

Series: *The Wisdom, Wonder, and Witness of the Gospel*
The Foolishness of Preaching
1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

We have read a portion of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. In order to fully grasp the words of Paul and the significance of this letter, we need to understand a bit about Corinth. It was the capital city of Achaia, located at the southern tip of Greece. The city was located on a narrow strip of land that looked much like an island, having a harbor on the east and west sides. It was a heavily populated city with Greeks, Jews, Egyptians, and other nationalities living there. Due to its location, Corinth was a strategic shipping center for commerce.

Being a culturally diverse city with much commerce, one can imagine the lifestyle many adopted. Immorality was so prevalent in Corinth that the name of the city became a byword for evil and immoral living. This seemed an unlikely place for a church to grow and prosper, but Paul knew the significance and potential of Corinth. Their location would provide a tremendous opportunity to share the Gospel with the possibility of it being taken to various parts of the world.

After a word of greeting, Paul spoke of the need for unity among the church. As we come to our text, his focus has shifted to the significance of the Gospel. He desired to emphasize the importance of the Gospel and the great power it had to transform the lives of sinners.

The Gospel is a message that is thousands of years old, and yet it is as powerful today as it was when it was first preached. Over the next few weeks, I want to examine this portion of 1 Corinthians in a series on: *The Wisdom, Wonder, and Witness of the Gospel*. This morning I want to examine the [insights](#) of Paul as we think on: [The Foolishness of Preaching](#). Some were critical, others ignored it, but some received it. Paul knew preaching was invaluable. We see that:

I. Paul Speaks of Debate (18-20) – Paul addresses the debate surrounding preaching. Consider:

A. The Witness (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](#). Here we discover the reaction of those who heard the message of the cross preached. To those who rejected the message and remained perishing in sin it was foolishness, but to those who had received salvation it was the power of God. While men continued to debate the preaching of the cross, once it was presented, it called men to decision. All would not receive the message, but some would. Paul was determined to share the Gospel every opportunity he had in order to bear witness of the saving grace of God.

- The debate continues today concerning the Gospel, but we must not let that hinder our sharing the truth. Some will reject it and remain in sin, but some will respond in salvation!

B. The Warning (19) – *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.* Paul refers to Isaiah 29:14, a time when Judah foolishly listened to the counsel of men rather than the prophet. God brought them to a place of despair where they had to look to Him for guidance and wisdom. While men look to the wisdom of the world and choose to reject the truth of the Gospel, Paul warns their wisdom will actually come to naught. They may have thought their wisdom exceeded the preaching of Paul and the Word of God, declaring it foolish, but in the end God would prove their wisdom was lacking.

- Many today continue to follow this path. The Word of God is shunned and the Savior of men is rejected. The world looks to the philosophies of men and the standards of society, but these will not stand before a holy God. Either in this life in salvation, or as they stand before God in judgment, all will recognize and declare Christ the Lord of all.

C. The Wisdom (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?* Paul speaks of those men looked to for wisdom and guidance: the wise, the scribe, and those who debate. John Phillips described them as scholars, scribes, and skeptics.

- Each of these remains today. Our world is filled with those who claim to possess more wisdom than those who embrace the Word as the literal, inerrant Word of God. The scholar seeks an answer through human philosophy and reasoning. Many know the Word but choose to reject for a number of reasons. Others simply scoff at the Gospel and the Word of God, rejecting it outright. Those who embrace the truths of the Word and receive Christ in salvation are declared foolish, but God declares them wise!

II. Paul Speaks of Discernment (21-22) – Now Paul addresses the various approaches to the message of the cross and how it is perceived. Consider:

A. The Inadequacy of Wisdom (21a) – *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God...* Referring to those who claimed wisdom, Paul reveals their acquired wisdom failed to bring them into a proper knowledge of God. They may have been revered by their peers as men of great learning and wisdom, but they had not come to a saving knowledge of the Lord. The wisdom essential to life was rejected as foolishness. These may have been embraced by society as wise, but they failed in any attempt to know God.

- This inadequacy remains today. One may possess knowledge in this life and yet lack the wisdom of God that brings salvation. Far more important than head knowledge is wisdom that permeates the heart and changes lives.

B. The Obsession with Wonders (22) – [For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.](#) Paul declared the Jews sought signs and miracles. They demanded some great wonder be accomplished before their eyes if they were to believe. Although this was true, it is very ironic. Jesus performed many great miracles and signs and yet they would not believe. They rejected the truth He spoke and the miracles He performed. The Greeks were only interested in intellectual wisdom. They were not interested in spiritual truth, but sought philosophical engagement. Many of the great thinkers of Paul's day considered him a babbler, offering little to consider. They demanded something that would challenge their minds.

- These obsessions remain today. Some seek for a great sign or miracle in order to believe. Others are only interested in deep philosophies and intellectual challenges. They refuse to embrace anything by faith. However, in reality, Jesus has provided each of these demands. There is no question regarding His miracles if one will only consider the evidence. The Word of God is deeper than the brightest mind can begin to comprehend. These are mere avenues to avoid Truth.

C. The Perfection of the Word (21b) – [it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.](#) While men continued their futile attempt to reach God through wisdom, demanding miracles and deeper learning, Paul reveals the simple approach God designed. His approach involved the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

- This is in no way derogatory toward the Word. It simply reveals that God uses human instruments to proclaim His inspired, inerrant Word to those who will respond by faith. Salvation isn't through great signs and miracles. It isn't obtained through advanced wisdom and knowledge. It is simply hearing and receiving the preached Word. Millions have been saved over thousands of years by hearing and responding by faith to the preached Word!

III. Paul Speaks of Declaration (23-25) – Finally he addresses the public declaration of the Word: the preaching of the cross. Consider:

A. The Preaching (23a) – [But we preach Christ crucified...](#) That is the central theme of the Gospel. It isn't in great miracles or newfound wisdom. It centers on the substitutionary sacrifice Christ made on behalf of sinners. Christ lived, died, was buried, and rose again: the Gospel.

- We know the entire Bible was given by inspiration of God and is profitable in our lives. There is much given that applies to our daily lives and walk with the Lord. The Bible reveals the past as well as what we can expect in the future. It is a glorious book filled with truth, but the theme of the Bible is the Gospel. Until one knows Christ in salvation, the rest won't mean much.

B. The Perception (23b) – *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.* Paul was well aware that all would not receive the Gospel. For many of the Jews it was a stumblingblock. They could not embrace it as truth. They stumbled at the notion that Jesus was in fact the crucified Messiah. Many of the Greeks saw the Gospel as mere foolishness, a tale of fiction or dreams. Although many rejected the truth, Paul continued to preach faithfully. He would not allow the rejection of some to prevent others from hearing the good news!

C. The Purpose (24) – *But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* Paul had faced much rejection. Many had denied the truth and refused the Gospel, but all had not. Some had responded in faith, both Jews and Greeks. He had witnessed the salvation of those from two of the most difficult cultures to reach. He knew the power of the Gospel and he was determined to preach it as long as he lived. He knew God had chosen the method of preaching to reach the world for Christ. There was great purpose in his calling and work. He would not allow discouragement to hinder his preaching.

- We need reminded of this great truth. There is purpose in our existence. The Lord has placed us here to share the good news we have received. All will not respond and believe, but some will. We must continue to proclaim the Gospel.

D. The Power (25) – *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* On the surface this comment may appear disrespectful and controversial, but Paul is declaring the power of God. He is in no way minimizing the power of truth. In fact, he is building a solid case for it. Society declares the wisdom of God foolish when compared to the wisdom of men. They proclaim God and the Bible are weak when compared to the intellectual minds and abilities of those considered knowledgeable and strong. Appealing to their way of thinking, Paul declares the foolishness perceived of God is much stronger than the wisest of men. His perceived weakness is much stronger than the strongest and most powerful on earth.

- In essence, the world proclaims the Gospel is foolish and weak, when in reality it is abundant wisdom and strength. It is the power of God that leads to salvation and eternal life. However perceived by this world, I think I will go with God and remain committed to Him. The world was unable to provide salvation, but through His grace, God did.

Conclusion: We have considered a passage of Scripture that would be refuted by the world, but it is not to be taken lightly. Paul has discussed the method God has chosen for the salvation of men. He chose to use the proclamation of the Gospel, through weak and frail human instruments, to reach those who have not accepted Christ in salvation by faith. Salvation is never obtained through the wisdom of men or through signs and miracles. It is received by responding to the Word of God as it is faithfully proclaimed.

Have you responded to the Gospel? Was there a moment when you heard truth and accepted it by faith? If not, I urge you to respond today. You have heard truth. Will you believe?

For those of us who are saved, we must continue to share the Gospel. All will not believe, but some will. We cannot allow discouragement and the rejection of some to hinder our commitment to sharing the truth. The next one we speak to may respond by faith.