

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5

Topic

The apostle Paul explains that the Cross of Jesus is foolishness to those who trust in human wisdom

Title

***“Wise Men Say Only Fools Trust Him...
But I Can’t Help Being a Fool for Jesus”***

Incredible moment: Doctor operates on biker's heart in middle of road - and saves his life.

It happened earlier this year in England. John O’Brien, age 47, was involved in an accident. Before he could be airlifted, he suffered cardiac arrest.

Doctor Mark Forrest realized the only option was to operate. He opened O’Brien’s chest in the middle of the road, exposing his heart and lungs, to allow treatment of his internal bleeding, lung injuries and to massage his heart back to life. Incredibly within a matter of minutes his heart was beating strongly and the bleeding had been controlled.

A doctor who can successfully perform heart surgery is rightfully praised for his or her skills. Someone who can do it successfully without being in an operating theater, and without the proper implements or support team - well, that’s some doctor.

In the first *Iron Man*, Tony Stark is captured by a terrorist group who demand he make them one of his weapons of mass destruction. He instead makes a weaponized Iron Man suit and escapes. It is powered by an incredibly sophisticated Arc Reactor.

When his nemesis, Obadiah Stone, tries to replicate the suit, his best scientists fail to duplicate the Arc Reactor. At one point, he angrily lashes out, saying, "Tony Stark was able to build this in a cave - *with a box of scraps!*"

It's one thing to be a genius inventor with every conceivable resource at your disposal. It's really something quite remarkable to do it in a cave, with a box of scraps.

These two illustrations are far from perfect, but they capture some sense of what our passage is going to highlight. We're going to read that, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not..."

God is like the doctor operating with inadequate implements; or the inventor using crude parts. Only in this case, He's working *on* and then *through us*.

You and I - believers in Jesus - **we** are the weak, base, despised fools Paul is referring to. He describes us further saying, "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.*"

Why choose such people to work in and then work through? "That no flesh should glory in His presence."

God takes that which is crude and base, and crafts us into the image of His Son. We're His church, made from a box of scraps, so that "HE WHO GLORIES, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD."

I'll organize my comments around two points:

#1 God's Message To You Is So Foolish It brings Him Glory, and #2 Your Mission For God Is So Foolish It Brings God Glory.

#1 God's Message To You
Is So Foolish It brings Him Glory
(1:18-25)

Last time, we stopped in the middle of verse seventeen:

1 Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

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First Corinthians 1:18-2:5
"Wise Men Say Only Fools Trust Him...
But I Can't Help Being a Fool for Jesus"

We stopped in the middle of that verse because the second half introduces Paul's next topic, the contrast between "the wisdom of words" and the Cross.

- Scan the verses and you see the phrases "the wisdom of words," "the wisdom of the wise," "the understanding of the prudent," "the wisdom of the world," and "human wisdom."
- Scan them again and you see "the Cross of Christ," "the message of the Cross," "the power of God," and "the wisdom of God."

There is the "wisdom of God," and there is "the wisdom of man." In Corinth, the believers were bringing "the wisdom of man" into the church, thinking it augmented and strengthened "the wisdom of God."

The wisdom of God is the power of the Cross to save men.

How can we summarize "the wisdom of man?" One scholar put it this way: "The wisdom of man is, at very least, a use of the human mind which comes up with ideas contrary to the power of Christ's death on the Cross to save lost mankind and restore all things."

It includes all religions and philosophies and psychologies that postulate a theory of mankind that deny we are sinners in need of the Savior Who died on the Cross as our Substitute.

When we say "the wisdom of man," we're not talking about things like mathematics, or biology, or physics. We're not suggesting all learning is contrary to God.

We are talking about the most important thing in everyone's life; and that is, how to be saved and have a relationship with the living God.

My go-to example of looking to man's wisdom today is the effort to integrate secular psychology with biblical truth. Freud... Jung... Skinner... Maslow... Discovered nothing that remotely integrates with the ministry of our Wonderful Counselor and His indwelling Comforter. It can only taint and distort biblical counseling. Yet Christians insist on utilizing it.

1Co 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

“The message of the Cross” is more than just the historical event of Jesus’ crucifixion itself. It is everything leading up to it, starting in Genesis; and it is everything coming after it - culminating in the Revelation. It is God’s eternal plan for saving sinners.

“Us who are being saved” are those who come to the Cross to have their sins forgiven. Only there will a man find “power” to be saved and to go forward walking with God.

Until then, the Cross seems foolish to “those who are perishing.” Nonbelievers are perishing now and will perish eternally, conscious in torment, unless they come to Jesus crucified for them.

1Co 1:19 For it is written: "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND BRING TO NOTHING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRUDENT."

It’s from Isaiah. It’s here as an illustration of God’s wisdom vs. man’s wisdom. The viscous Assyrian Empire had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Judah, to the south, paid tribute to Assyria. Wanting to get out from subjection to Assyria, King Hezekiah of Judah refused to pay the tribute, and “rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not,” but entered into a league with Egypt. This led to the invasion of Judah by Assyria, who took forty cities, and besieged Jerusalem with mounds. Hezekiah yielded to the demands of the Assyrian king, and agreed to pay him three hundred talents of silver and thirty of gold.

The Assyrians returned to besiege Jerusalem a second time. Hezekiah sought the Lord, relying on Him to save them. The Lord dispatched one mighty angel, who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers as they slept. Siege over.

- Human wisdom said, “Make an alliance.”
- God’s wisdom said, “Stay in reliance.”

1Co 1:20 Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

“The wise” refers to nonbelieving Gentiles; “the scribe,” to nonbelieving Jews. They are both “disputers.” The mercy and grace of God’s plan makes them look foolish, in that their best efforts in religion or philosophy or psychology save no one.

1Co 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

It was wise of God to devise a plan in which man cannot know Him by his own wisdom. Human wisdom always defaults to some work or works, some self-effort or self-sufficiency. Human wisdom gives you cause for boasting; it inspires pride - not giving glory to God.

1Co 1:22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

Didn't Jesus give the Jews plenty of signs that He was their Messiah? The Jews were looking for a Deliverer. They thought their Messiah would be a man who would set them free from Rome. They were waiting for some sign that their conquering hero had come. Jesus told them the only sign they would get was His death and resurrection. It was the utmost folly to them that their Messiah must be the God-man Who had to die a criminals death to deliver from sin and Satan.

Gordon Fee describes the Greek mind, saying, "No mere human, in his or her right mind or otherwise, would ever have dreamed up God's scheme for redemption - through a crucified Messiah. It is too preposterous, too humiliating, for a god."

1Co 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

- Even though the Jews were stumbled by the message of the Cross, Paul preached it.
- Even though Gentiles seemed unlikely to receive it, he preached the Cross.

1Co 1:24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Don't let the word "called" throw you. **All are called.** Jesus said that by being lifted-up on the Cross He would **draw all men** to Himself (John 12:32). He is "the Savior **of all men**, and especially of those that believe" (First Timothy 4:10).

There is zero "power" in man's wisdom to transform you. Nothing human wisdom has suggested can cause you to be born-again, and become the residence for God the Holy Spirit.

1Co 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The foolishness and weakness of God are better than human wisdom or strength. Not that God is foolish or weak; quite the contrary. But His plan to save you seems that way, on purpose, so that no man may glory.

We are to share a simple message: “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (First Corinthians 15:3-4).

#2 Your Mission For God
Is So Foolish It Brings God Glory
(1:26-2:5)

In *Guardians of the Galaxy Volume 2* there is a running dialog between Drax and Mantis (“the chick with the antenna”) about how ugly and disgusting Drax thinks she is. Not exactly great for your self-esteem.

Self-esteem is still a thing. According to *Psychology Today*, “Confidence in one’s value as a human being is a precious psychological resource and generally a highly positive factor in life; it is correlated with achievement, good relationships, and satisfaction.”

Strap in. Your self-esteem is about to take a big hit.

1Co 1:26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.

Looking around at a gathering of Corinthian believers in Christ, you’d see few who were “wise” by worldly standards. Few who were “mighty,” i.e., in positions of authority.

Few who were of the upper classes. To be frank, they were a bunch of social losers, with few FaceBook friends and no one to SnapChat.

1Co 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

1Co 1:28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

At first read, any self-esteem a Corinthian might have had left was trampled upon. “Foolish,” “weak,” “base,” and “despised.”

Where is the encouragement? How many times in those two verses does it say “God has chosen” just those kind of people? That’s right - three times.

And what do those kind of people do? They “put to shame the wise” and “the mighty.” They “bring to nothing the things that are.”

The “things that are,” those are the folks who put stock in being wise, mighty, and noble in the eyes of the world.

Albert Barnes says of the phrase, “bring to nothing,”

That which is nothing; which is worthless; which has no existence; those things which were below contempt itself; and which, in the estimation of the world, were passed by as having no existence; as not having sufficient importance to be esteemed worthy even of the slight notice which is implied in contempt. For a man who despises a thing must at least notice it, and esteem it worth some attention.

It reminds me of what Jesus said to the Laodiceans. They thought themselves rich and having need of nothing. In fact they were, spiritually speaking, “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

How will believers “bring to nothing the things that are?” One example of this is at the Second Coming. Jesus returns with His saints, and those who have survived the Great Tribulation marvel at the transformation.

These descriptors are not only for the Corinthians. They are every believer. *They are you.*

Do you think of yourself as wise, mighty, and noble? Maybe not. But how about foolish, weak, base, and despised? Before you answer, read verse twenty-nine:

1Co 1:29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

The more foolish, weak, base, and despised - the more glory to God in regenerating and transforming you.

1Co 1:30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -

This is how God, in His wisdom, sees you because you've come to the Cross - "in Christ," "redeemed," "righteous," "sanctified." Those are works of God, impossible for human wisdom but made possible by Jesus.

1Co 1:31 that, as it is written, "HE WHO GLORIES, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD."

It's a reference to the ninth chapter of Jeremiah. The prophet knew that God's judgment was coming. The Babylonian Empire, who defeated Assyria, would overrun and destroy Jerusalem - if the Jews did not repent. In their wisdom, they put faith in the Temple, thinking God would never allow it to be destroyed. He would; He did.

If the Corinthians wanted to know if the foolishness of God was greater than the wisdom of man, they need only look at themselves.

1Co 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.

1Co 2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

1Co 2:3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

1Co 2:4 And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, Paul arrived in Corinth. There were no believers, no church. By the time he left, eighteen months later, many in that city had been saved by the simple preaching of the Cross.

They couldn't credit Paul. He had been weak, afraid, and trembling. He had not appealed to any human wisdom. He wasn't a good speaker.

Still - many were saved. By choosing the lowly Corinthians God declared that he has forever ruled out every imaginable human system of gaining his favor.

Gordon Fee imagines Paul saying this to them:

Look at the message; it is based on the story of a crucified Messiah. Who in the name of wisdom would have dreamed that up? Only God is so wise as to be so

foolish. Furthermore, look at the recipients. Yourself! Who in the name of wisdom would have chosen you to be the new people of God?" Finally, remember my own preaching. Who in the name of wisdom would have come in such weakness? Yet look at its results.

1Co 2:5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

This verse is a call to action.

In order for "your faith" to be "in the power of God," you are at times going to have to reject human wisdom, and thereby look to the world as if you are an absolute fool.

The base word for "foolish" can mean dull or stupid. Strong's Concordance says it can be translated "blockhead," e.g., that lovable loser, Charlie Brown.

Our word "moron" derives from it; or, as Bugs Bunny would say, "What a maroon."

- Ask yourself: Has there been a time, or times, in your life when you put your faith in God and it made you look like a moron to others - especially nonbelievers? You can also ask yourself negatively: "Have there been times when you refused to put your faith in God because you knew it would make you look like a blockhead?"

If I'm reading First Corinthians correctly, we ought to be thought of as moronic blockheads more often.

Not stupid; not ignorant. We're talking about reliance on God rather than human wisdom with regard to spiritual things.

God will never seem strong to others if you are not willing to appear weak, in fear, and trembling.

Isn't that just the opposite of how we want to appear? Yeah... But you might think of Jesus on the Cross. Naked... Bleeding... Suffering... Dying... Despised... Rejected... Abandoned.

Is it really too much for you, for me, to be thought fools for Him?