

## A Foolish Gospel – 1Corinthians 1:18-25

Bible Study ~ 11/16/16-12/14/16

Grace Church of Lockeford

Paul has already begun to address issues of division in the Corinthian church. They are dividing over what man they follow. Paul rejoices that he didn't baptize them stating that Christ sent him to preach the gospel, not to baptize. He was sent to preach the Gospel, not man's wisdom. If we preach the gospel in man's wisdom, we make the cross useless. The section we will consider builds on this idea that we preach something that man's wisdom cannot comprehend.

Part 1 – 11/16/16

### 1. The Message Of The Cross: Foolishness Or Power? Vv. 18-19

In *verse 18* we learn that what the Cross communicates, its message, to those who are perishing is perceived as foolishness. We need to understand how truly horrific the image of the Cross was in history. It was an instrument of torturous execution. The idea that anything about a Cross could be good news was laughable in that time. Paul specifically references the Cross here. Referring to the Cross of Jesus. So what is the message, the word of the Cross. What does the Cross of Jesus Christ communicate? Vicarious death for sin. Atonement. Love. Forgiveness. Yet a world that is lost and dying cannot understand this message! It is foolishness. Foolishness – *μωρία mōria foolishness. Ridiculous thought – a wildly mistaken or unfounded opinion or idea. The idea that the sacrificial death of another person on the Cross for their wrongdoing can save is completely ridiculous to those who are perishing.* Who are these ones? Perishing – *ἀπόλλυμι apollymi destroy; perish; lose. To perish (spiritually) – to be or become without spiritual life under the condemnation of God.* The idea here is not that they are dying, we all are. The idea is that they are spiritually separated from God and so they are headed toward an eternity separated from Him! Because they have not had their senses awakened by the Spirit, they see the Cross as foolish. But it is perceived as something entirely different to those who are being saved. This is translated in the continual action because we have not been finally glorified just as those who are alive and have not trusted Christ are perishing but not perished. This word is passive. It is something that is being done to us. We are not contributing anything to our salvation! We simply trust in the message of the Cross! And when we do it is the power of God working through His message that saves us! This refers to power or ability with control and direction. The Gospel message, the message of the Cross is under the ability and control of God to accomplish a specific purpose.

In *verse 19* Paul paraphrases *Isaiah 29:14*. This is a woe that Isaiah pronounced on Jerusalem. Paul normally uses the expression “it is written” before he quotes or paraphrases the OT. He is using the authority of the OT to demonstrate a point. Interestingly “I will destroy” is the same word used for “perishing” in v. 18. The difference is in the tense and mood. In v. 18 it is present passive. In v. 19 it is future active. So those who are perishing in v. 18 are doing so because of a lack of action, namely belief in Christ. But in v. 19 the reference is to a future action that God will take. Paul is saying that the time Isaiah referred to is what the Corinthians are facing. But what will God destroy? Their Wisdom – *σοφία Sophia wisdom. Finite wisdom (ability) – the ability to acquire and discern truth about natural and supernatural matters without the assistance or revelation of God.* God will destroy the reasoning of those who reason apart from Him. Those who are considered by others or themselves to be wise. He will bring their understanding to nothing. Bring to nothing – *ἀθετέω atheteō reject; declare invalid.* This is interesting. God will cause their wisdom to perish, but invalidate their understanding. Their reasoning will be destroyed and their understanding revealed as false. Understanding – *σύνεσις synesis understanding; insight. Comprehension – an ability to understand the meaning or importance of something (or the knowledge acquired as a result).* This will be invalidated because their understanding or insight has been gained apart from Christ and therefore they cannot have an accurate picture of the message of the Cross. It is the message of Christ and can only be understood as we view everything through the lens of His redemption. These are interesting because there is a personal element to it just as

there is a personal element to the gospel. As these wise and understanding people are confronted with the simplicity of the message of the Cross they will either find it to be the power of God or foolishness.

Part 2 – 12/7/16

**2. The Message Preached: Foolishness Or Salvation? Vv. 20-21**

*Verse 20* is Paul's affirmation that God has truly destroyed the wisdom of the wise and invalidated the understanding of the prudent. The implied answer to each question is that these people are not to be found and that God has made their wisdom foolish. The wise is not to be found. Scribe – γραμματεὺς *grammateus scribe. Scholar (scribe) – an expert interpreter and teacher of a body of writings; usually the Mosaic Law. This person makes it their life studying something that cannot bring deliverance!* It cannot answer the most important question ever! Disputer – συζητητής *syzētētēs debater. Debater – someone who engages in a discussion in which reasons are advanced for and against some proposition or proposal.* Those who make it their lives to debate are unable to give a reasoned accusation against the message of the Cross. They cannot understand it at all! The implication is that those who normally argue these points can't because God, through the message of the Cross, has shown their wisdom to be foolishness. Yet the irony is that they view that very message as foolish. Foolish – μωραίνω *mōrainō make foolish. To make foolish – to cause to be marked by lack of good sense or judgment.* Here is the humor and irony of God. He has taken those who thought they were wise and had understanding and he has made them foolish in their failure to accept the message of the Cross! The world system is opposed to and in rebellion against, God. The consequence of this is that they have been made foolish.

*Verse 21* reveals that God, in His infinite wisdom, made it to where the world couldn't gain knowledge of Him through their own wisdom. This word wisdom is the same as vv. 19-20 but now it is a contrasting wisdom because it is the wisdom of God. Know – γινώσκω *ginōskō know. To know (experientially) – to know or have knowledge about.* The world system cannot gain an experiential knowledge of God through its wisdom. The sad thing is that so many attempt to do so. Using man's reasoning, logic, and philosophy men try to know God through experience and it cannot be done! There is only one way to know God and that is through the foolishness of the message preached! It delights God to see men saved by believing the message preached. I love this image. God delighting in thwarting man's wisdom to reveal His plan of salvation through simple faith. Foolishness is the same as v. 18. Here the object of the foolishness is the message preached. The proclamation of the Cross – the death, burial and resurrection of Christ – is the vehicle God has chosen through which to give men the opportunity to believe. When they trust the truth that the message contains, they are saved. "Save" is the same as v. 18 where we are being saved. But here it is active because believing, faith, is what actively saves. We are passive in works but active in faith. It pleased God to reveal Himself through the foolishness of the message preached. And through the foolish message of the Cross, He saves those who believe.

Part 3 – 12/14/16

**3. The Message Of Christ Crucified: Foolishness & Stumbling Block Or Power & Wisdom? Vv. 22-25**

According to *verse 22* all people have a qualification to belief. The Jews want a sign (miracle) and the Greeks want there to be some sort of knowledge to be gained. This is the condition that Jewish people in general, especially in Paul's day, placed on their belief. They told Jesus they would believe if He would give a sign. "Sign" here is the idea of miracle. His death, burial, and resurrection was the only sign that would be given. The Jews want to see a miracle. Something that they would view as definitive proof of who Jesus is and the veracity of the gospel. The Greeks, however, the goal they strive for is wisdom. But the next verse reveals that these are faulty methods. *Verse 23* gives the contrast to the things the Jews and Greeks seek after. We preach Christ. Preach – κηρύσσω *kēryssō proclaim; preach. To announce (herald) – to make known (important news) publicly and loudly (as if a herald).* This is a slightly different word than v. 21. The major difference is the public announcement connotation. We publicly and loudly announce the reality of Christ's death on the Cross for sin! It isn't just the fact that He was

nailed to a Cross that is proclaimed. It is the “why” that is preached. But the reality of a Christ who is crucified earns certain reactions from Jews and Greeks. To the Jews it is a Stumbling block – σκάνδαλον skandalon *cause for stumbling*. *Offense – an offensive action that results in opposition*. It is scandalous to the Jews to preach the Messiah as crucified for sins. Why? Because they wanted a Messiah who would step in, conquer Rome, and set up the earthly kingdom. To the Greeks it is foolishness. The Greeks find the Cross to be a ridiculous thing! How can someone who died be the Savior?! How can believing the impossible impart deliverance from death and hell? The intellectualism that permeated the Greek culture made it very difficult for them to believe. We still have people from these two groups with us today. People who won’t believe until they see a miracle, or people who struggle intellectually with the simplicity of the Gospel message.

But... *Verse 24* introduces a contrast. Those who are called, who are summoned by God into salvation, those who respond to the Gospel message find Christ to be the power and wisdom of God! These both are the words we found before. “Power” is the idea of ability with intention and focus. So those who are called by God find everything that they are seeking in Christ! If it is miracles they seek – Christ! If it is wisdom they seek – Christ! The idea here is that power and wisdom are only found in Christ! It is all about Christ! What seems foolish to intellectuals and impossible to doubters is powerful and wise with God! We preach Christ crucified, but it is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. But to those who are called in both camps, it is the power and wisdom of God. Why? Look at *verse 25*. Because God’s foolishness is wiser than men and God’s weakness is stronger than men. Not that God is foolish or weak, but that what He reveals, though it may seem foolish and weak, is better than anything man can devise! The things of God that are viewed as foolish are wiser than men. God’s foolishness shows more discernment than anything seen in mankind. Any strength that God lacked would still be stronger than men. God’s weakness wouldn’t just be stronger. It would be greater than average. Far and above the strength of men. In context all of this is seen in Christ and the Gospel message. If God could be foolish or weak, it would still be wiser and stronger than anything we can imagine!

This is the beauty, glory, and blessing of the Gospel message. It is not revealed how we would expect. There are not the requirements we might assume. By simple faith in the Message of the Cross of Jesus Christ and all that was accomplished through it, we are saved! What a blessing it is to know that we don’t have to wait for a miracle from heaven to confirm the truth of who Christ is, we simply believe. We don’t need a super-secret special knowledge in order to come to Christ, we simply believe.

**CHALLENGE:** Come to Christ in simple faith, trusting that Christ is all the power and wisdom you need.

### Word Studies By Verse

#### **V. 18**

Message – λόγος logos *word; message*. *Message (content) – the contents of a communication*.

Cross – σταυρός stauros *cross*. *Cross (instrument) – a wooden structure consisting of an upright post with a transverse piece onto which individuals’ wrists and feet were nailed as a form of execution*.

Being Saved – σώζω sōzō *save; deliver*. *To be saved (state) – to be or become delivered or rescued from sin (and consequential judgment)*.

Power – δύναμις dynamis *power*. *Power – possession of controlling influence; often understood as manifesting influence over reality in a supernatural manner*.

#### **V. 19**

Written – γράφω graphō *write*. *To be written (state) – to be or become set down in writing*.

I will destroy – ἀπόλλυμι apollymi – Same word used for “perishing” in v. 18.

Wise – σοφός Sophos *wise*. *Wise person – a person characterized by having wisdom*.

Bring to nothing – ἀθετέω atheteō *reject; declare invalid*. *To invalidate – to take away the legal force of or render ineffective*.

Prudent – συνετός *synetos intelligent. Comprehending person – someone marked by the ability to understand the meaning or importance of something (or the knowledge acquired as a result). The idea is “the understanding of the one who understands”.*

#### **V. 20**

Age – αἰών *aiōn age. Era – a period of history having some distinctive feature.*

World – κόσμος *kosmos world. World system – the people constituting the world whose values, beliefs, and morals are in distinction and rebellion to God’s.*

#### **V. 21**

Pleased – εὐδοκέω *eudokeō take delight; be well pleased. To delight (take) – to take a high degree of pleasure or mental satisfaction in.*

Message preached – κήρυγμα *kerygma proclamation; preaching. Preaching – a public proclamation (by herald) containing information about an event that has happened or is going to happen; especially messages from God concerning salvation.*

Believe – πιστεύω *pisteuō believe. To trust in Jesus – to trust in Jesus as contained in the content of the Gospel.*

#### **V. 22**

Request – αἰτέω *aitēō ask; ask for. To ask (request) – to make a request or demand something from somebody.*

Sign – σημεῖον *sēmeion sign; sign miracle.*

Seek – ζητέω *zēteō desire; seek; look for. To seek – to try to get or reach something one desires.*

#### **V. 23**

Crucified – σταυρώω *stauroō crucify. To be crucified – to be or become executed by being nailed to a Cross.*

#### **V. 24**

Called – κλητός *klētos called. Summoned – denoting someone whose participation or presence has been officially requested (for something); especially a request to which refusal is not an option.*

Wisdom – σοφία *sophia wisdom. Wisdom – the capacity for rational thought, inference or discrimination (and the application of it).*

#### **V. 25**

Foolishness – μωρός *mōros foolish; stupid; fool. Stupidity – a poor ability to understand or profit from experience.*

Wiser – σοφός *Sophos wise. Wise (characteristic) – having or prompted by accumulated knowledge or discernment.*

Weakness – ἀσθενής *asthenēs weak; sick. Weakness – the property of lacking physical or mental strength; liability to failure under pressure or stress or strain.*

Stronger – ἰσχυρός *ischyros mighty; strong; powerful. Strong – having strength or power greater than average or expected.*