

The Wise Folly of God – 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Introduction – Two words. Two ways. There is the “*wisdom of words*” (v17) developed by man in all his high styling rhetoric and philosophy. And there is the “*word of the cross*” (v18) which is foolishness to those same men. This is the raging folly of an incarnate Logos hanging dead on a tree. And this is the power of God for salvation.

The Battle of Two Words – The word, “*message*” in v18, is *logos*, “*word*.” It may be that the schisms in the previous section were rivalries because they were glorying in the superficially impressive human wisdom of the age. Skillful rhetoricians in ancient Greece were the Hollywood superstars of their day. As far back as the 5th Century BC, Herodotus said that all Greeks were “zealous for every kind of learning” (Acts 17:19-21). We love words; we love to hear ourselves wax eloquent about the way the world is. We love to try and fix things without depending on God. Just like Judah in Isaiah’s day, refusing to submit to and obey Yahweh, they instead tried to protect themselves from Assyria by aligning themselves militarily with Egypt. That’s when God said of their wisdom, “*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent*” (v19, Isaiah 29:12). But how is this “*word of the cross*” received by natural man? That is foolishness, *moria* (gr.), stupid. “Don’t listen to the *moron* who speaks of Jesus.”

To Those Who Are Perishing – The message of the cross is foolishness to those *who are perishing* even though in reality it is the power of God for salvation and their only hope of not perishing. And this is why we are so lost; when it comes to apprehending spiritual truth, we cannot find our way out of a cardboard box. And it is not foolishness only to the modern man, for Paul is speaking back then in those ancient days. It is foolishness to the old man. Preaching the death of Christ is and always has been unfashionable. The gospel is incomprehensible to those who need it. And the only way to make the cross relevant to our old man is to nail that old man to it – which it was in Christ “*to those who are being saved*.” It is in passages like this that it becomes clear that for anyone to be converted, the efficacy must come from God alone (Eph 2:8-9).

And so Paul kicks in to his own rhetorical skills (v20ff). The “*wise man*” is the Greek philosopher, as opposed to the Jewish “*scribe*.” The “*disputer of this age*” is the Corinthians in general as they try to hide behind various men of rhetorical eloquence. They are all “*perishing*” or “*lost*” in their wisdoms (John 3:18-19).

God’s Plan? Foolish Preaching – God has made foolish the wisdom of this world (answering the rhetorical question #4 from v20, he explains in v21ff). It is not just that the world through its wisdom does not know God (v21). It was God’s wisdom that the world by wisdom could not get anywhere. God set it up that way. The kind of wisdom that the unbelieving world wants is incapable of achieving the one thing needful: the knowledge of God. Instead of using man-made and “autonomous” philosophy, He was pleased to open the way of access to the knowledge of God through preaching. But preaching (heralding the gospel) is foolishness as far as the world is concerned.

“*This is why calls to make the preaching of the gospel ‘relevant’ are exercises in vanity. If it is gospel preaching at all, there is no way to make it relevant.*” – D. Wilson. What we trust in is the Spirit of God to move on the preacher and through the preacher, making the declaration the right kind of irrelevant; the kind that causes a metamorphous and grants a new heart. Imagine trying to convince a caterpillar to suffocate itself in a cocoon and then be liquefied.

And it was like that to the Jew and to the Greek (vv22-23). To proclaim a crucified Messiah to the Jew is to talk nonsense. They were looking for a sign-bearing, powerful deliverer like Moses. The Greeks would be offended to follow the teachings of a carpenter’s son who never wrote a book or founded a school.

The Surpassing Wise Foolishness of God – But what are we to proclaim? What are we to preach? To the Jew we are to preach Christ, the power of God and to the Greek we are to preach Christ, the wisdom of God. These two idols, power and wisdom, are still with us. Today they are manifest in Statism and Evolution. And what are preachers to do in the face of such idols? Preach the foolish message of a crucified Messiah. Why? *“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*

The Foolishness of Today’s Power/Wisdom - Step back and look for a minute. Modern man rejects the message of the cross because it is a myth of simpletons millennia ago, outdated and illogical. Instead, this sophisticated man believes that a boy can change into a girl and a woman into a man. Our wisdom teaches us that we can mutilate our bodies and chop up our babies. And all of this is true because we are the product of billions of years of time and chance acting on matter over billions and billions of years. But, of course, we have rights – you know...rights. And the State is the treasurer of our rights.

But when Christ is preached, people discover to their astonishment that things change. Lives change. Cities change. Human hearts change. To us who are being saved, it is the power and wisdom of God. You are the evidence of this foolishness and the efficacy of the message preached. Or you can be. You will be called a fool. So was Paul. So was Jesus. You’ll be in good company.

Dave Hatcher – April 29, 2018

Notes for Little Saints

What is the hero in a story supposed to do?

Why did it look to the Jews that Jesus was not a hero, or a Savior?

Have you ever heard the story that we used to be apes? Isn’t that silly (you can laugh at it)? But most people today believe that is true wisdom.

But what does God teach about where Adam, the first man, came from?

Many people will think you are foolish for believing the Bible to be true and for believing that Jesus is your Savior and the only way for salvation. But that foolish message we preach God uses – and many are saved.

Write out 1 Corinthians 1:25