

Reason to Revelation

Choosing Wisely When Culture Clashes, September 11 & 12 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
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CULTURE CLASHES WITH CHRISTIAN FAITH

You're looking right now at a recent picture of the International Space Station.

It orbits the Earth about every 90 minutes at an altitude of roughly 250 miles.

The station brings together partners from around the world, including the United States, Europe, Japan, Canada, and Russia.

The International Space Station is also nearly 25 years old.

Given its age and the difficulty of bringing together so many different technologies, countries, and cultures, the International Space Station is showing signs of wear.

The station is developing cracks. This week astronauts smelled smoke.

In July, a new unit sent up by the Russians fired its engine unexpectedly. For a while, the station was spinning in space until they were able to stabilize it. Thankfully, no one was hurt.

What a great picture, though, for what happens when cultures clash.

Sometimes when one culture comes in contact with another, things go smoothly. Everyone gets along, and people find the ability to live and work together harmoniously.

Other times, when one culture comes together with another, they clash.

The clash can be mild, like when a person wears an outfit in which the pieces don't match.

Sometimes the clash can be violent.

Sometimes it just leaves you feeling like you're spinning in space.

Do you ever sense that your Christian beliefs clash with the values of the culture around you?

Do you believe things that people around you don't believe?

Does that lead you to think altogether differently from those people?

And do your different beliefs and ways of thinking lead you to speak and act differently?

Where do you sense the clash? At work? When you're with your friends? When you're with your family?

When you're online?

How do we choose wisely when culture clashes?

The culture around us will always clash with our Christian beliefs to some degree or another.

We want to respond in biblical, righteous, just, God-honoring ways. We want to choose wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian beliefs. The question becomes: how?

In this series, we are going to look at Paul's letter to the church in Corinth.

Paul helped to start the Christian movement in Corinth during his first missionary journey. For the most part, the Christians in Corinth came out of a pagan culture. When they became Christians, they adopted Christian beliefs, thoughts, and practices. However, as time passed, they began to get sucked back into their old pagan culture. Worse, they thought that they had become super-Christians, better than many of the other Christians in Corinth and better than the Apostle Paul himself. Paul wrote to them to help sort out the mess, so his letter is a good guide to us in how to choose wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian beliefs.

As we study the book of 1 Corinthians in the New Testament, we are going to look at nine shifts in our thinking that will help us to choose wisely when culture clashes with our Christian faith.

The first shift we will consider today is from Reason to Revelation.

We'll be unpacking that shift together but let me state it from the outset: **As the culture clashes with Christian faith, God's revelation corrects and completes reason alone as our guide to salvation and life.**

Since or because the culture around us clashes with Christian faith, what are we to do?

REASON AND REVELATION CLASHED IN CORINTH

Paul wrote about the clash of reason and revelation in 1 Corinthians 1:18:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Reason and revelation clash repeatedly in this passage.

In verse 18 we see that the cross is folly to some and the power of God to others.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 more broadly speaking, we see a clash between the wisdom of the wise and of the world versus the wisdom of God and of the cross.

Which is truly wise? Which is truly foolish?

Using these categories, we can define "reason" as the wisdom of the world or of the wise. It's our best effort to make sense of the world around us.

We can define "revelation" as the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the cross. We can't get the wisdom of God or the wisdom of the cross on our own.

But we see the stakes: Paul says that one pathway leads to perishing and the other to salvation.

This clash between reason and revelation comes down to what to do with the cross.

It is impossible for us to understand fully the clash caused by the cross in Paul's day.

The Greek people specifically (and pagans more generally) in Paul's day could not conceive of a god dying on a cross as a criminal. Gods could die but not like that.

Jews in Paul's day were not willing to entertain the thought that Messiah would die to pay the price for sin rather than leading his people to battle and victory.

The cross was the center of the clash!

Christians in Corinth tried to minimize the clash between reason and revelation caused by the cross.

Based on their pagan background and their own reasoning alone, the Christians in Corinth knew that a god dying on a cross made absolutely no sense.

However, God's revelation to them said that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross to pay the price for their sin and rose again physically from the dead with profound implications for the ways that we live today.

The profound clash between their own reason alone and God's revelation was too much for the Christians in Corinth, so they sought to minimize the clash by spiritualizing it.

Jesus, the Savior God, filled them with the Spirit of God, liberated them the demands of the law, filled them with spiritual power and gifts now, and set them on a path to becoming powerful spiritual beings when they died.

They solved the clash between reason and revelation by reshaping God's revelation to make it fit their reason (and their pagan background).

What they came up with was much more palatable to them.

We live with the clash of reason and revelation as well.

We hear the wisdom of the cross. We want it for ourselves and want it to guide our lives.

However, it clashes with our culture, which values things we can see, touch, measure, and prove.

People point out the way that the wisdom of the cross clashes with the wisdom of the world. We hear repeatedly from other people that our faith doesn't make any sense. People question the reliability of the Bible, the lifestyle we live, and the common sense of a God who died and rose again. They say that everything we believe is baseless, dangerous foolishness.

We feel the clash as well and find ourselves being drawn back to our old ways of thinking.

We sometimes question the claims of the Christian faith and wonder if they make sense.

We question the way the Bible teaches us to live; sometimes we just outright change the rules God reveals to us to suit our own reasoning.

So, we come back to our thesis today: **As the culture clashes with Christian faith, God's revelation corrects and completes reason alone as our guide to salvation and life.**

By now we're clear: the culture clashes with Christian faith, and we're caught in the middle.

REASON ALONE LEADS DOWN DEAD ENDS

In 1 Corinthians 1:19-21, Paul lets us know that reason alone leads down dead ends.

For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

Let's look more closely at how exactly Paul says that reason alone leads down dead ends.

Paul started by quoting from Isaiah the prophet. In his day, Isaiah said on behalf of the Lord that the people claimed to belong to God but did not. Since they had turned away from God, God would let them walk away. They would search for true wisdom but not find it.

Paul went further to say that this principle applied to all of humanity. He asked where the wise person could be found and if any wise person had found the way to wisdom of God or not.

He asked specifically about scribes. These are the professional students and teachers of the Jewish law. Had their study pointed them to the wisdom of God and the cross? No.

Then he asked about the debaters of that age. These are the Greek philosophers, politicians, and rhetorical scholars—the finest thinkers of the pagan world. Had all their training pointed them to the wisdom of God and the cross? No.

They had all failed to find the wisdom that saves.

Reason alone always leads down dead ends.

In fact, in Romans 1 Paul told us that reason alone or our own worldly wisdom would always lead us to idolatry. **Romans 1:21-23** says:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

We won't get to the wisdom of God or the wisdom of the cross by our reason alone.

Following our reason alone is an empty quest that leads down a dead end.

Why does reason alone lead down dead ends?

When God created the world, he left evidence of his existence all over the place. There are markers that point out God's goodness, glory, power, and love for his creation.

God even created us in his own image, so we have the capacity to know him and relate to him. In fact, we have an innate need to be in a relationship with God which draws us to him.

In a sense, that's why people in every age of history have been religious in one way or another.

This idea is called "general revelation". God has placed evidence of his existence throughout creation and in us.

However, the Fall broke us and our relationship with God. Since the Fall, our reason is corrupted by sin and cannot get us back to God. Our reason alone, damaged as it is by the impact of sin, takes us to dead ends.

At the same time, Christian faith does not contradict reason or deny the importance of reason!

Some people would say that Christian faith makes no sense, that it is devoid of reason.

That's totally untrue. Reason helps us to make sense of the world around us.

Reason helps us to make sense of the Christian faith God gives us.

Reason is critical to so many important human endeavors.

Reason is a partner with God's revelation.

However, our reason alone cannot lead us to salvation.

Being saved is what's at stake here.

To be saved takes more than reason.

To be saved takes a special action, a special intervention by God.

Coming back to our thesis again, we see now not only that there is a clash but also that our reason alone can't save us or be our defining guide in life: **As the culture clashes with Christian faith, God's revelation corrects and completes reason alone as our guide to salvation and life.**

Notice that there's hope, and that hope comes from God's revelation.

GOD'S REVELATION CORRECTS AND COMPLETES REASON

Paul asserts the critical importance and primary role of God's revelation in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

God's revelation is given to us.

Our reason alone doesn't guide us to revelation.

Remember: because of our sinful, fallen nature, we can't reason our way to God.

Instead, God has chosen to disclose himself to us. He reveals himself to us.

Paul addressed this fact in 1 Corinthians 1:21-25. He said that our reason alone must be supplemented by something else given to us by God.

Jesus talked about this reality specifically in **Luke 10:21**. After having sent out many of his disciples to teach and work miracles, they returned with good news. Some people had accepted their good news about the Kingdom of God. Jesus rejoiced:

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

The wisdom of God and the wisdom of the cross are given to us by God!

Paul called preaching a means of God's revelation to us.

Paul had received the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the cross.

Then Paul preached Christ crucified just as the good news had been handed to him.

As Paul and others preach the good news about Jesus, that reveals the wisdom of the cross.

The Bible is God's written revelation to us.

From Genesis in the beginning to Revelation at the end, God reveals himself through the Bible.

God the Holy Spirit inspired the writing and protected the collecting of the Bible so that what we have is the true, reliable, authoritative revelation of God to us. God is telling us who he is, who we are, what he wants for us, and what he expects from us.

Through the Bible, God makes himself known to us.
Through the Bible, God reveals to us things we can't get any other way.

Jesus is God's revelation to us in the flesh.

Jesus shows us in the flesh who God is in the absolutely clearest way possible.
We interpret the entire Bible through the lens of Jesus.
No event makes Jesus clearer to us than his death on the cross and his resurrection. They're the focal point of history.
The cross is the deepest revelation of God, the deepest wisdom we will ever receive.
That's why the wisdom of God and wisdom of the cross are so closely linked in 1 Corinthians.

The cross is the focal point of salvation history.

We shared the entire arc of salvation history in a series called "**CREATION TO CONCLUSION**" this past summer.
This is what Paul shared with the people of Corinth.
We've prepared a video to explain salvation history succinctly. We'd like you to see it today.

We come again to the main point for today:

As the culture clashes with Christian faith, God's revelation corrects and completes reason alone as our guide to salvation and life.

There is a clash between culture and Christian faith.
Reason alone cannot guide us to salvation and through life.
We need God's revelation to correct and complete our reason alone.
What, then, are we to do?

LET'S SHIFT FROM REASON TO REVELATION

As we consider making this shift, let's read Proverbs 3:5-8, a profound piece of wisdom.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Proverbs 3:8 reminds us that we are tired from hitting one dead end after another.

It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Why do we need healing for our flesh and refreshment for our bones?

If we're relying on our reason alone or if we're relying on our reason primarily, then we are hitting brick walls and getting bruised and disappointed.

Backing up, Proverbs 3:7 reminds us that following our own reason alone has been the problem.

Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

Verse seven reminds us that we need to develop a healthy sense of skepticism about our own ability to think our way through every problem we encounter in life. After all, following our own reason alone has led us to so much pain and disappointment as we discovered in verse 8.

But relying on our reason alone comes so naturally to us, so quickly to us, and with such subtlety that even those of us who think we belong to the Lord and who think we rely on God's revelation as the pathway to the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the cross sometimes find that instead we're trusting ourselves and disregarding what God says!

We need a healthy suspicion of our own motives.

Proverbs 3:5 tells us to turn to God's revelation to correct and complete our own reason.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

We know that trusting in the Lord with all our heart and leaning not on our own understanding mean turning to the Bible as God's revelation of his wisdom to us.

We know that trusting in the Lord with all our heart and leaning not on our own understanding mean taking Jesus as the centerpiece of God's revelation of his wisdom to us.

To trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding mean believing what the Bible teaches and believing who Jesus is.

But to believe means more than to accept intellectually. It means to put our faith in Jesus and in the Bible. It means to obey Jesus and to obey the Bible. Even when doing so isn't easy. Even when doing so goes against our own reason alone.

Finally, Proverbs 3:6 tells us that God will show us how to choose wisely when cultures clash.

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

When culture clashes with our Christian faith, we choose God's revelation over our reason alone every time.