

The foolishness of God: 1 Corinthians 1.18-25

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

In the rest of the Bible wisdom is a good thing.

But Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians is saying that foolishness is better. Or rather, he is saying that the foolishness of God triumphs over human wisdom. What does this mean?

The crucifixion is the foolishness of God. Why would God do such a foolish thing as to allow his Son to be crucified? Why would God lose?

That is the question that human wisdom asks of the claim that Jesus, the Son of God, gave himself up to be crucified. If you wind up crucified, you've lost, surely. Why would God lose like that? That's foolishness.

Of course, if you believe, then you know that the crucifixion is not a defeat; it is the final victory over sin and death. So, for believers, what appears to be foolishness is not foolishness. It is victory.

Paul points out that God uses the apparent weakness that Jesus displays on the cross to shame the strong. He uses the apparent foolishness of the crucifixion to shame the wise.

The strong and the wise are shamed. They think they have triumphed. They think they have shown themselves to have the power. They think they have worked out in their wisdom how to win. They humiliated and executed Christ. Only for the cross to be the moment of victory over their sin.

Paul says he preaches Christ crucified – he does not offer wisdom to compete with the wisdom of other men. What does that mean?

I think preaching Christ crucified means making yourself vulnerable. It means making yourself vulnerable to people who regard themselves as powerful and it means being mocked by those who think they are wise. Just as Jesus was mocked. Just as Jesus made himself vulnerable.

Making ourselves vulnerable means trusting others. It means placing yourself in their hands. It means advocating peace rather than seeking power that rests on violence and domination. It means trusting in God as Jesus was obedient to God on the cross.

And how should we preach Christ crucified? In his letter Paul makes the connection between the crucified Christ and the way he behaves towards the Corinthians and the way they should behave towards each other.

Preaching Christ crucified means we make ourselves vulnerable to each other when we preach. It means not hiding behind our learning or our oratorical skill. It means not seeking to win debates but rather to open our hearts and minds to each other in the way we speak.

And it means keeping it simple.

Christ crucified is not difficult to understand. It is easy to understand.

It is easy to understand that to follow a man who was the Son of God who allowed himself to be crucified on a cross will involve making yourself vulnerable.

It is easy to understand. But not always easy to accept.

That is why we retreat into human wisdom. We are seeking ways to evade the cross. We are seeking ways to cling onto what power we have.

Can we let go of power just a little today? Can we make ourselves just a little more vulnerable? Do we dare exchange our human wisdom for a dash of God's foolishness? Do we dare exchange our human strength for a portion of God's weakness?

*How great are your counsels to me, O God, how great is the sum of them!
If I count them, they are more in number than the sand,
And at the end, I am still in your presence.*

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