

Paul's sneer

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Paul has a way with a sneer. Nineteen times in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul mentions wisdom, and each time we hear a growing sneer in his voice, until he nominates Christ as the wisdom of God. The word "wisdom" is distasteful to him because it is wooing the Corinthians to pursue a dead wisdom when they might turn to a wisdom he calls the "source of life"--and come alive.

When Paul writes that Christ is the wisdom of God, he's tapping into an ancient way of speaking about God. He's drilling down into proverbs, where wisdom plays the part of the creative spirit of God. Wisdom is begotten of God, the firstborn of all creation, the very spirit alive in Creation, a feminine expression of God. This isn't just some *hocus pocus* stuff from the Old Testament, either. The New Testament writers are so influenced by this thinking that they pay homage to Lady Wisdom everywhere.

From Proverbs:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

John doesn't use footnotes, but if he did he'd have to use one here:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

Or perhaps you prefer the Pauline tradition in Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible... He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Or Luke, who in 7:35 calls Jesus a child of Wisdom and her vindicator, too. That's four New Testament citations--and from four different sources, the holy grail of historical authenticity in New Testament scholarship.

From the very beginning of things, Jesus was known as an embodiment of wisdom. And wisdom is more than just accumulated knowledge or enlightenment. Wisdom, the New Testament tells us, is God in Christ.

For Paul, all human wisdom is nothing in comparison.