

1 Corinthians 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

Analysis

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise (μωρὸς γενέσθω, ἵνα γένηται σοφός, mōros genesthō, hina genētai sophos)—Paul returns to the wisdom theme from chapters 1-2. Dokei (δοκεῖ, 'seems/thinks himself') indicates self-deception, not genuine wisdom. To become (γενέσθω, aorist imperative) a fool is a decisive act of repudiation—rejecting worldly wisdom's categories and criteria.

The paradox is profound: worldly wisdom and divine wisdom are antithetical. To be wise in this world (ἐν τῷ αἰώνι τούτῳ, 'in this age') means operating by fallen reason, human traditions, and cultural values. True wisdom requires appearing foolish by those standards—believing in crucified Messiahs, loving enemies, seeking to serve rather than rule. Jesus blessed those who suffered for his sake, called his followers to lose their lives, and himself endured the cross, 'despising the shame' (Hebrews 12:2). Worldly wisdom maximizes comfort, status, and self-interest; divine wisdom embraces the 'foolishness' of self-sacrifice modeled at Calvary.

Historical Context

Corinth prized Greek philosophical sophiscation—rhetorical skill, logical argumentation, speculative wisdom. The church imported this value system, preferring eloquent teachers and despising Paul's 'plain speech' (2 Corinthians

11:6). Paul subverts their entire framework: what they call wisdom is folly; what they call folly (the cross) is God's wisdom (1:18-25).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. In what areas are you trusting worldly wisdom—conventional success metrics, cultural values, 'practical' compromises—rather than gospel foolishness?
2. What would it look like for you to 'become a fool' in your career, relationships, or church involvement—embracing apparent foolishness for Christ's sake?
3. How can you discern between legitimate use of human wisdom (education, planning, prudence) versus the worldly wisdom Paul condemns?

Interlinear Text

Μηδεὶς	έαυτὸν	έξαπατάτω·	εἴ	τις	δοκεῖ	σοφός	εἶναι
no man	himself		Let		G1487	G5100	seemeth
G3367	G1438		G1818				G1380
							G4680
							G1511

ἐν	ὑμῖν	ἐν	τῷ	αἰῶνι	τούτῳ	μωρὸς	γένηται	ἴνα
among	you	among	G3588	world	this	a fool	he may be	that
G1722	G5213	G1722		G165	G5129	G3474	G1096	G2443

γένηται σοφός

he may be	wise
G1096	G4680

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 3:5 (Parallel theme): Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

Isaiah 5:21 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Galatians 6:3 (Parallel theme): For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Matthew 18:4 (Parallel theme): Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 18:17 (Parallel theme): Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

James 1:22 (Parallel theme): But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

Mark 10:15 (Parallel theme): Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

Proverbs 3:7 (Parallel theme): Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

Proverbs 26:12 (Parallel theme): Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Jeremiah 8:8 (Parallel theme): How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.