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God's Wisdom is Foolishness to Man

March 19th, 2023

Sermon Text: Galatians 1:10

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 1:18-31

Gal 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Listen to John Calvin comment on this:

“If we desire to be Christians, let us honor the Son of God by continuing to listen to His Word and obey it, even when we do not like what it says and when our natures find it unpalatable. Thus,

when anyone comes to a sermon, above all else he should be ready to be rebuked where necessary, and he should realise that if he is not comforted by it, then it is to his profit.

If he has itching ears, he should put this right, for he cannot benefit or profit from the teaching if this is the case. Let us all be willing to have our wounds scratched, as it were, and to be condemned, and to hear the opposite of what we would like to hear. This is how we should prepare ourselves if we wish to be good scholars under the Son of God and to attribute to him his rightful mastery over us.

We must work all the harder at this if we see that our natures are pushing us to do the opposite, for we are often blinded by self-love. Each one covets to be honored, and

yet we cannot be, unless it be by flattery and deception. For what is there that is commendable in us? In God's sight there is only filth and corruption.

For even all the best seeming virtues in us are corrupt until God transforms us. Thus, it is certain that everything we are by nature must be cleansed, or else we will perish in our own wretchedness.

There is no other way to be saved than to be cleansed from our sins. Yet this cleansing can only come about after we have been violently shaken and convicted by the teaching of the gospel, and when our own consciences rebuke us, even though we like to be praised and flattered at times.

Let us, therefore, desire to be spoken to earnestly, shown our sins, and made ashamed of them by having our guilt uncovered, rather than seeking to hear what pleases us. For secretly to hold on to our sins is to perish in them. It will cost us very dear if, having been flattered by men, the heavenly

Judge should thunder down upon us.

This, then, is how we may profit from the words of Paul here. If preachers wish to gratify and please men, they are renouncing God by so doing; and if they renounce him, what will become of the rest of the people? Where will they be led except to the devil?

Thus, when we come to hear a sermon, let us bear in mind that the one who is speaking is not doing so by his own authority but in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been appointed our Judge by God the Father. And to what end does Jesus Christ judge us? To the end that we should all condemn ourselves, and then, having passed sentence, come to him to be forgiven.

Now if a mortal man seeks to cover up my sins because of some supposed love he bears towards me, does this mean that the heavenly Judge will do the same? Is it not better that the one who teaches me should condemn me, and show me my sins, so that I am

sorry for them and learn to dislike those things that lead to hell? Should I not accept it, since God still holds out his arms to receive me, and Jesus Christ still goes before me to present me to God his Father as an acceptable sacrifice with a sweet-smelling savor?

Therefore, we must either be mad or bewitched by Satan if we cannot bear to have our sores rubbed in this way and our sins uncovered, and be shown what we need to do for our spiritual well-being.

What happens when we try to cheer a sick man? We might offer him something to drink every minute of the day. We might offer him wine when he ought to have water. We might offer him something savory and that may be the next best thing to poison to him! *In short, simply seeking to please a man will certainly lead to his death.*

Now, which is better: that the one who is caring for the sick man should grant his every desire, or that he should help him to control his desires, even if the sick man becomes angry, and grinds his

teeth, and creates a stir because he has not been given what he requested?

Yet, if sick people have inordinate desires, our are surely worse! What will become of us then, unless those who bring us the Word of God, who ought to be our physicians, take care to protect us from what they know to be harmful, and unless they show us what will be for our good? Surely to encourage us in our natural lusts is the way to ruin us forever? This is what we should learn here when Paul speaks of his motives.”

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We Can Please Man or God, not Both

Jesus rebuked the Jews for their selfish motives regarding the preaching of John the Baptist:

Mat 11:7-8 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds

concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (8) What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

Why did they go out to see John? Motives no doubt varied. A few no doubt took his word to repent seriously. But it is most likely that the mass of the crowds went to see what the stir was all about. To find some entertainment. This kind of hysteria is very common among human beings.

This calls us to examine our own motives carefully. Why did many people run to see C.H. Spurgeon in London, for instance? Or men like Benjamin Franklin coming to hear George Whitefield preach? To these godly men's grief, the motives of such were superficial and selfish. The circus had come to town – that was what sparked their curiosity. *Therefore we must ask, why do I open my Bible? Why do I listen to preachers? Why to I come to church?* And, as John Calvin just

suggested, *as long as we are seeking to please our own flesh, as long as we are motivated by a desire to hear what will commend and flatter us, as long as we want to hear about a God who approves of us and only speaks to make us feel good about ourselves, we can never be healed of the true fatal disease called sin.*

The Spirit of God is always, always, always *against the desires of the flesh*. The Word of God is always in opposition to the word of man. The gospel is foolishness to man, though it is the wisdom of God. These are the things Paul would have us consider this morning in this text:

Gal 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

We cannot serve and please God if we are seeking to please men. Or to please ourselves – our flesh, that is.

Let's call ourselves to real humility here. Unless we are humbled and our cursed pride is broken, we will never benefit from God's Word. Unless we acknowledge that God is God and we are not, that God is high above us and we are mere creatures, we will come to God's truth and it will do us no good. Why? Because in our sin – which still remains in the Christian's flesh – we will twist and distort His Word and fashion it into some mutation which pleases us.

Jesus told the crowds, for instance, that they were just coming out into the wilderness to get some more bread from Him, as He had fed them before. They came, you see, not to hear and feast on the True Bread which comes down from heaven to show us the way of salvation, but they came to feed their corrupting flesh. And that is exactly how so many people – even those who claim to be Christians – approach God's Word today. What will be such people's reaction when they are not given that fleshly food? You know the answer. They will condemn Jesus, turn away, and go elsewhere.

Here is another challenge in this regard from John Calvin [Sermons on Ephesians] -

“You see then that the reason why some men find this doctrine (election) hard and irksome is because they are too much wedded to their own opinion and cannot submit themselves to God's wisdom, to receive His sayings soberly and modestly. And truly we ought to take warning from what St. Paul says, namely, that the natural man does not understand God's secrets but regards them as stark foolishness (see 1 Cor 2:14). And why? Because we are not His counselors but must have things revealed to us by His Holy Spirit, or else we shall never know them, and we must have them in such measure as He gives them to us.

Let us learn to put away all that we conceive in our own brain and put it under foot, and let us be ready to receive whatever God says to us, casting away our own judgment and assuring ourselves that we cannot bring anything from our

side but utter stupidity. Thus you see what we have to bear in mind.

Understand? If God's Word is going to please the natural man, if it is going to be some kind of food that sin relishes, *it cannot be God's Word. The Bible must be altered when it is read. The sermon must proclaim another gospel which strokes man's pride and assures him that he is able to earn merit with God by his own doings. God's election of His people and His passing by of the rest is so repugnant to the flesh that it must never be served on his plate. We cannot please man AND God.*

Sometimes your computer acts like sinful flesh. How? It sends genuine messages which we need to receive to the spam folder. Often never to be found again. And this is a very good picture of what our own flesh does if we do not battle it and put it to death – *it sends God's Word to spam.* There are myriads of people who claim to be Christians who approach the Bible, biblical sermons, just like this. Ears that are programmed to send all messages

from the Lord which offend the flesh – straight to spam, replacing it with a counterfeit forged by our own mind or by the devil himself. *You can hear God's Word preached, you can read your Bible – for years and years and years, and yet have none of it get through unless you humble yourself and plead with the Lord to open your eyes and ears to receive His truth no matter how hurtful to you pride it might be.*

Let's hear Paul again:

1Co 2:7-14 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (8) None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

(9) But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— (10) **these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.** For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

(11) For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? **So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.**

(12) Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might understand the things freely given us by God.**

(13) **And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit,** interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

(14) **The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**

There is far more in those few verses than not only do we have time this morning to work through, but more than we are even able to fully grasp. But this much is clear to anyone who will hear:

The Word of God, the gospel, the Scriptures are impossible for us to understand unless the Spirit of God teaches us. Further, not only is the Word of God incomprehensible to us in our own selves, but in the unsaved person and even in the Christian when the flesh is allowed to prevail, that Word of God is repugnant. It is foolishness.

Now, here is the challenge we must put to ourselves:

When you come to hear the Word of God, when you hear a biblical sermon or when you read the Bible, do you come in broken humility acknowledging the stupidity and dullness of your mind apart from the Spirit of God, or do you come in pride and self-confidence, sitting in judgment upon God and His Word?

That is to say, *do you come only to hear what pleases you, what pleases your flesh, which is rational to man? Do you come for a loaf of bread to appease your belly, or do you come for the Bread from Heaven?*

Calvin again:

“They must be heretics who intend to mutilate and take away from the gospel. For what they did not like they set aside and have forged a gospel of various pieces, allowing nothing but what they themselves thought good....They would stop the mouth of God, if it were possible, and seal his mouth whenever he utters anything they do not like.” [Sermons on Ephesians]

And again:

“Let us note well that we cannot believe unless God reveals himself to us by his Holy Spirit and speaks to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, in addition to speaking to our ears by the mouth of man. And that is why the prophet Isaiah says, ‘Who has believed our doctrine, and to whom has the arm of the Lord revealed?’ (Is 53:1) He shows that there is no faith in the world until God has worked in men’s minds and hearts by the power of his Holy Spirit. And for the very same reason also our Lord Jesus Christ says that no

man comes to him except he be drawn by the Father; but whoever has learned of my Father, the same submits himself to me” (John 6:44). In a word, we see clearly that God shows himself merciful to us when he promises to enlighten us by his Holy Spirit in order that we might be drawn to the faith of his gospel.” [Ibid]

The wisdom of God is foolishness to man, and no one can please God and please man as well. This means that we, even if you are a true child of God having been born again as a new creation, that we must humbly admit that in that corrupting portion of our being in this world – called the flesh – still strives against the Spirit in us to crave after a false gospel which glorifies us, to sit up and give ear to an ear-tickling doctrine which sinful ears itch for. There is within us that fallen part – the flesh – which craves to be pleasing to and popular with unregenerate men and women. And we must do battle with it by the Spirit:

Gal 5:16-17 But I say, walk by the

Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Rom 8:12-14 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Consider this list carefully and as you do, let's realize and confess two things:

1. All of this ugliness clings to us – even as real Christians – and craves to exercise its will in us – and it will be present until we pass out of this life and leave this flesh behind.
2. All of these aspects of sin – and more – crave to alter God's Word to sin's own

pleasing. If permitted to do so, our sinful flesh will distort God's Word every single time we hear it so that it will be of NO benefit to us.

That is why there are professing Christians who never change. They never grow. They never bear fruit – they are Barren Fig Trees. Why? Because God's Word is foolishness to them.

Let me close with an example which we will get into in more detail in the new mid-week Ephesians study.

Why is TULIP so wretched and stinking to even many people who claim to be Christians? I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the majority of evangelicals detest the 5 doctrines these letters stand for. Let's consider, for instance, the second letter – "U" which is, "unconditional election."

God, in eternity past, before the world ever existed, elected to salvation a remnant of fallen humanity. He loved Jacob and hated Esau (Romans 9). Before

they were even born. God could have elected everyone, but He did not. He chose some and passed the rest by. It is the elect for whom Christ died, not all of humanity.

Now, why is this doctrine so detestable to man? Why are churches split over it? Why is the doctrine twisted as Arminian theology does? We know the answer if we will hear it:

Because God's wisdom is foolishness to the natural man. Because man in his sin insists that he has ability to please God, to earn merit with God and to do so by his own works. But the gospel says that man is dead in his sin, not only unable to please God but devoid of any DESIRE to please God.

Man's will, you see, MUST be free to choose Christ and so all of Scripture is interpreted through that false lens. Man answers back to God. Man who is made stupid and blind by sin, is going to tell God that man knows better. So that unless we cease from this evil lunacy, unless we come to God's

Word humbly, acknowledging that He is God and we are not, this sinful interpreter in us called the flesh is going to keep right on asking – every time God's Word comes to our ears – “Indeed, has God said?” And that life-giving Word will do us no good.

Rom 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (34) “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” (35) “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” (36) For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.