

The Foolishness of the Cross

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Christianity preaches a message that makes no sense to the world. Paul pulls no punches describing the reaction that outsiders have to the faith. Embracing the foolishness of the cross enables us to not only to witness boldly but also to grow in humility at the same time.

A Foolish Message

Paul describes the message of the cross as foolishness to those who are perishing and as the power of God to those who are being saved (v18). To our natural selves, the cross is not just odd or unfamiliar—it's stupid (*moria*). When you think of what Christians believe about creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, the story is wild and only becomes more so when you describe it to someone. We believe the gospel because it's true, and therefore it explains everything, but to the person who is dead in sin it has no appeal. Paul makes stark contrasts (foolishness/power, foolishness/wisdom, weakness/strength) because he is observing what God has done. God hates pride and hypocrisy, and just as He judged Judah and their "wisdom" to trust Egypt, so He destroys all so-called wisdom that sets itself against Him (v19; Is. 29:13-14). The wisdom of God has always been counterintuitive, but the cross is the ultimate surprise and inversion of how we think of victory. The philosophers think, the scribes study and pray, and the rhetoricians argue, but God confounds them all by sending Christ to die on the cross (vv20-21 cf. Is. 19:12). There are answers for all logical, ethical, epistemological, historical and every other -cal question, but God doesn't climb into the dock to answer them. He lifts up His crucified Son before the whole world. Those who acknowledge and worship Him are taught, but those who insist on being god are made fools. The Jews are religious so they want signs, to see something spectacular and worthy of God's power (cf. Matt. 12:38; Mk. 8:11). The Greeks want wisdom, a higher level of thinking and enlightened existence. God sends a crucified, cursed Messiah who scandalizes the Jews (v23; Deut. 21:23). He comes incarnate as a construction worker from Galilee who never earns a degree, founds a school, writes a book, or travels outside the country. He is crucified like a common criminal. *This* is the power and wisdom of God, His wise foolishness and strong weakness. Paul cheerfully grants that this is offensive and foolish to the carnal heart. It's not personal or malicious to him, or a matter of misunderstanding. The more thoroughly the unbelieving mind considers and understands, the worse it seems. We are blinded by sin. But the gospel gives sight. It's the power of God unto salvation.

A Foolish People

God didn't line up all the cool kids in Corinth and pick them for His team (v26). Paul says "not many" were wise, powerful, and noble became Christians, which means a few did. Paul himself was an upper echelon Jew—circumcised the eighth day, from the tribe of Benjamin, a strict Pharisee, zealously fighting for the faith, blameless according to the law. But he counted all these things as compared to knowing Christ (Phil. 3:5-8). God

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calls all kinds of normal people, but everyone who comes to Him must lay down their gifts at the foot of the cross. God then uses His mixed multitude, the foolish things of the world, to put to shame the wise, the weak to overcome the mighty, the low, despised and nothings to beat the powerful (v29). He does this so that “no flesh should glory in His presence.” For the believer there are no merit badges for advancement. We mature as sons and daughters, and the Father delights in every child growing and blooming where they are planted. The result is there are no rivalries among brothers and sisters, but each wants the best for the other.

God's Glory & Ours

Proud boasting in God's presence ignores who we are in Christ. Positively stated, He is our wisdom—righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (v30). Paul is saying that it makes no sense to argue who is more of any of these things when Jesus is all of them and He is ours completely because we are His. We are justified, made holy, and saved from slavery to sin and death all because of Jesus' victory on the cross. His crucifixion accomplished these. All of our insecurities come from not believing this and finding our identity in other things. Paul has been telling us that the cross is foolishness to the world and we are foolish people that God chose to have mercy on. Rather than an aw-shucks embarrassment, the saints are called to *glory* in the Lord: “Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord” (Jer. 9:23-24; v31). Boasting in Christ is true and wise. He really conquered for us, and we really do know God through Him, and to truly glory in it is to know that's He did for us, that the whole thing is a gift. Boasting in Christ is the most humbling thing in the world. His foolishness is wisdom; His weakness is strength; His glory is humility and honor.