

The World's Greatest Foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

TEXT

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. **20** 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? **21** For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. **22** For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: **23** But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; **24** But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. **25** Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

INTRODUCTION

The world thinks it has found something foolish in Christianity: the cross. A crucified Saviour. Salvation by believing. Preaching a message that has been preached for two thousand years. To the wisdom of this world, surely there has to be something more impressive than that.

But this passage turns the accusation completely around.

The world looks at the cross and says, “Foolish.” God looks at the wisdom of this world and says, “I have made that foolish.” Man looks at Christ crucified and sees weakness. God says Christ is “**the power of God.**” Man thinks he has wisdom. God says Christ is “**the wisdom of God.**”

So here is the question: **Who is really foolish?**

That is what makes this passage so powerful. Man thinks he is standing in judgment of God, but the entire time God is judging the wisdom of man.

And this was not written to a philosophy class. Paul was writing to a church that had already begun thinking too much like the world. They were dividing over personalities. They were glorying in men. They were becoming impressed with human names, human ability, and human wisdom.

Paul brings them back to one place:

The cross.

Church, we can do the same thing. We can become so concerned with what sounds impressive, what looks successful, what the world respects, and what people want that we start becoming embarrassed by the very message God told us to preach.

Paul's answer is still the answer:

“But we preach Christ crucified.”

I. THE WORLD CALLS THE CROSS FOOLISH — VERSES 18–21

Look carefully at verse 18.

1 Corinthians 1:18 “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

The Bible does not say the preaching of the cross **is** foolishness. It says it is “**to them that perish foolishness.**” That is a completely different statement.

The defect is not in God's message. The defect is in man's judgment of God's message.

Man looks at God's way and says, “That doesn't make sense to me.” But since when did God need man's approval? Since when did the Creator have to submit His plan to the creature and ask, “Does this seem wise enough to you?”

That is human pride.

Man wants a God he can evaluate. He wants a Bible he can correct. He wants a gospel that fits what he already thinks ought to be true. And if God's Word contradicts human wisdom, man assumes God must be the One who is wrong.

But listen to verse 19.

1 Corinthians 1:19 “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

God is not intimidated by the wisdom of this world. He says He will destroy it and bring it to nothing.

Then Paul asks:

1 Corinthians 1:20 “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?”

There is the great reversal.

The world points at the cross and says, “Foolishness.”

God points at the wisdom of this world and says, “I made that foolish.”

Who has the higher authority?

Who sees the end from the beginning?

Who created the mind that man is using to question Him?

And verse 21 shows us the ultimate failure of man's wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1:21 “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

For all man's intelligence, “**the world by wisdom knew not God.**”

Man can build machines. Man can study the stars. Man can split atoms. Man can solve equations. Man can fill libraries with his knowledge.

But human wisdom could not invent a better gospel.

God says it pleased Him “**by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.**”

Don't miss those last words.

“Them that believe.”

You do not get saved by becoming smart enough. You do not get saved by becoming religious enough. You do not get saved by proving yourself worthy enough.

God says He saves **“them that believe.”**

Now that does not mean thinking is bad. This sermon is not against learning. It is not against education. It is not against using your mind.

The problem comes when man takes the mind God gave him and uses it to tell God that His Word is foolish.

Church, be careful. The moment we become embarrassed by what Scripture plainly says because the world laughs at it, we have started trusting man's wisdom more than God's.

II. THE WORLD DEMANDS WHAT IT WANTS, BUT WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED — VERSES 22–23

Now Paul shows us what man wants.

1 Corinthians 1:22 “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:”

The Jews require a sign. The Greeks seek after wisdom.

Different people. Different demands. Same basic attitude.

“God, give me what I want, and then maybe I will believe You.”

The Jew says, “Show me.”

The Greek says, “Impress me.”

One wants a sign. One wants wisdom. But both are trying to establish the terms by which God's message will be accepted.

Then Paul gives the answer.

1 Corinthians 1:23 “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;”

I love that word:

“But.”

The Jews require a sign. The Greeks seek after wisdom.

But we preach Christ crucified.

Paul does not poll the audience and ask what message would be most popular.

He does not remove Christ crucified because somebody might stumble over it. He does not polish the cross until the Greeks finally consider it sophisticated.

He preaches what God gave him to preach.

And church, that is where we have to stand.

We should explain the Bible clearly. We should study. We should answer questions. We should reason with people. Paul did all of that.

But there is a massive difference between **persuading somebody with the truth** and **changing the truth into something they find persuasive**.

There is a difference between understanding your audience and allowing your audience to control the sermon.

The world says, “Don't preach that.”

But we preach Christ crucified.

The world says, “That doctrine is embarrassing.”

But we preach Christ crucified.

The world says, “People don't want to hear that anymore.”

But we preach Christ crucified.

At some point the church has to decide who determines the message.

Is it God or the audience?

And that does not give us permission to be rude. We do not need to manufacture offense. We do not need to act foolish and then congratulate ourselves because somebody got mad.

The cross is already a stumblingblock.

Let Christ be the stumblingblock.

If somebody rejects the truth, let him reject the truth. But don't make people stumble over our pride, our laziness, our ignorance, or our bad attitude.

Preach clearly. Prepare carefully. Love people. Answer their questions.

But do not change Christ crucified to win their approval.

III. WHAT THE WORLD CALLS FOOLISH IS THE WISDOM AND POWER OF GOD — VERSES 24–25

Now Paul gives us God's verdict.

Verse 23 tells us how men see Christ: a stumblingblock and foolishness.

Verse 24 tells us what Christ actually is.

1 Corinthians 1:24 “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

Do you see the irony?

The Greeks are looking for wisdom while rejecting the One God calls **“the wisdom of God.”**

Men want power while looking at the One God calls **“the power of God”** and seeing weakness.

They are searching for the very thing standing in front of them, but because God did not package it according to their expectations, they reject it.

That is foolishness.

Christ does not merely possess some wisdom. In this passage He is **“the wisdom of God.”**

Christ does not merely demonstrate some power. He is **“the power of God.”**

So who misjudged whom?

Did man expose a flaw in God's plan?

No.

Man exposed the blindness of his own wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1:25 “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

God is not foolish. God is not weak. Paul is taking the world's accusation and turning it against the world.

You call God's way foolish? His “foolishness” is wiser than your greatest wisdom.

You call God's way weak? His “weakness” is stronger than your greatest strength.

Think about Gideon. God reduced the army so that Israel could not boast in its own power. By man's calculation, fewer soldiers made no sense. But God was making sure everybody knew where the victory came from.

That is what this passage is doing.

God does not need what impresses man.

And that is a warning to the church.

We can become impressed with a preacher's personality. We can become impressed with education, speaking ability, production, crowds, programs, and numbers.

None of those things is the power of God.

You can have an impressive preacher and very little Bible. You can have a polished sermon and very little Christ. You can build something everybody admires and still become ashamed of the very message God told you to preach.

We cannot let that happen.

Christ crucified is not something we graduate from.

We do not become so mature that we no longer need the gospel. We do not become so sophisticated that plain Bible preaching becomes embarrassing.

Paul's answer never changed:

“But we preach Christ crucified.”

CONCLUSION

So what is **the world's greatest foolishness?**

The world thinks the foolish thing is the cross.

But the greater foolishness is man thinking he is wise enough to sit in judgment over God.

God speaks, and man says, “I don't agree.”

God gives His Word, and man says, “That is outdated.”

God gives Christ crucified, and man says, “That is too simple.”

God says salvation is for **“them that believe,”** and man starts looking for something more impressive to add.

And then, little by little, even churches can start becoming embarrassed by the simplicity of what God said.

So here is the question for us:

Are there parts of God's Word we are tempted to be ashamed of because the world laughs at them?

Are we embarrassed by simple gospel preaching?

Are we embarrassed to tell somebody plainly that salvation is through faith in Christ?

Are we embarrassed to stand on Scripture when the culture says the Bible is foolish?

Are we starting to measure the church by what impresses people instead of what pleases God?

Those are not questions for somebody else.

Those are questions for us.

Church, we do not need to make God's Word more respectable.

We need to believe it.

We do not need to improve the gospel.

We need to preach it.

We do not need the world to certify God's wisdom.

We need enough faith to stand when the world calls it foolish.

Reason with people, but never reason away the cross. Understand the audience, but never let the audience choose the message. Prepare carefully, but never trust preparation more than the power of God.

And when this world tells us that Christ crucified is too simple, too offensive, too old-fashioned, too foolish, we need to plant our feet and answer the way Paul answered:

“But we preach Christ crucified.”

Because the world is wrong.

Christ is **“the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”**

And **“the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”**

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