**“The Church in the World:**

**Studies in 1 Corinthians” No. 2**

**“Wisdom, Faith and Foolishness"**

 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5

--CEFC 3/15/20; 1/25/98

***Topics****: Christ and Culture; Gospel,*

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When the Apostle Paul entered the city of Corinth in AD 50,

 he quickly discovered that "wisdom" was the "in" word there.

This was nothing unusual for a Greek city--

 as early as the 5th century B.C. the Greek historian Herodotus had said that

 "All Greeks were zealous for every kind of wisdom" (*History*, 4.77).

And Paul had seen such excitement about this topic at his last stop in Athens, certainly--

 he had gone to the meeting place of the philosophers at the Areopagus,

 where, Luke says in Acts 17, that

 "**All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there**

**spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas**" (17:21).

They loved to look for wisdom, for "***sophia***"--

 that's what philosophers were--

 the word literally means "lovers of wisdom."

And by the time of Paul, there were those who made a living

 seeking to satisfy that popular passion.

 They were professional purveyors of ***sophia***--called Sophists.

The Sophists were traveling teachers who went from city to city giving paid lectures--

 speaking on the art of wisdom,

 how to get on in the world,

 and how to be successful.

They were especially noted for their rhetorical skills--

 entertaining large crowds and commanding substantial fees.

 Some Sophists enjoyed great success in telling others how to succeed,

 and the best of them amassed large fortunes.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Indeed, rhetoric itself was one of their main topics,

 for speaking well was one of the primary means of getting ahead

 in Greco-Roman society,

 and the Sophists took great pride in their ability

 to argue for any point of view irrespective of its truth—

 the very thing of which lawyers in our day are sometimes accused.

The ***form*** of speaking, in their view, was every bit as important as the content,

 and many were, as Disraeli once said of Gladstone,

 just "Sophisticated rhetoricians,

 inebriated with the exuberance of their verbosity."

But these Sophists set the standard of wisdom in much of the Mediterranean world,

 not least in the city of Corinth.

And the Corinthians who became Christians through the ministry of Paul

 had no doubt been strongly influenced by just this kind of thinking.

This seems to lie in the background of Paul's words to them

 in the passage we consider this morning.

Last week we saw that the church in Corinth was divided into little factions--

 with each group claiming allegiance to some particular Christian leader--

 whether it was Paul, or Apollos, or Peter, or even Christ himself.

Paul quickly dismisses such divisiveness as silly--

 "**Was Paul crucified for you?**" he asks (v.13).

 “**Were you baptized in my name?”**

But at the end of our passage from last week

 Paul moves to address a deeper issue--

 one that was, in Paul’s mind,

 the root cause of their thinking they way they did.

v.17--"**Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--**

 **not with words of [eloquent] human wisdom** [ejn sofiva/ lovgou]**,**

 **lest the cross be emptied of its power.**"

And it is this contrast--

 this contrast between the wisdom of the world

 and the wisdom of God found in the cross of Christ--

 that Paul now pursues in the verses that follow.

He wants to correct their understanding of wisdom--

 that word is found 16 times in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians

 and only 11 times in all the rest of Paul's New Testament letters.

It is quite likely that Paul is picking up on their language--

 in trying to correct their faulty view of what counts as a Christian.

They are glorying in the superficially impressive human wisdom of this age,

 and that has led them to glory in certain Christian leaders over others.

And in so doing they have missed the point of the gospel, Paul says--

 the gospel is not about human wisdom at all.

 At the heart of the Christian gospel, rightly understood,

 is a profound foolishness.

The gospel of Jesus Christ stands over against

 all human pretensions of wisdom, power and glory

 and comes to us in foolishness, weakness, and humiliation.

In Paul's view,

 to understand this stark and absolute contrast between words of human wisdom

 and God's message of the gospel

 was the most pressing need of the Corinthians--

 and it may well be our most pressing need as well.

Let's go then to our passage--1 Cor. 1:18-2:5--

In our passage this morning Paul points to three areas of Christian foolishness--

 The first is the foolishness of the Christian message—

 that is, the gospel itself, the *evangel*.

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1 Cor. 1:18-- **“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.**

 **For it is written (**here he is quoting Isa. 29:14):

 **"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;**

 **the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."**

 **Where is the wise man?**

 **Where is the scholar (**the scribe)?

 **Where is the philosopher of this age?**

 **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?**

**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.**

 **Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,**

 **but we preach Christ crucified:**

 **a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,**

 **but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks,**

 **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**” (1Cor. 1:18-23).

Have you ever had a conversation with someone about God,

 and they become defensive and demand that you *prove* to them that God exists.

What are they looking for when they say that?

Are they looking for some sort of philosophical or scientific proof that God exists?

 Some infallible syllogism, some repeatable experiment

 that will give an indubitable foundation for faith in God?

 Is that what they want?

That's absurd--

 for God is not a deduction from something else--

 he is the first axiom upon which all else is deduced.

 He is not a philosophical concept but a living Person.

 He is not one object among others existing ***in*** this universe--

 he is outside of this universe as its Creator and Author.

 We can no more prove God's existence

 than Sherlock Holmes can prove the existence of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

 or than Harry Potter can prove the existence of J. K. Rowling.

 It can't be done.

Or sometimes when they say that they want proof of God's existence to believe

 they want some sort of powerful sign--a great and incontestable miracle--

 that would do it--

 "If God just healed my mother,

 of if God just helped me win the lotto jackpot,

 then I'd believe."

But what kind of God would he be

 if he had to bow to our demands for such proofs?

 He wouldn't be a God;

 he would be the genie in Aladdin's lamp

 always at our beck and call.

"**Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom**"--

 healing miracles or philosophical proofs--they can get people's attention,

 but that's not where saving faith comes from, Paul says.

Saving faith comes only through the foolish message of a crucified Messiah--

 it comes through the message of the cross of Jesus Christ.

v. 23--“**we preach Christ crucified:**

 **a stumbling block [or a scandal] to Jews**

 **and foolishness to Gentiles**,”

Unfortunately, the force of that statement has been largely lost to us--

 we’ve lost sight of just what an offense the message of the cross was

 when the first Christians began to proclaim it.

We have so sentimentalized the cross.

 We have sanitized it and made it

 a piece of jewelry to wear around our necks.

I have nothing against shiny, silver crosses, mind you,

 just so long as we remember that the true cross--

 the cross of Christ--was a wooden cross,

 a cross with nails,

 a cross red with the blood of its victim.

 It was a place of agonizing pain,

 extreme humiliation,

 and a slow and painful death.

We forget that in the ancient world,

 the cross was a universal symbol of utter disgrace.

Crucifixion was described by Cicero as

 "a most cruel and disgusting punishment"--

 reserved for criminals convicted of murder, rebellion or armed robbery--

 provided of course, that they were slaves or foreigners,

 for no Roman citizen was ever crucified.

Crucifixion was not something you mentioned in polite company.

Again Cicero writes--

 "To bind a Roman citizen is a crime,

 to flog him is an abomination,

 to kill him almost an act of murder:

 to crucify him is--What?

 There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed."

The crowds *laughed* at the early Christians

 when they preached this message of *Christ crucified* as the Savior of the world.

The Christians were ridiculed--

 It was *utter foolishness* to think that God's Son

 could possibly die on a cross.

In fact, the first surviving depiction of the crucifixion of Christ is a *caricature*--

 It was a piece of graffiti from the second century,

 found on the wall of a house in Rome

 believed to have been a school for imperial pages.

The crude drawing pictures one man with arms outstretched in worship.

 Underneath are the words, "Alexamenos worships God"

 and this man is looking above him to another man nailed to a cross,

 whose head is that of a **donkey**.

That's how preposterous it was to think of worshipping

 one who had been crucified. /

And if to the Romans crucifixion was a disgrace,

 to the Jews it was a curse--

They made no distinction between crucifixion and hanging,

 between a cross and a tree--

 so they applied the words of the Old Testament Law to both:

 "**Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse--**" (Dt. 21:23)--

 literally damned by God.

This is what made Paul at first such a vicious opponent of the Christians—

 in his view, their message was nothing but blasphemy.

 To the Jews it was a scandalous idea--

 an insult to their national pride.

Christ crucified was an impossibility-

 -it was a self-contradiction--an oxymoron--

 like "fried ice."

"**But we preach Christ crucified:**" Paul writes,

 "**a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles**,”

The message of the cross is an inherently offensive message.

 Try as we might to be intellectually sophisticated and socially sensitive,

 there’s no getting around it.

 Paul says, “**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."**

But Why?

 Why did God do it this way?

 A crucified Messiah?

 Why not a glorious Messiah--

 a Messiah who reveals his power to all the world?

 How about a Messiah who reveals the secrets of science

 or who gives us the answer to the question of evil?

Why something so contrary to our expectations and standards

 of what a Messiah ought to be?

Why?

 Who would have believed that this

 was how God would save his people?

 Who would have ever thought it up?

 Who would have ever planned it this way?

No one--and that's the point--

 No one would have.

God says,

 **“'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;**

 **the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'**

Paul, commenting on this, says,

 **“Where is the wise man?**

 **Where is the scholar [the scribe]?**

 **Where is the philosopher of this age?**

 **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?**

 **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**" (vv.19-21).

Try as they might, our wise men, our scholars,

 our philosophers have never come,

 by their own ingenuity and efforts,

 to a knowledge of God.

 They could never devise this plan of salvation.

The foolishness of God's plan nullifies all human wisdom--

 it makes it worthless as a means of coming to know God.

The message of the cross says that you don't have to be smart to know God;

 you just have to be humble.

For God's purpose in offering to us a crucified Messiah,

 in all his weakness and foolishness,

 is to pull the rug of human pride right out from under us.

We have nothing to be proud of--

 not our power or our wisdom.

Have you understood that?

 You became a Christian not because you were so smart to figure this out,

 but because God has so opened your eyes

 to see that what appears to be foolishness

 is actually an expression of his wisdom.

 And if you are not a Christian here today

 this is what you must realize and accept--

For God in his wisdom chooses to save us through the foolishness of the cross.

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So first, Paul says, there is the foolishness of the Christian message—

 the gospel, the *evangel*.

But second, there is **the foolishness of the Christian church**--the *evangelized*.

v.26--

**"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called.**

 **Not many of you were wise by human standards;**

 **not many were influential;**

 **not many were of noble birth."**

"You Corinthians think very highly of the wisdom and power of this world,

 but let me just remind you of something--

 just look at yourselves.

Just look at whom God has called together

 to form his church there in Corinth.--

 not the rich, the powerful and the famous--

 not the best and the brightest--

 but just ordinary folks, most of you,

 and that is by God's design."

**"But God chose the foolish things of the world**

 **to shame the wise;**

**God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.**

 **He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--**

 **and the things that are not--**

 **to nullify the things that are,**

 **so that no one may boast before him"** (vv. 26-29).

Paul never tells us the reason why God chooses anyone to be the recipient of his grace,

 but he does tell us very clearly what *wasn't* the reason--

 it wasn't because of our excellent education or high IQ

 or exalted social position or large bank account.

 And if you look at the make-up of the church through history

 you might be led to believe that all those things

 can actually be a hindrance to coming to faith.

It doesn't disqualify you, certainly,

 as the wealthy Christian philanthropist Lady Huntington once said,

 "I was saved by an **'m'**.

 Paul did not say, 'Not any' but 'Not many of you were influential.'"

But the truth is, you don't have to have a Ph.D. in theology to become a Christian.

 A three-year old can come to know God's love

 just as easily as a venerated university professor--and maybe easier.

In fact, a homeless man on the street may be *more* likely

 to receive the gospel than a suburban banker.

A few years ago one *Washington Post* reporter

 described Evangelical Christians in America

 as "mostly poor, uneducated and easily led."

It caused an uproar at the time--everyone was offended by it.

 I was offended by it.

 But then I thought about what Paul says here--

 The church in Corinth was "mostly poor, uneducated and easily led."

And probably throughout history

 the followers of Jesus Christ have been "mostly poor, uneducated and easily led."

Does that kind of description bother you?--

 this foolishness of the church of Jesus Christ in the eyes of the world?

In the second century A.D.

 it was an offense that one fierce opponent of the church named Celsus

 latched on to--

 He writes sarcastically:

[The Christians'] injunctions are like this.

 "Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near.

 For these abilities are thought by us to be evils.

 But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated,

 anyone who is a child, let him come boldly."

By the fact that they themselves admit

 that these people are worthy of their God, Celsus writes,

 "they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish,

 dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and children."[[2]](#footnote-2)

In a sense, Paul concedes his point,

 and he wants to remind the Corinthians of much the same thing--

 God has brought together a bunch of nobodies by human standards--

 mere simpletons.

But why?

 Why has God chosen to compose the church in this way?

That's not the way we would do it--

 if you want to reach the world, you need to go after the movers and shakers,

 you need to reach the powerful, the wealthy, the influential--

 and then you can impact the masses.

 Doesn't that make sense as a strategy of evangelism?

Why then does Paul make such a point of the church's rather despicable makeup?

v.28--God **"chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--**

 **and the things that are not--**

 **to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."**

God in his wisdom has so designed his saving work

 that heaven will be a place devoid of human pride.

In heaven, no one will be able to point to anything of their own--

 whether it be their power, or wisdom or good works or good looks--

 they will be able point to nothing that got them there.

There will be nothing to boast about--

 nothing except the grace and mercy of God

 as displayed on the cross of Christ.

And that, you see, that's the real offense of the cross--

It destroys in one mighty act

 all self-sufficiency,

 all human independence and autonomy;

 all human pride.

 The cross shames our wisdom and our power--

 and it offers us the beauty and grace of God instead.

"**Christ has become for us wisdom from God—**

 **that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption,**” Paul says.

“**Therefore, as it is written:**

 **'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.**" (vv. 30,31).

If you want to boast--

 if you want something to trust in

 and feel good about

 and take pride in--

 Take pride in that which destroys all grounds for pride.

 Come boldly to the place of all humility.

**"May I never boast except in the cross**

 **of our Lord Jesus Christ**," Paul writes (Gal 6:14).

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The foolishness of the gospel—the *evangel*;

 the foolishness of the church—the *evangelized*.

And there's one more bit of Christian foolishness

 that Paul wants to remind these Corinthians of--

 it is **the foolishness of Christian preaching--the *evangelists.***

 2:1--"**When I came to you, brothers,**

 **I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom**

 **as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.**

 **For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you**

 **except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**

 **I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.**

 **My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words,**

 **but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.**

Paul almost certainly has the Sophists in mind here,

 as he contrasts his own message and his manner of presenting it

 with their impressive performances.

As for the message--

 it was not anything that anyone would call "wisdom" by the world's standard.

 He came simply to testify to that mysterious thing God had done in history,

 through his Son Jesus Christ.

As for his manner of speaking, it was nothing like the Sophists.

 The Sophists were known precisely for their sophisticated and persuasive style--

 they always came across as confident and self-assured,

 even arrogant in their presentations.

 It is written that the Sophist Polemon

 "used to talk to cities as a superior,

 to kings as not inferior,

 and to gods as an equal."[[3]](#footnote-3)

In contrast to them, what a poor impression Paul must have made--

 "**in weakness and fear, and with much trembling,** " he came to them.

 not the kind of speaker that would be invited to give a TED talk,

 you can be sure of that.

Paul is aware of his own reputation--

 in 2 Cor. 10:10 he writes that "**some say** [of him],

 **"His letters are weighty and forceful,**

 **but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing**."

Paul was unconcerned with eloquence or superior wisdom,

 he took no stock in wise and persuasive rhetoric.

﻿His preaching was not some competitive "performance"

 designed to elicit applause, approval, and status from audiences.[[4]](#footnote-4)

 Paul's single passion was the proclamation of the simple message

 of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

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But why?

 Why should Paul insist on doing ministry this way?

It seems like a very strange method, when you think about it.

 It was contrary to all the cultural conventions--

 surely nobody would respond to this poor preacher--

 not in Corinth, not when there were so many more accomplished orators around.

 His church growth consultants would surely have advised him

 to do it very differently--

 "Don't use preaching, Paul--at least not your kind of preaching, Paul.

 That's foolish--that's not effective.

 Celebrity testimonials--that's what you need.

 Multi-media presentations--that's what you need.

 Try friendly dialogue and discussion.

 How about some drama--or musical concerts--

 that's what will bring them in, Paul.

 Not this silly preaching stuff--it won't work."

But it ***did*** work--

 for his preaching was more than a human activity--

 its success couldn't be predicted by market surveys or focus groups.

 For Paul's preaching came with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

 When Paul testified to this foolish gospel,

 in all his fear and weakness and trembling,

 God was at work in power.

For some strange reason, people responded to the message.

 And they still do.

 I don't think anyone can say that Billy Graham

 was the most eloquent or persuasive of speakers.

 He had a strong voice and a winsome manner,

 but I know I've heard him and thought,

 "I could do that."

But what I could never do--in my own power--

 and what Billy Graham could never do in his own power--

 is bring new life into a human heart--

 or open blind eyes to the beauty of the gospel,

 or change lives from deep within.

Only God by his Spirit can do that--

 and throughout history he has used the foolishness of preaching,

 the foolishness of simple presentations of the truth of the gospel,

 to bring men and women, boys and girls

 to a saving faith in himself.

Why?

 Why has God done it this way?

Paul's answer is in v. 5--"**so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom,**

 **but on God's power."**

 No one who believed after listening to Paul

 would go away later and wonder if Paul had simply tricked them into believing.

 They wouldn't think they had simply been carried away by his eloquence

 and had been deceived by his fancy way with words.

 They wouldn’t go away saying, "What a great preacher Paul is,"

 no, they would "What a great God God is,

 and what wonderful Savior is Jesus Christ!"

It's like the story of the Scottish preacher with a great reputation,

 and one day after the service an elderly woman was asked as she left the church

 what she thought of the sermon--

 "Oh, it was a wonderful sermon;

 he is such an eloquent preacher."

 And what was the sermon about? she was asked.

 To which the woman replied,

 "Oh, far be it from me to try to understand anything said

 by that great man of God!"

This has always been a temptation of preachers--

 In the fourth century John Chrysostom (c. 344-407)

 complained about his fellow preachers who tried to emulate pagan oratory:

 "There are many preachers who make long sermons:

 if they are well applauded, they are as glad as if they had obtained a kingdom;

 if they bring the sermon to an end in silence,

 their despondency is worse, I may almost say, than hell.

 It is this that wins churches,

 that you do not seek to hear sermons that touch the heart,

 but sermons that will delight your ears with intonation

 and the structure of their phrases,

 just as if you were listening to singers and lute-players.

 And we preachers humor your fancies, instead of trying to crush them."[[5]](#footnote-5)

Paul was seeking to crush the fancies of the Corinthians here.

By their worldly standard, his preaching was foolish--

 he did not have the rhetorical flourishes,

 and the confident, oratorical manner that they so highly prized.

 But in that very foolishness lay the power of God himself.

His style of preaching matched the message that he preached--

 the foolish gospel of a crucified Messiah.

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A foolish message,

 a foolish church,

 and foolish preaching--

 all these stood over against Corinthian wisdom.

So how can we apply what Paul has said to our own situation?

His central message to us is simply this:

 we must come to understand all of life

 in light of what God has done in the cross of Christ.

 The cross, as foolish as it is by human standards,

 is the key to understanding not only the character of God

 but also the kind of life he calls us to live.

For the cross of Christ turns all the values of this world upside down.

All of our values, our methods, our goals,

 must be shaped by that weak and foolish death of our Savior.

And if in Corinth that meant reshaping the way they viewed wisdom,

 in our day it surely means reshaping the way we view *success*.

 For it is success that we worship--

 success in very outward and visible forms--

 social rank, material wealth,

 academic or athletic achievement, political power.

 Everybody loves a winner--even in the church.

But the cross is a symbol of failure--

 Jesus did not win over his generation in his calls to follow him.

 His teaching was rejected, his invitation was spurned,

 and his opponents did him in--in a most humiliating way.

 To the world, the cross is a symbol of failure.

And in conjunction with that,

 the call of the gospel

 is precisely a call to admit that you are a failure.

 Who was it that Jesus commended?

 Not the religiously righteous Pharisee,

 but the tax-gatherer who could not even lift his eyes up to God,

 who prayed, "**God, be merciful to me a sinner**"--

 a failure in the eyes of God.

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So how can we live in light of this gospel of failure

 in a society that worships success?

Do we repackage the gospel?--

 and reshape it to fit our culture?

 Do we represent it as something that is really slick and sophisticated?

 Do we market it as product that can help you get more out of life

 and can help you achieve your goals and find success in life?

Do we promote our Christian celebrities,

 and do we seek present ourselves in the church,

 as a people who have it all together,

 whose homes are always clean,

 whose kids are never naughty

 and whose faces are never without a smile?

Or do we say with Paul--

 the message of the cross of Christ is all about how God uses failure

 to achieve his glorious victory--

 and so we will admit our failure.

 We will confess our need of a Savior,

 as we pray, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Let's face it, we have nothing to boast about.

 Think of who we are—

 our church is not full of the brightest,

 most influential and powerful people around--

 no, we are ordinary, at best.

And this preacher is not the most persuasive orator around,

 who can sway great crowds with his silver tongue.

 No, he's just trying as best he can to testify to the truth of God's word.

We mustn't worship success and worldly power, even in its Christian forms,

 for that's not what the cross of Jesus Christ is all about.

In fact, we must embrace that failure of the cross as our very own—

 Have you done that?

 Will you continue to do that?

 For only in identifying with the failure of the cross

 can we share in God's ultimate victory,

 begun in the resurrection of Christ

 working itself out in our lives,

 until that final day of Christ's return in glory.

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Prayer

Lord, may our only boast

 be in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

 To him be glory, now and forever. Amen.

Closing Song: Mike Strand song??

 or #186 *The Old Rugged Cross* [vv. 1,2,4

*Closing prayer--*

**“The Church in the World:**

**Studies in 1 Corinthians” #2**

**March 15, 2020**

**"Wisdom, Faith, and Foolishness"**

 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5

 "Wisdom" was an "in" word in Corinth. It was a city enthralled with the rhetorical skills of traveling sages who displayed great powers of persuasive speech. Such "wis­dom" was highly valued, but in Paul's mind, it was pre­cisely that value that was contributing to the divisions in the church. In our passage this morning, Paul calls the Corinthian Christians to forsake this worldly wisdom, and instead to embrace the foolishness of the Cross.

**I. The Foolishness of the Christian Message** (1:18-25)

 (***The Evangel)***

***“we preach Christ crucified:***

 ***a stumbling block to Jews***

 ***and foolishness to Gentiles” (v. 23)***

**II. The Foolishness of the Christian Church** (1:26-31)

 (***The Evangelized)***

***“God chose the foolish things of the world***

 ***to shame the wise” (v. 27)***

**III. The Foolishness of Christian Preaching** (2:1-5)

 (***The Evangelists)***

***“My message and my preaching***

 ***were not with wise and persuasive words” (2:4)***

***"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."***

**--1 Cor. 1:18**

Sermon Response:

**"Wisdom, Faith, and Foolishness"**

**1 Cor. 1:18-2:5**

**•**What does our world hold up as "wise" and "powerful"? How can you become attracted to those values? How does Paul's message of the cross affect the way we view those things?

**•**Read vv. 26-29. Does it bother you to think that the church of Jesus Christ is not composed of "the brightest and best" of our society? What is Paul's point in reminding the Corinthians who they were?

**•**Read v. 29. Here is the ultimate purpose of God's foolish ways. What kind of boasting is Paul referring to here? Why is this so important to God? Why is this at the heart of our faith?

**•**As you read Paul's words in 2:1-5, consider how our presentation of the gospel can affect the way it is heard and understood. What did Paul seek to avoid? What are some things that we should be careful to avoid?

**•**In this passage Paul has tried to show that the "foolishness" of God in the gospel ought to rebuke us when we become enthralled with the world's wisdom. How can this apply to the problem of factions in the church which so troubled Paul (1:10-17)? How ought this perspective to help to unite us as a church?

1. See *Oxford Classical Dictionary.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 3.44. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Vit. Soph*. 1.25.4; cited in Carson, *Triumphalism*, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Anthony C. Thiselton. *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Kindle Locations 711-712). Kindle Edition [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hom. 30 on Act Apost. 3, cited in Carson, *Triumphalism*, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)