

The World's Greatest Foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:18–25]

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“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:
 - 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.**”
- **[QUESTION] Who is really foolish?**
- Man thinks he is standing in judgment of God.
- But the entire time, God is judging the wisdom of man.
- Paul was not writing to a philosophy class.
 - He 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:
- **[STRONG] The cross.**
- Church, we can do the same thing.
 - We can become concerned with what sounds impressive.
 - What looks successful.
 - What the world respects.
 - What people want.
- And we can become embarrassed by the very message God told us to preach.
- Paul's answer is still the answer:
- **[STRONG] “But we preach Christ crucified.”**

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

- Look carefully at verse 18.

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:18]

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.”
- **[QUESTION]** Since when did God need man's approval?
- **[QUESTION]** 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.
- If God's Word contradicts human wisdom, man assumes God must be the One who is wrong.
- But listen to verse 19.

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:19]

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.
- He says He will bring it to nothing.

- Then Paul asks:

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:20]

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.”
- **[QUESTION]** Who has the higher authority?
- **[QUESTION]** Who sees the end from the beginning?
- **[QUESTION]** Who created the mind that man is using to question Him?
- Verse 21 shows us the ultimate failure of man's wisdom.

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:21]

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.”**
- **[SLOW]** Don't miss those last words:
- **“Them that believe.”**
- **[GOSPEL]** 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.”**
- This 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.
- **[WARNING]** 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.

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:22]

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.

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:23]

1 Corinthians 1:23

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

- I love that word:
- **[STRONG] “But.”**
- The Jews require a sign.
- The Greeks seek after wisdom.
- **[REPEAT] 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.**
- 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.”
- **[REPEAT] But we preach Christ crucified.**
- The world says, “That doctrine is embarrassing.”
- **[REPEAT] But we preach Christ crucified.**
- The world says, “People don’t want to hear that anymore.”
- **[REPEAT] But we preach Christ crucified.**
- At some point the church has to decide who determines the message.
- **[QUESTION]** Is it God or the audience?
- 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.
- **[STRONG] 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.
 - 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.
 - Foolishness.
- Verse 24 tells us what Christ actually is.

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:24]

1 Corinthians 1:24

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

- **[QUESTION]** 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.”**
- **[QUESTION]** So who misjudged whom?
- **[QUESTION]** Did man expose a flaw in God's plan?
- **[STRONG]** No.
- Man exposed the blindness of his own wisdom.

[PPT → 1 Corinthians 1:25]

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.**
- **[WARNING]** And that is a warning to the church.
- We can become impressed with:
 - A preacher's personality.
 - Education.
 - Speaking ability.

- Production.
- Crowds.
- Programs.
- 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:
- **[STRONG] [REPEAT] “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.
- Little by little, even churches can start becoming embarrassed by the simplicity of what God said.
- So here is the question for us:
- **[QUESTION] Are there parts of God's Word we are tempted to be ashamed of because the world laughs at them?**
- **[QUESTION] Are we embarrassed by simple gospel preaching?**
- **[QUESTION] Are we embarrassed to tell somebody plainly that salvation is through faith in Christ?**
- **[QUESTION] Are we embarrassed to stand on Scripture when the culture says the Bible is foolish?**
- **[QUESTION] 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.**
- **[ENCOURAGE] 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:
- **[STRONG] [REPEAT] “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.”**

This follows the supplied manuscript as the authoritative source, preserves the exact three main-point headings and Scripture sequence, and keeps every quoted Scripture block complete as required.