

The Hope of Holiness
The Wisdom of the Cross
1:18-25

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.

There is a sense in which the Bible details the contest between wisdom and foolishness.

Proverbs 1:7 – The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Matthew 7:24 & 26 - Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.... And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

It doesn't require a contractor or builder to understand or relay the significance of those words

If Jesus is right, then, Adam and Eve were foolish not to listen to God...and they were.

In the wilderness temptation, Christ too, was tempted by the devil, with the same old trick –

Genesis 3:1 – "Did God actually say 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

No, God didn't say that. In fact, he said quite the opposite!

Genesis 2:16-17 - You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Matthew 4:5-7 - Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

but Christ wisely obeyed the Father instead of acting foolishly.

If 'foolishness' is doing the same thing, again and again, but expecting different results, then the Bible is the record of people acting wisely and foolishly, again and again.

Paul does not want the Corinthians Christians to 'buy in' to Corinthian wisdom. Names like, Plato, Socrates and Aristotle only remind us of how much the Greeks prized wisdom. See: https://www.worldhistory.org/Greek_Philosophy/

Philosophy = philo = love / sophia = wisdom (1 Cor 1:19 – “the wisdom of the wise”)

These two concepts: 'the word of the cross' or God's wisdom and Greek wisdom are dividing the Corinthian church.

Verse by verse –

17 – The 'word of the cross' has inherent power

What is 'the word of the cross?' – 2:2 – *“Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*

18 – Even though, it is foolishness to the perishing but power to those being saved

19 – God has intentionally done this to embarrass the world's wisdom

20 – It is incontestable (This is the point of the sermon)

21 – The world's 'wisdom' set up this contest

22 – Everybody wants God to do life 'their way'

23 – This is why a crucified Jesus is a stumbling block and foolishness ('it's not 'my' way)

24 – The 'word of the cross' nonetheless, possesses Christ's power and wisdom

25 – After all, (as you would only expect from a god), God's foolishness is smarter than us and his weakness is stronger than us

Note: But we never learn. We are still fighting the same old battle, to be God, to be good and right. For example, the new Marvel move, “Eternals,” really presents a Hindu worldview with better-known Greek gods in it but, from the Christian perspective, the Eternals are the angels, messengers of Arishem, their god, who rightly rebel against him to 'save' humanity from destruction. Hmmm. That makes the 'god' in the story, 'bad/stupid' and the rebelling angels, 'good/smart.,' which is exactly what Satan said in the Garden. The world keeps re-running the same old story, (We're good! We're right!) just with a new characters and in new story lines.

Let's look at God's wisdom in 'the word of the cross.'

There are two pivotal words, '*wisdom*' and '*foolishness*' represented in the phrases

- “The word of the cross” (18) = wisdom
- “The wisdom of the wise” (19 & 20d) = foolishness

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*
- Robert Frost in "The Road Not Taken"

The bottom line is that v 18 – *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*

'folly' = moronic – how can death save anyone?

'power' = *dunamis* (dynamite) -

How does Jesus's death save us? In other words, "Why did Jesus have to die?"

III – We traditionally think that the life of a person saves us. That's only smart. But...

1. An offense has been committed –

Genesis 2:17 - ...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

2. - Someone has to pay the penalty –

Ezekiel 18:20 - The soul who sins shall die.

QUES: Why can't God just forget about it all?

- Do you want a God who doesn't keep his word? – What about Romans 10:13?
- Do you want a God who is just like you? – Who then, would solve our dilemma?
PS – If God was like us, unholy, unholiness is unhealthy/destructive

3. - An infinite being has been offended

4. - This makes the offence (whether A&E's or ours) an infinite offense

Example: The directive, *Genesis 9:6 – Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*

Is based on the principle of proportionality.

Deuteronomy 21:25 - ...eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

If a person takes a life, the most that can be done to that person, is to take their life; a finite life for a finite life. But what if you have offended an infinite Person? Then an infinite penalty is required.

Psalm 14:1 – *The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'*

What this means is:

"Sin is the wishing that God was not"
- Stephen Charnock

5. - An infinite offense requires an infinite payment

- Hell must be eternal

6. - Only an infinite being can pay the infinite penalty

7. This is why only Jesus could, and only Jesus did, die for our sins.

- A human must die to pay the penalty for human sin.
- But a (finite) human can't pay an infinite penalty
- God is infinite. Could he? No, because eternity means
- God can't die
- So, neither a human alone, nor a God alone, can solve the problem.
- But – a God-human can both
 - Die to pay the infinite penalty and
 - Live to accept it
 - At the same time

This, is what Paul means when he says in verse 20 that the 'word of the cross' is incontestable, i.e., it all just makes the best sense: ***"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?"***

Conclusion:

Let's step back for a quick moment and see the big picture.

What are the first four steps in the Bible story?

- 1 – **Creation** shows us 'what,' 'how,' and 'why' anything exists.
- 2 – The **Fall** shows us 'what,' 'how,' and 'why' everything is in a mess.
- 3 – **Israel** shows us that humans can't fix it.
- 4 – **Jesus** did and does.

This is our memorization verse for the week: **18 - 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.**

Fundamentally, life is a contest between God's wisdom and human foolishness. But remember Paul's overarching theme: *The Hope of Holiness*. Holiness, i.e., a right relationship with God, is the key to everything else in life. In these verses, he's telling us that the only way to the holiness is through the cross.

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two ways were preached in the world, and I—
I believed the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*
- Robert Frost in "The Road Not Taken"

Community Groups:

- 1 – Read the text:
- 2 – What is 'the word of the cross?' (2:2)
- 3 – Think of the Ukrainian/Russian border right now. Our world seems power hungry. What 'power' in 'the word of the cross' have you experienced?
- 4 – The world seems to want Heaven any way but God's. Why does everybody want to have life their own way?
- 5 – Humans are extremely ingenious, working to 'create the best life now.' What 'foolishness' does the world employ to save itself.
- 6 – How does that model set us and the world up for confusion and misery?
- 7 – How do you see yourself wanting life your way and what mechanism have you employed?
- 8 – Church factions are a part of human history. How does worldly wisdom create factions and rob the cross of its power in the church today?
- 9 – People all around us say they would trust God "If only" he would show them a sign. How do these verses remind us that people who are waiting for a sign are simply rejecting God?
- 10 – What is *the* sign God has already provided? Perhaps John 2:19 will shed some light.
- 11 – We tend to think too much or too little of ourselves? We are proud or we despair. How does the cross answer both extremes?
- 12 – What does verse 24 say about our part in 'the word of the cross?'
- 13 – With whom are you or could you share the Gospel?