

1 Corinthians 1:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?

(pou sophos, pou grammateus, pou syzētētēs tou aiōnos toutou, ποῦ σοφός, ποῦ γραμματεὺς, ποῦ συζητητῆς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου)—Paul issues a triumphant taunt, echoing Isaiah 33:18. **The wise** (sophos, σοφός) represents Greek philosophers. **The scribe** (grammateus, γραμματεὺς) represents Jewish Torah experts. **The disputer** (syzētētēs, συζητητής, "debater, skillful arguer") represents sophists and rhetoricians. Where are they now? Silent, confounded, unable to produce salvation.

Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (ouchi emōranen ho theos tēn sophian tou kosmou, οὐχὶ ἐμώρανεὶν ὁ θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου)—The verb mōrainō (μωραίνω, "to make foolish") is related to mōria ("foolishness"). God turned the tables: the world calls the cross foolish, but God reveals worldly wisdom as the true foolishness. **The wisdom of this world** (sophia tou kosmou, σοφία τοῦ κόσμου) is human wisdom operating in rebellion against God, cut off from divine revelation.

Historical Context

Paul confronts the three major intellectual traditions of his world: Greek philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Epicureans), Jewish Torah scholarship (Pharisees, scribes), and Roman rhetoric (sophists, orators). All three claimed to

offer wisdom and truth. Yet none produced salvation. The cross confounded all three: Greeks found it foolish, Jews found it scandalous (v. 23), and rhetoricians couldn't package it attractively. God's wisdom bypassed them all.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the gospel confound not just one intellectual tradition but all human attempts to reach God by wisdom?
2. What are the modern equivalents of "the wise, the scribe, the disputer"—and how does the cross silence them?
3. In what ways do we rely on worldly wisdom (credentials, sophistication, intellectual achievement) rather than the gospel?

Interlinear Text

ποῦ	σοφός	ποῦ	γραμματεὺς	ποῦ	συζητητῆς	τοῦ
Where	is the wise	Where	is the scribe	Where	is the disputer	G3588
G4226	G4680	G4226	G1122	G4226	G4804	
αἰῶνος	τούτου	οὐχὶ	ἐμώρηνεν	ὁ	θεὸς	τὴν σοφίαν
world	of this	not	hath	G3588	God	G3588 the wisdom
G165	G5127	G3780	G3471		G2316	G4678
τοῦ	κόσμου	τούτου				
G3588	world	of this				
	G2889	G5127				

Additional Cross-References

Romans 1:22 (Parallel theme): Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Job 12:17 (Parallel theme): He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools.

1 Corinthians 1:19 (Parallel theme): For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

1 Corinthians 3:19 (References God): For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

Isaiah 33:18 (Parallel theme): Thine heart shall meditate terror. Where is the scribe? where is the receiver? where is he that counted the towers?

Isaiah 44:25 (Parallel theme): That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish;

Job 12:24 (Parallel theme): He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way.