

## I CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

GOD'S POWER IS ALL IMPORTANT  
TO THE REACTIONS OF PEOPLE  
TO THE CROSS



# CAN THE CROSS BE MADE PALATABLE? (1:18)

- God is to be honored, not man

- Isaiah 2:20–22

- We dare not think the ways of God can be honored by the wisdom of man

Worldly people view the cross as silly, insulting, or morbid (18a) - *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,*

- Unbelievers evaluate the “*word of the cross*” as offensive and ridiculous

- Persuasiveness is not the focus of Paul

- Paul’s focus is on trusting God and being honest with people about the gospel

- It is not that the “*word of the cross*” is unreasonable

- It is that the “*word of the cross*” is reasonable only to those whom God spiritually enlightens

- The word or message of the cross has supernatural power

- 2 Corinthians 4:6-7

## CAN THE CROSS BE MADE PALATABLE? (1:18)

Those being saved affirm God's power in the gospel (18b) - <sup>18</sup> *but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

- Those on the road to ruin and destruction (“*perishing*”) are contrasted with those whom God is actively saving (“*being saved*”)
- God's saving grace is the power of God on display for all those He saves
  - To the world the word of the cross is disgusting and obscene
  - For the people of God, the cross is their precious means of deliverance

# GOD'S GOSPEL WISDOM IS COUNTERINTUITIVE TO WORLDLY WISDOM (19-21)

Scripture predicts people will discredit the saving mercy of God (19) - <sup>19</sup> *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

- Paul quotes Isaiah revealing God's promise to graciously bless some while leaving others to the foolishness of their own wisdom
  - Isaiah 29:13–14
  - God exposes the foolishness of the wise and discerning people of the world through the cross
  - God did something *wonderful* to redeem His people, but the people of the world have no appreciation for God's redeeming grace
  - Wise and discerning people in the world are unresponsive to saving truth because God's judgment rests on their reasoning abilities
- The fact that God's people in Corinth want to come off to people in their society as credible and perceptive, contradicts God's purpose in and through the cross
- When we try to come off polished and persuasively pleasing, we, too, contradict God's purpose through the crucifixion of His Son
  - Because people are unresponsiveness does not mean we don't care and don't share
  - We must realize the only hope for them is life and enlightenment from God
  - The gospel exposes the foolishness of their wisdom and discernment

# GOD'S GOSPEL WISDOM IS COUNTERINTUITIVE TO WORLDLY WISDOM (19-21)

The world's greatest thinkers will not perceive the greatness of the gospel (20) - <sup>20</sup> *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?*

- “*wise man*” - someone educated and skilled in evaluating various worldviews
- “*scribe*” - a word used to describe a Jewish theologian who had a command of the teachings of Old Testament Scripture
- “*debater*” - gifted personalities and lecturers of the day – religious and secular
  - Masters of communication, argumentation and debate would not produce the truth of the cross
  - Matthew 11:25–26
- “*Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*” - Worldly wisdom is an arrogant and self-centered way of assessing life
  - Self-centered and prideful reasoning blinds all unregenerate people
  - The people of this world consider themselves to be thoughtful, but not before God
    - Romans 3:10–12

# GOD'S GOSPEL WISDOM IS COUNTERINTUITIVE TO WORLDLY WISDOM (19-21)

God delights to enlighten through preaching rather than exalting people's perception (21) - <sup>21</sup> *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.*

- God in His wisdom chose not to allow human wisdom to be the pathway to discovering God and salvation
- God takes great delight (*"it pleased God"*) in providing salvation for lost and undeserving sinners
- *"through the folly of what we preach"* – κήρυγμα (kērygma) – preaching, proclamation, message – the declaration and sharing of the truths of why Jesus was crucified
  - God takes great pleasure in leading men and women, boys and girls, away from themselves and their failing efforts to achieve righteousness
  - God allows them to see the performance of God's grace through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross



# WHAT PEOPLE DESIRE AND WHAT GOD DESIGNS ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS (1:22-25)

The message of the cross is not what people want (22) - <sup>22</sup> *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,*

- The Jews demand miraculous displays of power that make them feel powerful and the center of God's attention
- Greeks pursue personal success and superiority as the fruit of astute human reasoning
- Neither group sees themselves in a deficit position before God
- Each expects God or the gods to reward their efforts

# WHAT PEOPLE DESIRE AND WHAT GOD DESIGNS ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS (1:22-25)

The offense of the cross is what people get (23) - <sup>23</sup> *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,*

- Proclaiming “Christ crucified” is to Jews and Gentiles a contradiction of terms
- A crucified Messiah was a significant stumbling block to Jews
- Gentiles don’t appreciate the implications of a suffering Savior

The message of the cross becomes desirable to transformed people (24) - <sup>24</sup> *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

- The initiative of God in effectually calling people to Himself is presented as another reason for humility
- “*both Jews and Greeks*” – The gospel call is not limited to a specific ethnicity or group
- “*Christ the power of God*” – Jesus, the crucified Savior, performs all God demands
- “*the wisdom of God*” – God’s gift of mercy and grace takes the focus off man and puts it on God where it belongs



# WHAT PEOPLE DESIRE AND WHAT GOD DESIGNS ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS (1:22-25)

The value of the cross is rooted in God not in men (25) – <sup>25</sup> *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

- God doesn't have bad days!
- Some of what God chooses to put on display as wisdom and strength are not viewed as wise and strong from earthbound and man-centered perspectives
  - The cross – what the unregenerate world defines as scandalous – is far greater than any story of redemption man could conceive
  - The cross – what the unregenerate world defines as pathetic and disgusting – is a vivid display of God's redeeming might

(Hosea 1:10; 2:23; Romans 9:25-26)

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Can the cross be made palatable?
- Why does it please God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe?
- Are you living with confidence that God will change hearts so that enemies of God will value the wisdom and power of the cross?
- Will you preach Christ crucified?

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