



1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - 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. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

We preach Christ crucified



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
(1 John 3:1)

If you had a chance to go back to the 15th century and talk with Johannes Gutenberg, the man who invented the printing press, and you told him that one day, people would be typing words on a computer and printing volumes of pages on whatever topic they wanted, all with the greatest of ease, what do you think he'd say? Probably nothing at first, because I don't think he spoke English, but let's look past that. This man who made it his life's work to bring movable type to the world would probably tell you, "You're crazy!" If you had the chance to have words with Nicolaus Copernicus, the 16th century astronomer who popularized the theory of "heliocentricity" (the sun is the center of the solar system, not the earth) – this was no small thing – and you told him that one day we would shoot a rocket into space and land a man on the moon, what might he say? "Impossible! That's foolish talk!" He would think you're nuttier than a squirrel's breakfast. Given the context, things that seem unlikely or even impossible to human thinking are often met with rejection. "There's no way! That's impossible!" You're crazy!"

So how about this one – the Almighty God, whose ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts – the God whom no mind can know, no hand can reach, and is completely set apart from anything to which we could compare him - this God reveals himself in a baby born in Bethlehem, a humble, homeless rabbi, and finally the man in the middle on Calvary's cross. Is the message of the cross of Christ and Christ crucified any less absurd to human minds than laptops to Gutenberg or moon landings to Copernicus? It's utterly unreasonable! The Almighty God is offended by sin and demands a sacrifice to pay for it – and that sacrifice is...himself?! Rather than try to harmonize the logic or explain the rationale, God essentially admits, *I know how it sounds*. Through the pen of Paul we read, **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.**

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter of 1 Corinthians to a church in trouble. Divisions in the church, sexual immorality, drunkenness at the Lord's Supper, the misuse of spiritual gifts, and more. But before he dealt with any of these troublesome topics, Paul starts at the beginning. He once again lays the foundation of all his teaching and, in fact, the foundation of our teaching as well: We preach Christ crucified. To the world, this is weak and foolish. To believers, this is the power and wisdom of God.

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel had grown accustomed to seeing some pretty spectacular demonstrations of God's power. Think of their Exodus from Egypt. The waters of the Red Sea were parted and the whole nation walked through on dry ground. Manna and quail came daily to their camp in the wilderness to provide food for a wandering nation. The presence of the Lord himself went before the people in cloud and fire. Fast forward to the time of Jesus. These works of power became the criteria by which the Jews of Jesus' day were going to determine whether he was their Messiah. But when this travelling rabbi came to them and said he was the Christ, the Jewish people found Jesus to be a stumbling block instead of a Savior. He looked weak. To them, his message was foolish. They didn't want their Messiah to look so weak, so defeated. They wanted a conquering king, who would restore Israel's political and economic prosperity. And so the message of the cross, the message of Christ crucified was considered the height of foolishness and the ultimate show of weakness.

We might fault the Jews for their lack of vision. Christ was standing right in front of them and had backed up his message with miracles, but they didn't understand. What about today? Does the world still try to make Jesus into what they want him to be – regardless of who he reveals himself to be? Do we? Why is the message of the cross such foolishness and such and so offensive to human beings? Because it cuts out every self-righteous leg we'd try to stand on before God. It paints an honest picture of us and of God. What kind of Christ would we prefer to be

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preached? Maybe the Jesus that works along with me – the Jesus who helps me become the David so that I can face down my Goliaths; the Jesus who would pat me on the back whenever I walk the talk; the Jesus who gives me ten principles to live by so I can earn his favor; ultimately a Jesus of our own making.

To borrow an illustration: the message of the cross is offensive, and maybe it's just too absurd. So the little woodworker that lives inside each of us, our sinful nature, will take the wood of Christ's cross, dismantle it and rebuild it into something a little more reasonable and palatable – like a ladder. That makes some sense – I climb as best I can and Jesus is at the top cheering me on. Once I've climbed my little heart out, Jesus will pull me up the rest of the way. Or maybe that little woodworker in us crafts that cross into a pair of crutches. The road to heaven is long and tough, but I'm gonna hobble with all my might, and when all's said and done, Jesus will see just how hard I've worked and he'll take care of the rest. Removing the offense of the cross removes the cross itself. There's no question about it - it's offensive to hear that by nature you are dead in sin. It's offensive to learn that your sin separated you from God and there isn't a thing you could do about it. It's foolish and it's offensive to hear God tell you that your sinful heart knows nothing of him, and even if you tried to obey your way into his graces, you'd just be pushing yourself further into darkness. It's sad that such a Christ has been proclaimed by so many claiming to speak in his name – dethroning Jesus from his role as Savior and Substitute, and making him little more than a life-coach. And so the offense of the cross is removed in the name of self-empowerment or intellectual sensibility.

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom... We preach Christ crucified, but a message like that is offensive to those who are looking for self-determined shows of God's power AND it's offensive to those who think they know better. When Paul says, **Greeks look for wisdom**, we think of those great thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates; those men whose intellect was unrivaled and who produced theories about life and logic that we still hold in high regard at a university level even today. But let the world have 100 Aristotles. Give them 1,000 men like Socrates. With their tremendous powers of reasoning, not one of them could unravel the mystery of God. Not one philosopher offers a solution to mankind's greatest problem: sin. Not a single one of those wise men could give humankind what we needed most: a right relationship with God. God never chose to reveal his plan of salvation through human intelligence. Instead, he sent his Son to take on human flesh and suffer unjustly for the sins that his human creatures commit. The very Son of God dies to redeem a creation who tries to remove the offense of the message that saves them. **For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.** As if the crucified God wasn't offensive enough, now look at the ridiculous way God communicates that truth – through preaching! Through words!

We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. By God's grace, to us who believe, this message of Christ crucified is the power and wisdom of God. By the miracle of his Holy Spirit, God has called us out of the darkness of sin and unbelief and into the marvelous light of his grace in Christ. At one time, we all considered the message of Christ crucified to be weak and foolish. We still fight a daily battle against our sinful natures that see Christ crucified as weak and foolish. Our Old Adams will never let us rest. *"Where is this wisdom and this power you claim to have courtesy of the message of Christ crucified? Wouldn't you rather have a message that the world wants to hear? Your God just doesn't make sense."* But God did not choose to save people through what sounds reasonable to human minds. The bottom line is, Jesus doesn't care about offending your intellectual sensibilities. He cares about...you. That's why the Creator of the universe became a helpless baby for you. It's why he would submit himself, put himself under his Father's law, why he'd preach to people even when they wouldn't listen, and finally take all our sins to his cross. This is the only way that sinners stand righteous before a holy God –



in God-made-flesh Jesus Christ dying on a cross to pay for your every sin. Does that offend you? Jesus doesn't care about offending you. He cares about saving you. This is the wisdom and power of God.

To the casual observer, words like "wisdom" and "power" wouldn't be the first to jump to mind when they thought about Christianity. After all, it's not like our worship services feature any spectacular miracles. Or do they? The word of absolution, the word of forgiveness comes through a human messenger, but in it you hear the voice of God himself. Every time we enter this assembly, the baptismal font stands before our eyes, taking us back to three splashes of water and the promise of God – *you're mine*. The altar is always before our eyes, recalling the once-for-all, perfect sacrifice of Christ for our sins. And, grace upon grace, our Savior Jesus sets the table himself: "*Taste how much you're forgiven. See how much I love you.*" In these things the world considers weak and foolish, we find the wisdom and power of God for salvation. By faith, we realize how brilliant it is!

Jean Abbott was a 33 year old mother of two from Minnesota. Jean struggled to walk for over 30 years. At a young age, she had been diagnosed and treated for a specific form of cerebral palsy. She had gone to over a dozen doctors for treatment and had resigned herself to the fact that she would never play on the playground with her kids or take a walk on the beach with her husband. She would always get around on an electric scooter. Until one day, she went to see another doctor. The doctor told her what her problem was...and it wasn't cerebral palsy. The doctor told her she had a genetic disorder called DRD. Misdiagnosis is not unusual, but this is. DRD is treated with a simple pill. The doctor told her that with the medication she would be able to walk without help, play with her kids, and stroll with her husband. Jean said that she thought the doctor was crazy! Could it really be true? After three decades of losing my ability to walk and after all my other resources have turned up empty – could it really be true? I don't have to tell you how the story ends – because Jean is still walking. Sometimes life's biggest problems have the most foolish, offensive sounding solutions.

How much more when it comes to the biggest problem humanity has ever known? We preach Christ crucified. To the world, it's a message that's weak and foolish. But by the miracle of the Holy Spirit, to us this message is the power and wisdom of God for salvation; our salvation. And now that message of sins forgiven is ours to share. Sometimes we're hesitant to share our faith. "I don't know what to say!" Yes you do: Christ crucified. The message is simple. Don't try to argue someone into believing, because it won't work. Don't hide the message of Jesus behind a philosophic dissertation. Instead, boldly share the only thing that the Apostle Paul wanted to share: Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Proclaim Christ crucified and risen like one of our preschool kids would say to his friend. "Jesus died on the cross to take away all of our sins, so now we can live forever in heaven. Jesus loves you, too!" We preach Christ crucified. It's simple. It's powerful. It's our salvation.

Amen

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:7)