

The Crucified Christ: Foolishness or Wisdom? 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Theme: Although the proclamation of the crucified Christ is foolishness to those who are perishing, to those who are being saved it is wisdom and power from God.

1. To the perishing the cross is foolishness, verse 18

“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.”

To those who are perishing, the proclamation of the crucified Christ is indeed foolishness! They are perishing in the sense that

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they are on the road to hell. It is the same sense of perishing as used in John 3:16: “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life!” Perishing is the opposite of having eternal life. Perishing is being on the road to hell.

To such people, that is, to those who do not believe in Christ, the proclamation of the crucified Christ, specifically His death and resurrection to pay for the sins of the world, is foolishness. They simply cannot get a grasp on such a proclamation of the crucified Christ, because it must be received by the power of the Holy Spirit, whom they do not have--or a better way of saying it, who does not have them.

a. Those perishing seek what is "reasonable", v 22

Those who are perishing in their unbelief are seeking what is "reasonable" just as the Greeks of Jesus' day, verse 22 says, were seeking wisdom. But the crucified Christ is a very unreasonable idea for our sinful reason to contemplate.

i. The example of the first-century Greeks

In v. 22 St. Paul mentions the Greeks in their pursuit of wisdom. The Greeks of Jesus' day loved to philosophize about the nature of reality. They began with some assumptions and then speculated from those assumptions about the structure of the universe and the nature of reality. But they could get no two of their philosophical systems to agree with each other, because their starting beliefs were all different from each other.

ii. We moderns are not very different from the ancient

Greeks

We modern people are not very different from the ancient Greeks. The number and variety of philosophies and religions in this country today are numbing to the mind. Everyone is seeking for what is "reasonable."

A network TV owner once said that he simply cannot come to terms with Jesus dying for his sins. "Jesus is a great man, but why should He die for my sins? I never asked Him to. And, in fact, I don't want Him to!" To this intelligent but unbelieving man, the crucified Christ is simply "unreasonable," because he does not believe that he is a sinner in need of forgiveness. Our supposed reason is so clouded by sin that it is a very unstable and untrustworthy guide. Our reason is based on our belief system. Without a belief system centered in Jesus Christ, our reason can only lead us away from God, our reason can only consider the crucified Christ as foolishness. To those who are perishing, the crucified Christ is indeed foolishness.

b. Those perishing seek "powerful signs", v. 22

To those who are perishing the crucified Christ is also weakness. Can you think of any greater example of weakness than a man nailed to a cross as a common criminal? The world sees that as pure weakness! What the world seeks is power.

i. The example of the first-century Jews

This is no different from the Jews of Jesus' day. Verse 22 says that the Jews seek signs. Signs are powerful

miracles proving the truth of what one says. The Jews of Jesus' day frequently asked Jesus to perform these powerful miracles to prove that He was, in fact, sent from God.

ii. Our modern hunt for power

In our country today we also seek power. Even Christians seek power. That is why so many preachers, both on TV and off, emphasize miracles of healing. Now I don't deny for one second that God does today perform miraculous healing. But that's a side-show pointing to what is truly important. The center of our power as Christians is the proclamation of the crucified Christ, because it is only the crucified Christ who changes lives. It is only the image in our minds of Christ dying for us on the cross that convinces us, in the midst of all the suffering and misery in our lives and in the world that the almighty God does, in fact, love us. It is only the crucified Christ who gives us the certainty that our sins are forgiven, so that we can meet a sinless, perfect, holy God on Judgment Day with the unshakable confidence that He is our loving heavenly Father who has forgiven us through His only Son.

2. But to those who are being saved, the proclamation of the crucified Christ is:

So, to the world, to those who are perishing, who are on the road to hell, the proclamation of the crucified Christ is foolishness

and weakness, an offense to the dignity of mankind. BUT...to those who are being saved, the proclamation of the crucified Christ is God's wisdom and God's power. St. Paul writes this in very strong terms beginning at verse 23: "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles!" We who believe do not just preach Christ, but Christ crucified. For it is the crucified Christ who gives wisdom and power, according to verse 24: "to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God!" God calls people to faith only through the message of the crucified Christ. It is the crucified Christ who is the wisdom and power of God!

a. God's wisdom

The crucified Christ is the center-point of God's wisdom. Despite being foolishness to human reason, the crucified Christ is the immovable center-point upon which the nature of reality is fixed.

i. The crucified Christ establishes the reality of sin

For the crucified Christ establishes that sin is a reality, that every person is both sinful and sinning, that sin is so terrible that the only way of removing it, its guilt, its stain, its punishment, is to transfer it onto the sinless Son of God, by His death on the cross.

ii. The crucified Christ establishes the reality of forgiveness

Even more, the crucified Christ establishes the reality of forgiveness. This is the emphasis of the proclamation of the

crucified Christ. God does not want us to wallow in our guilt and sin under the shadow of the cross. That's not the point at all. The cross is a bright flashlight shining up to heaven into the face of God showing a smile on the heavenly Father's face and love in His eyes. God is not a stern, stone-faced Judge who points His accusing finger at us, but rather the heavenly Father, who loves us and smiles at us. For how can God not love each of us, since He so willingly crucified His only Son to save us from sin and from hell?

As we face death and a holy God, it is only the crucified Christ who convinces and comforts us with the forgiveness of sins. An old man, on his death-bed, had been a pastor for fifty years. His son, who was also a pastor, kneeled by his father's bed. "Father, you have preached for fifty years, and have done more good than any man I know." The old man with a feeble but distinct voice, said: "Don't tell me about that, son. Tell me about blood of Jesus. Nothing but the blood of Jesus will do for a dying man." It is only the crucified Christ who convinces us of the reality of forgiveness. As verse 30 says it, the crucified Christ has become for us who believe in Him our very wisdom from God. The cross makes us wise unto salvation in understanding the nature of sin and forgiveness.

b. God's power, verse 24

And not only is the crucified Christ God's wisdom, He is also God's power! The proclamation of the crucified Christ

crashes into our lives, convicts of sin before a holy God, converts us, forgives us and gives us power for holy living. It is a misunderstanding of the Christian proclamation to not think of it as power. Romans 1:16 defines the gospel, that is the proclamation of Christ, as power: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile!'

The proclamation of the crucified Christ is power for a specific purpose: salvation! For it is only the proclamation of the crucified Christ which brings us to faith in Jesus Christ. Potlucks, dinners, and all the other social activities we have around here have their place, but it is a secondary place--that of increasing friendships and bringing joy to life through those friendships. But it is only the proclamation of the crucified Christ which brings the Christian fellowship of believers, because only that proclamation convicts us of sin and creates and strengthens faith in our Savior.

And by the way, the proclamation of the crucified Christ ought not be done just by pastors. It has been and must continue to be done by all who believe in Christ.

So it is by this proclamation of the crucified Christ that He becomes for us who believe in Him, according to verse 30, our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption. God declares us righteous through faith in the crucified Christ. God declares us holy through faith in the crucified Christ. God redeems us from sin and hell through faith in the crucified Christ. So, the crucified Christ is, truly, the power of God!

Conclusion

The proclamation of the crucified Christ proves once and for all that God's foolishness is wiser than the wisdom of men and God's weakness is stronger than the strength of men. For that proclamation has changed the world and continues to change lives. We joyfully proclaim Christ crucified and rejoice in what God does through that proclamation of the crucified Christ! Amen!