν Noun, dat pl ἔθνος, οὐς n nation,  
 people; τα ἔ. Gentiles  
 μωρία, ας f see v.18

"It was folly, i.e., the very reverse of a 'mastery' of life that brings success, honour, and esteem, for the figure whom Paul proclaimed passively accepted the kind of suffering and death which shouted failure, dishonour, and shame." Thistleton

**Verse 24**

αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ  
 Ἑλλήσιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ  
 σοφίαν.

κλητος, η, ον called, invited

The emphasis is on what *God* has done.

τε enclitic particle and, and so; τε καὶ  
 and also

**Verse 25**

ὅτι τὸ μωρὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σοφώτερον τῶν  
 ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ θεοῦ  
 ἰσχυρότερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

μωρος, α, ον foolish; το μ. foolishness

το μωρον perhaps a particular object is in view  
 – the cross as perceived by the world as 'a  
 foolish thing.'

σοφωτερος, α, ον wiser – comparative from  
 σοφος

ἀσθενής, ες sick, weak, helpless

The cross, if proclaimed to be the place of  
*God's* action seems to be a demonstration of  
 his weakness, even defeat.

ισχυροτερος, α, ον stronger – comparative  
 from ισχυρος

"Paul's marvellously succinct rhetorical parallelism both recapitulates vv.18-24 (first paragraph or section of 1:18-2:5) and points forward to the next sections (1:26-31 and 2:1-5)." Thistleton

**Verse 26**

Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλήσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ  
 πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί,  
 οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς:

βλεπω see, look at

κλησις, εως f call, calling

I.e. the circumstances and background against which you were called, cf. v.24. Robertson and Plummer paraphrase, "Summon before your mind's eye what took place then; note the ranks from which one by one you were summoned into the society of God's people; very few came from the educated, influential, or well-connected class."

πολυς, πολλη, πολυ gen πολλου, ης, ου  
 much, many

σοφος, η, ον see v.19

σαρξ, σαρκος f flesh, human nature

κατα σαρκα 'as the world counts cleverness.'

δυνατος, η, ον powerful, able, influential  
 εὐγενής, ες of high or noble birth, of high  
 social status

"The things which elevate men in the world, knowledge, influence, rank, are not the things that lead to God and salvation." Hodge  
 There *were* people of considerable socio-economic status within the church at Corinth but they were a minority. Paul's point is that they are one people, the poor no less than the influential, and that God's calling was not influenced by issues of social status and power – neither then should be relationships within the church. "Christian 'status' depends on the gift of grace and divine verdict, not upon compensatory self-esteem or self-promotion as 'wise' or 'spiritual' people." Thistleton

**Verse 27**

ἀλλὰ τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός,  
 ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ  
 τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ  
 τὰ ἰσχυρά,

μωρος, α, ον foolish

"The neuter concentrates attention of the quality of foolishness possessed by these people rather than on themselves as individuals." Morris. It is not that they *are* fools, but that they lack the supposed sophistication which was prized by the Greeks. There is a proper simplicity to faith.

ἐξελέξατο Verb, aor midd dep indic, 3 s  
 ἐκλεγομαι choose, select  
 καταισχυνω put to shame, humiliate

"God is no human construct, called in to legitimate human power interests, but the very reverse. His love for the nobodies and the nothings discounted as nonentities and as insignificant in the value system of the world puts the world to shame by its reversal of judgment." Thistleton

ἀσθενῆ Adjective, n nom & acc pl ἀσθενής,  
 ες see v. 25  
 ἰσχυρος, α, ον strong, mighty, powerful

### Verse 28

καὶ τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα  
 ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα  
 καταργήσῃ.

ἀγενῆ Adjective, n nom/acc pl ἀγενής, ες  
 low born, insignificant, inferior

ἀγενής is the direct antithesis of εὐγενής of v.26.

ἐξουθενημένα Verb, perf pass ptc, n nom/acc  
 pl ἐξουθενεω despise, treat with  
 contempt

τὰ μὴ ὄντα 'the nothings' "God's activity in men is creative. He takes that which is nothing at all and makes of it what he pleases." Morris

καταργεω render ineffective, cancel, do away with

'bring to nothing'

### Verse 29

ὅπως μὴ καυχῆσθαι πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.

ὅπως (or ὅπως ἄν) that, in order that  
 καυχαομαι boast, boast about

"The Corinthian people lived with an honour-shame orientation, where public recognition was often more important than facts, and where the worst thing that could happen was for one's reputation to be publicly tarnished. In such a culture a personal sense of worth is based on recognition by others of one's accomplishments, hence the self-promoting." Witherington

σὰρξ, σαρκος f see v.26

ἐνώπιον prep with gen before, in the presence of

Thistleton, quoting Martin, says, "These two dimensions together [divine election and the cross] give v.29 its full force: glorying is inappropriate in God's presence because whatever provides grounds for such glorying has come from God as his gift. Hence v.30 begins ἐξ αὐτοῦ ... (It is from him that ...). 'Paul disrupts the intuitive status expectations of his audience by invoking a belief he knows they share: the belief that in Christ, who was crucified, they have a common source of salvation and a common paradigm of leadership.'"

### Verse 30

ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὃς ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ, δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμός καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις,

ἐξ αὐτοῦ "The saved are *of him*, ἐξ giving the idea of source. Their new life derives from God." Morris

'It is as a gift from him that you are in Christ Jesus.' A double emphasis on the act of God and their status deriving solely from being 'in Christ.' 'In Christ' must be understood in terms of "objective status and corporate solidarity... Its content now manifests itself in sharing the gifts of righteousness, sanctification and redemption." Thistleton

ἐγενήθη Verb, aor indic, 3 s γινομαι  
 σοφία, ας f wisdom, insight, intelligence

"The wisdom of God is embodied in Christ, who offered himself that men might be saved. He is the real wisdom, let the philosophers argue as they will." Morris

δικαιοσύνη, ης f righteousness, what God requires

τε see v.25

ἁγιασμος, ου m sanctification, holiness  
 ἀπολύτρωσις, εως f redemption,  
 deliverance, setting free

= 'purchased from one owner to another by means of a costly transaction.'

"The four qualities, then, belong together, and both characterise Christ and are imparted by Christ. Just as Barth insists rightly that what real humanity consists in appears only in the perfect 'real man' Jesus Christ, so here Paul redefines what real wisdom consists in, namely (in Moltmann's language), The Way of Jesus Christ, as exhibited and made effective in God's own action in Christ on the cross. As against the obsession with status seeking and success at Corinth, wisdom is redefined and explicated as receiving the gifts of righteousness, sanctification and redemption freely bestowed through Christ and derivative from him. It is only that for Christian believers. Hence to glory in their new found status as righteous, holy and redeemed is to glory in the Lord, and in no other person, no other thing. These other things are 'nothings' not merely in a social sense, but, in isolation from God, also in an ontological sense. Thus Barrett comments, 'Not only do your sources of supply – wisdom, strength, and so forth – come from God: your very being comes from him.'" Thistleton

### Verse 31

ἵνα καθὼς γέγραπται· Ὁ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ  
καυχάσθω.

Cf. Jer 9:22-23.

γέγραπται Verb, perf pass indic, 3 s γραφω  
καυχαομαι see v.29

### 1 Corinthians 2:1

Κἀγὼ ἐλθὼν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ἦλθον οὐ  
καθ' ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας καταγγέλλων  
ὑμῖν τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ θεοῦ.

κἀγω a compound word = και ἐγω

The emphatic κἀγω indicates that Paul himself exemplified the principle which he had been expounding – in contrast with the manner in which the sophists introduced themselves at Corinth.

ἦλθον Verb, aor act ind, 1s & 3 pl ἐρχομαι  
ὑπεροχη, ης f position of authority; καθ ὑ.  
λόγου with high sounding words  
σοφια, ας f wisdom, insight, intelligence

'High sounding rhetoric or a display of cleverness' The words may include the ironic suggestion that such cleverness may result in what is above people's heads. Paul renounces preaching for effect.

καταγγέλλω proclaim, make known,  
preach

"Preaching the word is not delivering edifying discourses, beautifully put together. It is bearing witness to what God has done in Christ for man's salvation." Morris

'Preaching' here does not imply a particular form (cf 11:26; Acts 13:5; Rom 1:8 for the diverse ways in which the term is used). It is probable that the context for Paul's communication of the message at Corinth was not some public building but the household or private home. "But the proclamation remains 'public' in the sense that it does not communicate esoteric teaching to some inner group of initiates, but an announcement of events and state of affairs to all who would hear. In this sense the gospel is universal. The central content concerns a declaration of God's deeds in Christ." Thistleton

μυστηριον, ου η secret, mystery (of something formerly unknown but now revealed)

The weight of textual evidence is fairly evenly divided between μυστηριον and μαρτυριον. Metzger says, "From an exegetical point of view the reading μαρτυριον του θεου though well supported, is inferior to μυστηριον, which has more limited but early support. The reading μαρτυριον seems to be a recollection of 1:6, whereas μυστηριον here prepares for its usage in v.7." This argument is rejected by Fee who asks why any scribe would substitute the less expected *witness* for the more familiar *mystery*. Thistleton says, "No one can exclude either possibility, but ... we lean towards *mystery*."

### Verse 2

οὐ γὰρ ἔκρινά τι εἶδέναι ἐν ὑμῖν εἰ μὴ Ἰησοῦν  
Χριστὸν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον·

κρινω judge, pass judgement on  
εἶδεναι perf act infin οἶδα (verb perf in form  
but with present meaning) know,  
understand

Thistleton takes issue with most translations which link οὐ with εἶδεναι or with τι. He considers that οὐ belongs with ἐκριναι and implies that Paul *had not* come with a plan to use the methods outlined above. The only plan he had come with was to proclaim the crucified Christ.

ἐσταυρωμενον see 1:23

There is no implied contrast with Paul's experience in Athens. On the contrary, Paul refers to his settled method, whether in Galatia, Athens or Corinth.

**Verse 3**

καὶ ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρέμῳ  
πολλῷ ἐγενόμην πρὸς ὑμᾶς,

ἀσθενεια, ας f weakness, illness

φοβος, ου m fear

τρομος, ου m trembling

Maybe stressing that Paul saw himself as one standing *before God* with fearful sense of responsibility to deliver God's message.

Though "No doubt, if we draw on the narratives in Acts, the temporary absence of Paul's co-workers Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:15; 18:5) added a psychological dimension of loneliness or isolation which exacerbated Paul's fear and trembling (cf. the absence of Titus in 2 Cor 2:13)." Thistleton

πολυς, πολλη, πολυ gen πολλου, ης, ου  
much, many

"Paul is precisely not a visiting orator come to entertain the crowds as an audience-pleasing performer." Thistleton

**Verse 4**

καὶ ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν  
πειθοῖ σοφίας ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ  
δυνάμεως,

κηρυγμα, τος η what is preached,  
message, proclamation

πειθοῖς Adjective, m dat pl πειθος, η, ον  
persuasive, skillful

It is difficult to decide between the variant readings (eleven in all) here. In particular between the reading ἐν πειθοῖ σοφίας 'with the persuasiveness of wisdom' (πειθοῖ being the dative singular) and ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις 'in persuasive wise words.' In the end "the result makes little serious difference for the thrust of the verse." Thistleton

ἀποδειξις, εως f proof, demonstration

ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως 'brought home powerfully by the Spirit.' "Paul relies on the power of the Holy Spirit at work in convincing hearts and minds of the truth of ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα μου." Thistleton

**Verse 5**

ἵνα ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν μὴ ᾗ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἀνθρώπων  
ἀλλ' ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ.

ᾗ Verb, pres subj, 3s εἶμι

δυνάμει Noun, dat s δυναμις

"A faith based on human argument would be built on sand' (Godet). This does not mean that argument or persuasion can play no role; it means that something more is involved that speaks to the heart as well as to the mind and creates a new reality (δυναμις θεου) for the believer." Thistleton