

1 Corinthians 1 (Part 2): 18-31 • God Chose What is Foolish

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Paul's letter to the Corinthians. There are two letters in our Bibles that are to the Corinthians, 1st Corinthians and 2nd Corinthians. What you may not be aware of is that, Paul actually wrote four letters to the Corinthians, and two of them have been lost. And what is our 1st Corinthians is actually the second letter that he wrote. And what is our second is actually the fourth letter that he wrote to the church there in Corinth.

And by God's sovereignty these are the two that we have. These are the two that God wanted us to have. And we study through them with all diligence.

We ended last week with verse 18, but I'm going to start there again this week in verse 18 because that's the verse that Paul builds on for the rest of the chapter. Let's go ahead and begin reading in the 18th verse and then we'll open in prayer. It says,

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'"

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that

no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became (for us or) to us (rather) wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (ESV)

Stop there, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, use this Word to really speak to our hearts today. We come before You humbly asking You Lord to tune our spiritual ear to hear Your voice. Let us truly commune with You today in the Scriptures and may our hearts learn today what You would have us to learn. Where we ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Paul begins by simply making the statement that the message of the cross, he calls it here in the ESV. It says, *"the word of the cross"* or, the message of the cross, is foolishness *"to those who are perishing,..."* And that means basically, that those who have hardened their hearts, who have sought worldly wisdom above godly wisdom, they're always going to find the gospel message a little bit ridiculous. And probably you along with it.

But when you stop and think about it, we take things so much for granted. I don't know about we take it for granted, but we definitely get used to it from a very real sense of the word. And we stopped thinking about how it must seem, or hear, or sound to other people. It's like, wait a minute, you've put your faith in the guy who got executed? And you somehow think He's going to help you? I mean, it seems to me like the guy couldn't even stay alive Himself. And yet you guys believe that He's going to give you life.

I can imagine, I mean, I can put myself in somebody's situation of understanding that is so superficial about the gospel that they might hear it and go, wow, that's really weird that you guys believe all that stuff. And yet Paul says, to those of us who believe, it is the very power of God. We don't, even though we may have thought it sounded a little bit strange at one time, it has changed our lives.

There's always something amazing when you take the preaching of the Gospel, the preaching the message of the cross and you connect it with faith, there's a dynamic that takes place. There's an explosive sort of connection that happens when those two things come together that creates a changed life. And that's what it has done, I trust, for those of us here who are in Christ.

But do you know that you can't have one without the other? You can't have the preaching of the cross without faith. And if you have faith without the preaching of the cross, then you get weird, really easily. Let me explain that.

First of all, if you have the preaching of the cross without faith, you have foolishness. You have, at least what man perceives it to be, is foolish. Because he does not put his faith in the message of the cross. And so he just goes, that's really dumb, what you just explained to me. And it doesn't make any sense at all because he doesn't apply faith to the whole concept of understanding the message of the cross.

But there are a lot of people out there in the world who have a lot of faith, but they've never heard the message of the cross. And so they put their faith in all kinds of... Well, it could be anything. You have everything anything from base superstition maybe over here, to you name it over on the other side. You say it, I'll believe it because I got faith. I believe. And they're very spiritually minded. And they're, they just see spiritual things everywhere and stuff. There's no foundation in their life. They never heard the message of the cross.

So you've got you got faith without the message, the message without faith, you don't have anything to really base your life on. You take the message of the cross, you mix it with faith, and you have a changed life, a literally transformed life.

So what is the message of the cross? One of the greatest quotes I've ever read, simple, clear, concise, was written by the late John Stott in his book, *The Cross of Christ*. Let me put this on the screen. He said,

Moved by the perfection of His holy love, God in Christ, substituted Himself for us sinners. That is the heart of the cross.

—**John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ***

Moved by the perfection of His holy love, God in Christ, substituted Himself for us sinners. That is the heart of the cross.

It's a great statement. It's a wonderful statement because it just condenses it down to simple terms. God substituted Himself for you on the cross. It was your punishment; it wasn't His to take. He took it anyway and that is the heart of the cross. It's an amazing statement. And we've embraced it.

But, when you think again about those who hear the message of the cross, without maybe for the first time in their lives, you think... See, again, we're so

used to hearing it. You hear people talk. I mean, I, hopefully I talk about the message of the cross every Sunday and Wednesday that we're and whenever you're in the Word of God, I hope you're seeing it too. But we forget how crazy it sounds to people. We forget just how bizarre and insulting.

Do you remember when you were insulted by the cross? Paul calls it in Galatians, *"the offense of the cross"* (Galatians 5:11) because it has inherent in it, a very insulting message, and here it is. Here's the message, you're not good enough. You don't measure up. There's a gulf between you and God that you can't fill. You can try your whole life long and you'll never fill it You will never reach God on your own.

That's insulting when you say that to somebody, it affects him right in his pride. What do you mean? What are you saying to...? You're saying God refuses to accept me as I am? I'm saying He can't! It is impossible for Him to accept you as you are. Because as you are is a sinner. And God can't abide sin. He's too holy. He's too pure. He's too righteous. And there's this separation between you and God.

People love to think of themselves, apart from the cross, as close to God. You're not close to God. You are separated from God. That's insulting. You say that to people and they're like, how dare you! How dare you say such a thing to me!

That's the cross. That is the message of the cross. In fact, if you're not offended by the message of the cross, you probably haven't heard the message of the cross. Because, as I said before, it is inherently insulting.

How does God choose to bring this insulting message, this offensive message, to human beings? Well, look what Paul says in verse 19. It says, *"For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning. I will thwart.'"* Or frustrate. And then he begins to ask the question, *"Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe?"* Scribes in Paul's day were basically just copyists. They wrote down the scriptures and pass them along.

But in Paul's day, the scribe became synonymous with the scholar so you need to think of it in that term. If he were saying it today, he'd say, where's the scholar? Where's the educated person of the day? *"Where's the debater (he says,) of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"* And you might say, well, has He? I didn't know that He had.

Verse 21. He explains why, *"For since, in the wisdom (of the) of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through (the foolishness or) the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."* All right, stop there.

That can be a little confusing. Let me explain what Paul's saying here. He's essentially saying, that it pleased God to bestow wisdom on man. He gave us wisdom. And wisdom is that ability that God has given to you and I, to search out and to discern what is true from what is false, to seek out the answers that belong to life.

Here's the problem. Sin entered into the whole equation. God gives this great wisdom to man, but sin comes in. And it just corrupts everything and twists things. And suddenly now, man decides for whatever reason, and usually it's because God, believing in God is inconvenient, he believes, or he chooses to ignore certain truths or certain realities.

And he just decides he's going to deny them. Do you believe in God? No, I don't believe in God. And everything around man says there is a God but he chooses to ignore it anyway. No, I don't believe that sort of stuff. That's for idiots to believe. Smart people don't believe in God. Only idiots believe in God. And it becomes this topsy turvy sort of a thing where he chooses to ignore the truth that God has laid out. And again, because if he were to believe it, he'd have to change the way he lives and that's not acceptable.

And that's, you remember, that's what Paul wrote about when he started the Book of Romans. Do you recall? Let me put it up here just to remind you again. In the first chapter of Romans he wrote that,

Romans 1:18, 21-22 (ESV)

...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools...

...the wrath of God is (now being) revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and (all the) unrighteousness of men, (and look at this next phrase,) who by their unrighteousness (Do what?) suppress the truth. (That means they, they're pretending that it's not true. That's not true! And) although (it says) they knew God, they did not honor him as God or (and they didn't) give thanks to him (as God, but in fact) they became futile (look at this) in their thinking, (and

in their minds) *and their foolish hearts were darkened*. (And it seems like more they claim to be wise, the more) *they became fools*.

And that's man's biggest, number one failure is that we started fancying ourselves to be very wise people. I'm pretty smart, man said about himself. And the smarter he thought himself, the dumber he became. And that's just the fact of the matter.

But you know what, it's not being smart itself that's a problem. There are actually a lot of smart people in the Kingdom of God. I've even met a couple of them. But... Being smart is not the hindrance that you might otherwise think. It's trusting in your smarts that's the problem. It's trusting in man's intelligence. It's putting, it's leaning on your intelligence as if you know better. You can out think God. That's our problem. And God calls that great wickedness, in fact. You want to know the definition of wickedness? Trusting in yourself and your own wisdom.

Let me just pepper you with a couple of quick Scriptures. First of all, from the Book of Proverbs, check this out,

Proverbs 26:12 (ESV)

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

"Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

Well, that lays it out, doesn't it? I mean, that just tells you the way it is. Somebody who's wise in his own eyes, that means he considers himself wise. And we may not say that. We may not go around saying, I'm really smart or something like that. But by our actions and by our words, we actually say, we we communicate to people that, I'm trusting in my smarts. I'm trusting in my ability to think through things.

And one of the ways you always hear that, is when somebody says that they're an atheist. It really blows my mind when I am talking to like, a 16 year old, and they tell me they're an atheist. As if they've even begun to have the time in this life to dial that particular conclusion in.

I am 58 years old. I know that because Sue told me first service. And I can tell you that the older I get, the more I realize I don't know. The more I don't know,

in the sense that I have a better understanding of now what I don't have any grasp on at all, which creates humility in and of itself.

And then when a 16 year old comes along and says, I don't believe in God. There is no God. I'm just like, (Pastor Paul puffs in disbelief) Really? So the depth of your years on this earth have caused you to come to that conclusion, right? You could live 4,000 lifetimes on earth and personally not spend enough time to reach that conclusion on your own.

But you know why we do say we've reached that conclusion? Pride. I'm not going around telling people I'm prideful necessarily, but I'm saying it by what I say. Oh, here's what I believe. And you know when somebody hears something that the Bible says, the Bible teaches this, they go, I don't believe that. What is that? I know better. I'm smarter than that. I'm smarter than the Word of God. I know better than the Word of God. Don't talk to me about what this ancient textbook has to say. I know better! And again, those words might not come out of our mouth. But they're all over the things that we are saying.

Okay. Check this out from Psalm 10:4. I like this out of the NIV,

Psalm 10:4 (NIV)

In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

The prideful man has no room to think about God. I don't have a time to think about God! Why? He's thinking about himself. Whatever ability God gave you and I, to focus on God, and I believe that there is an innate ability that we have to direct our hearts toward God, our culture has done a great and powerful work of taking that apparatus (Pastor Paul mimics with his voice and hands, redirecting from outside to inside himself) directing it here this way.

Now it's all about me. It's all about me being happy. I just want to be happy. I just... Why do I do this? Cause it makes me happy. It's all about me now.

And we were created to live this way. (Pastor Paul raises hands indicating worship to God) And the world around you and I has taken this focus, made it go this way (brings hands to point toward himself) It's all about me. It's all about how I feel. It's all about what I like. And it's all about what I don't like. And who I like, and who I don't like. It's all about me. I live to serve me. Right?

Where am I going to fit God in there, in that sort of a scenario? There's no room for thoughts of God there. Right? So that's what it says here. There's no room for God, in the heart of prideful man.

And then check out this last one, Psalm 36. Love this. Again from the NIV.

Psalm 36:1-2 (NIV)

An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: (says) There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

He can't even detect his sin because he's too busy flattering himself about how smart he is, how wise he is, and everything else. Pretty crazy, isn't it?

Paul goes on, look with me in your Bible in verse 22. He says, *"For Jews demand signs (miracles) and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews (and downright absolute foolishness) to Gentiles, but, to those who are called, (whether they're Jews or Gentiles,) Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."*

He says, Jews look for signs and Greeks look for wisdom. You remember back in Jesus day, Jesus would be going about His public ministry and the Jews would say, what miraculous sign can you show us to prove that you are who you say you are?

Jesus would say to them, actually, you know what? It's a wicked and adulterous generation that asks for a sign and you're not going to get one. In fact, the only sign you will get is the sign of Jonah. Right? For as Jonah was, three days in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. And he basically said, by my own resurrection, I will show you the sign that I am who I say that I am. (Matthew 12:38-39, Luke 11:29-30,)

But they were always looking for signs and here's why. They wanted power. They wanted to see power. They believed miracles were a sign of power. We don't want weakness. Last thing Jews were expecting was a weak Messiah. And when the Christians started... When they were believing that Jesus was the

Messiah, and they're like, wait a minute, isn't that the guy they crucified? That is the ultimate sign of weakness.

You see, the Jews didn't expect the Messiah to die on a cross. They expected Him to ride in and save the day, and while He's at it, conquer all their enemies. Right? That's what the Messiah is going to do. He's not going to show any weakness. That's ridiculous! So the Jews look for signs because they're looking for strength, signs of strength.

And then he says, the Greeks on the other hand are, they love wisdom. They're looking always for wisdom. We're told in the Book of Acts, that when Paul got to the city of Athens, he said that, the people did nothing all day long, but sit around and talk about the latest ideas. (Acts 17:18-21) They got the latest philosophers and they'd come in there and they talk about the latest philosophies and ideas and things. And, ooh! now there's an interesting thought. Let's talk about that for the next, oh, I don't know, 8 hours. And then we'll move to some other subject.

Well, Paul found himself in the place where these discussions took place called the Areopagus. And he started talking about the cross of Christ, and the subsequent resurrection of Jesus, and they scoffed. What is this babbler saying? This is ridiculous. Let's get somebody in here who's going to, who's going to tantalize us with his wisdom. This is ludicrous stuff here. Get this guy out of here. It's the way the Greeks are. It's the way the Gentiles are. They considered wisdom to be the highest form of that which is impressive, I suppose.

It got me to thinking. What have we changed that to today? When you look at our culture today here in the United States of America, and you ask yourself, what do we consider, what do we consider wisdom, smarts. And what do we consider strength? Well, you don't have to stick around for very long before you figure those things out. Watch a little TV, read a couple of articles you find out that right away, we are very impressed with education and the level of education.

In fact, if you have a PhD, we'll listen. And you tell me that you graduated from Yale or Harvard or something like that, and eyebrows instantly go up. Oh, I, oh man! This guy has a PhD. This is Dr. so and so. Well, that's culturally what we equate with wisdom. Right?

And yet you look at those Ivy League schools, you look at those places of higher learning, do they... What do they think about the gospel? What do they think about the message of the cross? They think it's foolishness, don't they? In

fact, if you were lucky enough to get into one of those schools from an academic standpoint, I dare say by the time you got done, you'd probably think differently about the cross. If you believed in it going in, you'd probably come out questioning it. Places like that, the message of the cross is foolishness. And yet we're pretty impressed with people who have degrees from those places.

What about strength? What do we consider strength today? Oh, that's easy too. All you have to have is a lot of money, and then you have power. And you have our attention. And we'll watch you; we'll watch your life. You don't even have to have any character. In fact, we don't care anything about character. Just as long as you have a lot of money, we'll keep our eyes on you. We'll read about you in the news. We'll watch interviews with you. And isn't it crazy what a lot of money, how relative that is, into...

We just had this lottery for what, 1.3, 1.4 billion dollars. Probably the highest it's ever been. Right? And all of a sudden, then people, somebody, I guess somebody won, or some people won or whatever. And then we're, oh, it's only back to 40 million. Chump change. Yeah, I take that when I go to Albertson's. Isn't that crazy! I'm going to wait till it's up over a billion. But we do consider that a sign of strength when you have a lot of money.

The point of all of this is that, God intended the message of the cross to be foolishness to the world. He intended it that way. That was His goal. That was His aim.

Let me take you back to verse 21 for just a moment, if I could. Look at verse 21 in your Bible. *"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through the wisdom, (that He had given them) it (then) pleased God..."* And that's the point I want to focus on, *"it pleased God through (foolishness or) the folly of what we preach to (actually) save (people.)"*

That message that we have to go out into the world with, the world thinks is foolishness. And they think that this Savior that you believe in, is a weak person. And that is what we take into the world, and that is what saves people. It saves them for eternity. The very thing the world thinks is dumb and weak. And that's amazing! But you know what? That was God's intention. That was His intention.

And then... And we look in the last several verses here, beginning in verse 26, we're going to find out that, not only is the gospel or the message of the cross unimpressive, but so are the people who bring it. Sorry about that. That's you and me.

But verse 26 goes on and it says this, *"For consider your calling brother: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were (noble or) of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world (Isn't that good news?! God chose what is foolish) to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low(ly) and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."*

Paul says, consider your calling, consider your upbringing, consider who you are. I don't know how many people in this room have a PhD; not that that's the end all say all to education. But I'm just saying, in the world, it's thought of as a pretty big deal. But I doubt there's many, if any, people in this room who have one. And I don't think..., so, we're not really considered wise according to what the world thinks as wise.

Not many of us are powerful from the standpoint of how the world perceives power. Then, and I don't think any of us have any royal blood in us. If we do, we're not aware of it.

But isn't it great that God actually chose the weak and the foolish to bring about the Gospel. And the reason that He did is because, when you and I go out and share the Gospel, we share it from the standpoint of our lives. The simplicity of our lives. The un-impressiveness of our lives. You know what it does? It does the same thing that the cross of Christ does, or the message of the cross does.

It undermines everything that mankind otherwise thinks is just really cool. And that was God's choice to make both the message of the cross, and the messengers of the message of the cross, to undermine that which the world perceives as it, or important.

Guess what guys? God just took away every excuse that you thought you might have had about why you can't get out and tell people about Jesus. If you're just thinking, well, I just don't know and I haven't been to school. Don't you have to go to seminary or something like that? No, you don't? But I don't know very... You just go be who you are. Tell people about what God did for you when you heard the message of the cross and you mixed it with faith. And how He changed your life.

Notice Paul says in verse 30, *"And because of him you are in Christ Jesus,..."* See, that's the thing that we're trying to communicate to people. Whatever other things that you might have been proud about your life: your education, the

amount of money you make, the size house you live in, or your car you drive, or the bling on your finger, or whatever, whatever, whatever. It doesn't matter. That has nothing to do with anything. It is because of Him that you're in Christ Jesus. It is because of Him.

And that's the message we now take to the world. And people look at me and then I say, well, pastor Paul, how is it that you got into heaven? How is it that you received the promise of heaven? What was it? What's so special about you? And I am delighted to be able to say, nothing. It is not because of me that I am in Christ Jesus. It's because of Him that I'm in Christ Jesus. It's all that He did and nothing that I did. It's not about deserving.

And he ends this section, I'll read verse 30 again, *"...because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness (from God) sanctification (from God) and redemption, (from God) so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

That's a small quotation from Jeremiah. If you're going to boast about anything as a Christian, boast in this. God has opened my heart to see and to know Him in His character, and there's nothing else that I have to boast about.

Let me show you this passage from Jeremiah in it's, a little bit more in its context.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV)

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

Thus says the Lord: (Jeremiah chapter nine) "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,...but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and (that he) knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

This is such a great passage to end on here this morning. Because, we've been talking about what the world delights in and what we ought to delight in from the perspective of the kingdom of God. We know what the world delights in: wisdom, smarts, money, power, and those sorts of things.

What does God delight in? God delights in people who come to know His character. And His character is all about steadfast love, and justice, and righteousness. That's what He cares about. That's what He delights in.

And He delights when you and I set aside the things that, the treasures of the world, and we take instead and accept and embrace the treasures that are from the kingdom of God. Amen