

TITLE: HOW DOES THE CROSS AFFECT YOU?

TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

INTRO: What do you think of when you picture the cross? What words come to mind? “Foolish” is certainly not a word we would ever use to describe God, the cross, or preaching. Yet this is exactly what Paul did in 1 Cor 1.

I. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS (v. 18):

For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that are perishing; but to us that are being saved...the power of God. This verse is a thesis for the rest of this chapter, and is important to remember when studying the chapter. The cross (i.e., Christ's death on it) elicits many different responses. But Paul boils them down to two: Foolishness or the power of God.

II. TO THE WORLD (“THEM THAT ARE PERISHING”) – “FOOLISHNESS” (v. 19-25):

- A. (v. 19) This negative reaction was prophesied in **Isa 29:14** – *Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people... for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.* As seen by Paul's application here, this was a prophecy regarding Christ and the effect He would have on the world. But is God really destroying the wisdom of the wise, etc.? He's exposing this worldly wisdom for what it is. It makes them unable to see what's right in front of them – that it doesn't require extreme intellectual ability to understand (it's not that hard—**2 Cor 11:3**)!
- B. (v. 20) Prophecy fulfilled: *Where is the wise...the scribe...the disputer [debater] of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* Paul's saying that this has happened! But God is not to be blamed; this is the result of their own actions/attitudes! Worldly wisdom isn't wrong until it is substituted for the wisdom of God.
- C. (v. 21) The world, in its own “wisdom,” didn't know God. So God, in His own wisdom, chose to save them that believe through the ‘foolishness’ of preaching. Man by himself fails; so God steps in. But God's ways are unacceptable to most!
1. When people rely on their own wisdom to find God, instead of just listening to *Him*, they'll never know Him (**Jam 1:5**—*He will provide wisdom*). But, **Rom 1:28**—*“they did not like to retain God in their knowledge.”* Otherwise, He is not far from every one of us, if we will just look for Him (**Acts 17:27**). But we should do this based on the evidence He has left us (of His existence and His will for us)! So for those who rely on their own wisdom, it is clearly an issue of pride & arrogance, not truly seeking Him (cf. Tower of Babel). Many try to prove the Bible wrong; they believe they're wiser than God.
 2. God used (and still does use) the foolishness of preaching to save those that believe. Why is preaching ‘foolishness’?
 - a. Obviously it isn't literally foolishness. Contextually, that's the perception of those who are set on attaining human wisdom & knowledge. Anything short of achieving something by their own abilities is unsatisfactory.
 - b. Preaching is foolishness to them because it's the preaching of the cross. The plan of salvation doesn't make sense to the pursuer of human wisdom. It's too easy – too simple (**2 Cor 11:3**). It doesn't take a brain surgeon to understand the concept of sacrifice. Uneducated people can figure it out, so it can't be right! This is the attitude of many in the world's upper echelon. It's a problem of pride.
 - c. Even many who claim to follow Christ put themselves into this category when they consider it foolishness that one must be immersed for the forgiveness & washing away of sins. Yet this is what God said!
- D. (v. 22-24) The effect of the cross in Paul's world.
1. *For the Jews require a sign, and the Gentiles seek after wisdom.* The Jews wanted a miraculous sign and didn't recognize that the cross was that sign (**Mt 12:39-40**)! The Greeks wanted human wisdom. Greek philosophy was their pursuit in life. They believed they could attain to the perfect man through this knowledge, contemplation, thought, etc.
 2. *But we preach Christ crucified!* This was a stumblingblock to the Jews, because cursed is every man who hangs on a tree (**Deut 21:23**); but Paul explained that Jesus had become a curse for men (**Gal 3:13**). The Gentiles couldn't harmonize their philosophies with a savior on a cross (how could any god allow himself to be killed by his own creation?).
 3. (v. 24) *But to...the called (ones)* (i.e., those who have obeyed the call—**2 Thess 2:14**), *this message is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God* (a sign for the Jews; wisdom for the Gentiles)! *We understand! We know that His grace sent Christ to die & to save those who will believe & obey!* But this message is foolishness to everyone else!
- E. (v. 25) *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* There is no foolishness or weakness with God; this is in reference to man's perception of God's plan.

III. TO THE CHURCH (“THEM THAT ARE BEING SAVED”) – “THE POWER OF GOD” (v. 26-31):

- A. It's easy to read v. 19-25 and look down on those who glory and boast in their own wisdom while belittling us “uneducated” Christians! But let's make sure *we* understand and apply the second part of the passage – the *reason* for this preaching.
- B. (v. 26-28) The Facts: *For ye see...that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty...noble....* They can easily see that not many among themselves are from society's upper echelon. This is not an insult to the church (it's a compliment, considering what he's been saying about the “wisdom” of the world). (v. 27-28) *God has chosen the foolish, weak, base things....* Foolish & weak by *their* estimation, not by God's. God is putting these people in their place, but He's using His people to do it.
- C. (v. 29) **The Reason:** *That no flesh should glory in his presence.* God's way is simple, yet amazingly too complex for any human to ever have come up with. So **no** human can glory before God. God's wisdom is the *only* way this plan could exist and work.
- D. (v. 30) By God we are in Christ. *He* is to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, & redemption. None of this comes by us – so no human should glory (boast). There is no developing your own plan of salvation or earning anything. It is all of God & Christ.

CONCLUSION: The wisdom of the world cannot show us God. But God decided to save men through a message that He knew the world would consider foolish. God's ways have always seemed foolish to man (**Noah & the ark**—it had never rained; **Jericho**—foolishly walking around the city blowing trumpets; **Gideon's army**—too many soldiers; **Naaman**—dipping in the dirty Jordan; **Christ**—born in a manger/poverty, birth announced to shepherds, chose fishermen as his leaders, died, we celebrate his death & not his birth). Verse 29 tells us that God does it this way so man can't glory...so man can't say *he* came up with it. *There are only 2 responses to this message: “foolishness!” or “the power of God!” What is *your* response? It will be seen in your reaction, which should be total obedience; anything less is unacceptable to God.