

MORE THAN WISDOM

July 12, 1959

"And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." — Acts 18:11

In Corinth Paul's greatest adversary was not immorality, although it was the most corrupt city of the Roman Empire. Rather it was intellectual snobbery masquerading under the guise of wisdom or *sophia*. Its adherents were philosophers or *lovers of sophia*. Reduced to its component parts it was a combination of pagan and intellectual reason. Attempting to explain the ultimate realities of life it failed to produce any clear concept of or vital experience with God.

Multitudes of people today follow in the path of these philosophers. In one form or another they choose for religion some system of thought or pattern of life which is nothing more than human thought draped about a mannequin of inanimate religious names or phrases. Like the Epicurean philosophers some follow the materialistic cult of hedonism, dedicated to a pursuit after happiness which often degenerates into an orgy of physical indulgence. Others, like the Stoics, adhere to the cult of self-willed virtue whose end is pharisaic contempt for those of lesser accomplishments. Still another group follow Platonism whose philosophy-religion deifies the intellectual into a wisdom-for-wisdom's-sake school of thought. In any case such a procedure becomes a philosophy of life, sanctified under the name of religion, but which falls far short of the requirements of God or of the deepest needs of men.

Confronted with such a school of religion Luke says that Paul taught "the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11). This simple statement becomes clearer as we examine the opening chapter of I Corinthians in which Paul sets forth his

initial attack against the citadel of sin and snobbery called Corinth. In verse 17 he says, "For Christ sent me . . . to preach the gospel: not with *wisdom [sophia] of words*, lest the cross of Christ should be made of non effect" (author's italics). Here we have a contrast: "the *sophia* of words" and "the cross of Christ." In verse 18 he speaks of "the preaching of the cross." Literally he says, "the word [*logos*] of the cross," which suggests Luke's phrase in Acts 18:11, "the word [*logos*] of God." Paul's answer, then, to "the wisdom of words" is "the word of the cross." It is a contrast between man's intellectual religion and God's revealed religion. It is "the wisdom of this world" (1:20) versus "the wisdom of God" (1:24).

Such a contrast is still with us. Today there exists a school of theological thought known as "modernism." About twelve years ago Dr. Lloyd-Jones of London said that the drift towards modernism which blights present-day Christianity finds its origin in that hour when men began to turn from revelation to philosophy. It is unfortunate that the modern product of such a "drift" should be called "modernism." Such terminology suggests that he who does not follow its teachings is not up-to-date, but is a back number, an ignoramus. Actually modernism is an "ancient antique" which has been excavated from the ruins of ancient Greek civilization. It is an attempt to drape Greek philosophy with a religious cloak, and to foist it upon men as an intellectual approach to the Christian gospel. Its end result is no gospel at all. In essence it denies the inspiration of the Scriptures making them nothing more than the product of intellectual evolution. That which does not agree with its own concepts is discarded. Thu

it denies the miraculous element of the Bible, the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, blood atonement, and bodily resurrection. It makes of the Bible a patchwork crazy quilt of tradition, legend, and fabrication, with a mixture of eternal truth. The result is theological confusion, a negation of the gospel, the substitution of the theory of relativity in morals for a Bible based standard of righteousness. Its yield in the realm of character and conduct is the modern world given over to riotous living, stumbling toward inevitable ruin. Rejecting the gospel of God it substitutes its own gospel of social reform bereft of any dynamic to accomplish even the goal which it proposes. It literally dethrones God and makes man the master of his fate both in time and in eternity.

In answer to such a religious belief Paul, without apology, proclaimed "the word of the cross." Realizing that such makes the cross of "none effect" [void, empty], he chose to glorify the cross and to glory in it (Gal. 6:14). In so doing Paul makes three declarations. First, the power of a cross-centered religion; second, the impotency of a philosophy-centered religion; third, God's provision for a world bankrupt in philosophy.

First, note the power of a cross-centered religion (v.18). Paul introduces this thought by declaring that those who rest in a philosophy-centered religion are perishing. The word "perish" is a *present middle participle* of the Greek word to destroy. The *present tense* says that they are perishing. The *middle voice* says that they are doing it to themselves. They have placed themselves in the path of destruction. To them the cross is foolishness. The Greek word is *moros* from which we get our word *moron*. Thus to them the idea of salvation through one who died on the cross is moronic. Need I add that this attitude finds its modern counterpart in those who follow the same philosophy-religion today?

Answering them Paul declares that "unto us which are saved it is the power of God." The words "are saved" translate a *present passive participle*. The *present tense* suggests the continuing effect of salvation. Dr. A. T. Robertson points out that elsewhere Paul describes salvation as something done in the past, "we were saved" (Rom. 8:24); as a continuing state, "ye have been saved" (Eph. 2:8; perfect tense, done in past, still going on, and continuing to go on, a finished work); as a process, "ye are being saved" (I Cor. 15:2); and as a future result, "thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Thus is included redemption, sanctification, and final glorification in heaven. The *passive voice* indicates that it is a salvation wrought for us by another, with no respect to personal virtuous achievements. All of this is by the power (*dunamis*, dynamite) of God.

Now the devotees of philosophy-religion say that this is absurd, silly, moronic, and *foolish*. But to those who adhere to revealed religion it is *power*. Note the contrast. "Foolishness" is a thing of the mind, of opinion. "Power" is something that vibrates and performs, producing results. Thus the cross is contrasted with worldly wisdom. Man says that the cross is foolishness; God says it is power. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Second, consider the impotency of a philosophy-centered religion. This is not to negate the value of philosophy as such. It concerns itself with those who seek to make revealed religion subservient to the speculations of natural philosophy.

Paul's reference to Jews and Greeks in Romans 1:16 suggests the twofold aspect of this question. This is seen also in I Corinthians 1:19 where Paul says of God, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." He is quot-

ing from Isaiah 29:14. Looking at this passage we discover God's attitude toward natural philosophy versus revealed religion in His dealings with Israel.

"Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people . . . for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish . . . woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord . . . surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?" (Isa. 29:13-16). This is God's answer to both the ancient Jewish and Greek philosophers and to all today who follow in their train.

In I Corinthians 1:20 Paul applies this truth. "Where are the wise [Greek philosopher]? Where is the scribe [Jewish philosopher]? Where is the disputer of the world" [Greek and Jew]? What is the fruit of their labor? Jerusalem, soon to be destroyed was one answer. Corinth with its corruption was another.

Applying these two illustrations to our present day, what do we find? Modernism finds its modern roots in the German University of Tubingen. This school of thought emasculated the Bible and did almost fatal violence to all Christian truth. Such thought produced a Germany, which in the last century started three wars, two of worldwide scope. The rubble of today's Germany is the direct fruit of such a philosophy-religion. From Germany like a poisoned fog this teaching spread over Europe and on to America. The two major results of such are our frantic efforts to solve today's world problems without God, and the fatalism which expresses itself in the worst moral degeneration of modern his-

tory. Truly, God in His permissive will has made foolish or moronic the wisdom of this world.

How we need to slough off such a philosophy-religion! Even the modernists, realizing their inability to cope with life have returned to the half-way house of neo-orthodoxy, which seeks to pour their wine of philosophy-religion into the wine skins of the terminology of revealed religion. Long ago Jesus emphasized the destructive results of such an attempt (Matt. 9:16f.). For their teaching denies the very terminology which they seek to adapt. It hides the simple gospel of salvation, both personal and social, from a generation which so sadly needs to find it. As Jesus said of Judaism so must we say of this philosophy-religion. You cannot use Christian truth to patch up either Jewish or Greek philosophy. Any preacher endeavoring to do so should either experience a change in his heart and message, or else vacate his pulpit to turn to his own rented hall to which would come only those who reject God's revelation and spend "their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new things" (Acts 17:21)!

Third, note God's provision for a world bankrupt in philosophy. "For after the wisdom [*sophia*] of God the world by wisdom [its own *sophia*] knew not God [did not come to know God], it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (v.21). Thus He contrasted the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world, the foolishness of God and the foolishness of the world. The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God (v.25). What men call foolishness is the very essence of God's wisdom. The Jews and Greeks saw the cross as a stumbling block and foolishness (v.23). To them it was *weakness* and foolishness. To God it was power and wisdom (v.24).

Thus "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." This refers not to the act c

preaching, but to the message proclaimed. Taking the philosophy-religion at its word, Paul says that God showed His power by taking that which they called foolishness and saving the world thereby (v.27). Thus by choosing that which the world despises, God has brought to nothing that which the world adores (v.28).

Carried out to its practical conclusion

philosophy-religion says, "But of us are ye in yourselves who of nature are made unto us wisdom, and unrighteousness, and rebellion, and destruction." But God through Paul reveals, "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" (vv.30f.).

MORE THAN SINCERITY

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"And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism."—Acts 19:3

To understand the opening verses of Acts 19 we must look at the closing verses of Acts 18. Apollos was probably a young man who had never seen John the Baptist. Being mighty in the Scriptures (18:24) he was familiar with Isaiah 40:3 quoted by John the Baptist as referring to his own ministry. From some disciple of John he had heard and believed that John was the herald of a new era of God. On that basis he had received John's baptism (18:25). In Ephesus Apollos said nothing about Jesus, but only of the things of the Lord [Jehovah] (18:25), until two Christian disciples "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (18:26). They told him of the ministry of Jesus as the anointed one of God for salvation. Henceforth in Corinth, having himself "believed through grace," Paul helped other Christians by expounding his knowledge of the Old Testament, showing that Jesus is the Christ (18:27-28).

Apparently Apollos had made some converts to John's baptism prior to his own experience of faith in Jesus. For when Paul arrived in Ephesus he found twelve men who knew only John's baptism. He proceeded to preach to them

a full gospel, in which they believed and upon which basis they were baptized.

This incident serves to point up the fact that sincerity alone in your religion is insufficient for your salvation. These twelve men, like Apollos, were sincere in their faith. But it was without sufficient knowledge, and, therefore, faith in the wrong thing.

How often have you heard the statement that it does not make any difference what you believe so long as you are sincere in it? Our scripture proves the utter falseness of such an idea. Therefore, let us follow this incident as we consider, first, the evidence of salvation; second, the essence of salvation; third, the experience of salvation.

First, note the evidence of salvation. Paul asked, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost [Spirit] since ye believed?" (19:2). This is a bad translation. In Greek both "received" and "believed" are in the same tense (aorist). Thus they refer to the same event. Therefore, it should read, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" Hence Paul did not speak of belief as at one time, with a subsequent receiving of the Holy Spirit, or as in modern terminology a "second blessing."