

The unfolding of your words gives light.

The Temple of God

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

¹⁸For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing^a, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God^a. ¹⁹For it is written,

^a 1:18 **For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.** Some Bible translations, instead of “word,” say *preaching* or *message*. The idea is the same, but the original word is *word*. You cannot separate Jesus—the living Word—from the message of the cross. The message of Jesus is the message of His death and the message of that cross is the message of Jesus. Separate them and you either have another moralistic religion or you have nothing but a gruesome story.

This is not a message about a cross. The definite article (*the* cross) points the Church to a definite message about the central event in God’s redemption of His people. Note all the places (19 times) where “the cross” is used in the apostolic Scriptures:

and saying, “ You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from **the cross**.” Matthew 27:40

He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from **the cross**, and we will believe in Him. Matthew 27:42

save Yourself, and come down from **the cross**! Mark 15:30

Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from **the cross**, so that we may see and believe!” Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him. Mark 15:32

When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him **the cross** to carry behind Jesus. Luke 23:26

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on **the cross**. It was written, “ JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” John 19:19

Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by **the cross** of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. John 19:25

Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on **the cross** on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. John 19:31

When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from **the cross** and laid Him in a tomb. Acts 13:29

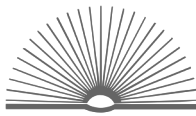
For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that **the cross** of Christ would not be made void. 1 Corinthians 1:17

For the word of **the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18

But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of **the cross** has been abolished. Galatians 5:11

Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for **the cross** of Christ. Galatians 6:12

But may it never be that I would boast, except in **the cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14



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**“I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE^b.”**

²⁰Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age^c? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world^d? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know* God^e, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the

and might reconcile them both in one body to God through **the cross**, by it having put to death the enmity. Ephesians 2:16

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of **the cross** of Christ, Philippians 3:18

having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to **the cross**. Colossians 2:14

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured **the cross**, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on **the cross**, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 1 Peter 2:24

The present/progressive “who are perishing” of the NASB accurately shows the condition of lost people. Men without Christ are not simply awaiting judgment. They are already judged and already displaying the signs of their ultimate demise apart from a work of God’s grace. So to them the message we preach and the Savior we love appear foolish.

^a 1:18 **but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.** It is the power of God. Now. This means that the gospel is for believers as well as unbelievers. The cross has everything to do with your standing before God and it has everything to do with the way you live in this world.

^b 1:19 **I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.** The quotation is taken from Isaiah 29:14. The Lord Jesus used this same chapter of Isaiah to warn the religious leaders that their religion was merely external:

And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’” Mark 7:6-7

The words translated “set aside” have also been translated “frustrate” or “thwart.” Being clever does not ease a guilty conscience nor does it provide freedom from spiritual bondage.

^c 1:20 **Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?** Why does Paul ask these three “location” questions? Based on Paul’s statement in verse 26, these questions call the congregation to look around among themselves and identify all the people who could be classed among the cultural elite.

More than this, however, Paul’s words appear to be like a victory chant. Just as Jesus asked the woman taken in adultery, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” (John 8:10), Paul points out that before the victorious gospel message the wise man now looks foolish, the scribe looks ignorant and the debater looks defeated.

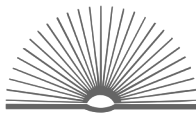
^d 1:20 **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** Consider the temptation to pride the serpent shot at Eve in the garden. He convinced her that she could have wisdom independent of God. Is today any different?

Romans addresses those who boast of wisdom apart from God:

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, Romans 1:21-22

^e 1:21 **For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God.** It was a wise plan of God to prohibit the world from knowing Him through its own wisdom. Had that been possible, all eternity would be filled with the praise of human ingenuity.

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians
Steven Svendsen, Sr.



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message preached to save those who believe^a. ²²For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³but we preach Christ crucified^b, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness^c, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God^d. ²⁵Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men^e.

^a 1:21 **God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.** In what is God “well-pleased”? Elsewhere you see the same word used:

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” Matthew 3:16-17

Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. Matthew 12:18

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” Matthew 17:5

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32

But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, Galatians 1:15-16

For it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I* say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:19-20

So God is pleased with His Son. He is pleased with His plan to send Him to the earth. He was pleased to reveal Jesus to His people and give them the kingdom.

Here we see that it pleased God to save people through a message that seemed foolish to the world’s wise men. Had he chosen to save men through human wisdom, humans could have taken part of the credit. That is not salvation but self-improvement.

^b 1:22 **For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified.** People of Hebrew descent craved verification of Mosaic proportions when the message of Christ came to them. Greeks were more impressed with clever arguments. The apostles were a disappointment because they warned of judgment and spoke of a violent execution.

^c 1:23 **to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.** The word “stumbling block” pictures something you cannot get past—even a snare or trap. The cross is tough to take for those who do not think they deserve what happened there. Its message was distasteful to Jews and Gentiles because it made Jesus and His followers appear weak and foolish.

^d 1:24 **but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** The new eyes of the new birth see by faith that the message is in fact powerful and wise. Christ is only precious to those who have understood their great need and have experienced redemption.

Who are “the called”? Romans 8:28 speaks of “the called”:

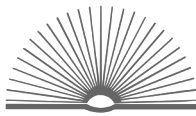
And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

Romans 10:14 explains the call:

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

Do you see? People believe when they hear Jesus. The word of the cross is wise and powerful because the powerful and wise Lord calls a specific group of people.

^e 1:25 **Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.** Does this mean that God is foolish and weak? The Mounce translation helps us to see what the text implies here:



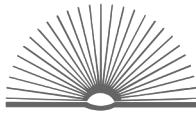
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For the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men, and the weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men.

The point is that man's assessment of wisdom and strength is very different from God's. Just as there are two kinds of faith (saving faith and the mental assent of demons), so there are two kinds of wisdom and strength.

^a 1:18-25 No one likes to look dumb. We have all known people who, because of willing ignorance, believe things so silly that we are embarrassed for them. Some Christians and Christian churches held extra-biblical doctrines to such a militant degree that it is hard to admit they are on our team. But on the other hand some of the things Christians must believe make us look silly to most of the world.

Do you believe in the inerrancy of the whole Bible? Do you believe God created everything out of nothing in six days and all very good? Do you believe in a real Adam and Eve, a real devil and a real exodus from Egypt? Do you believe that eternal punishment in the lake of fire awaits those who do not turn from sin to Jesus Christ? You look dumb to some of the brightest people in the world.



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The cross itself is distasteful to the world. Why? Those who do know God cannot understand why sin is evil enough to warrant His wrath. The cross itself is a very violent and disgusting manner of execution.

Are you afraid of looking uneducated or backward? You already do in the eyes of some of the most intelligent people in the world today. But do not despair and do not be ashamed of the gospel. Even if you could look smart and powerful, your identity would still not be found there. After Jesus' disciples had put on a powerful display of signs and wonders, He reminded them where their joy ought to lie:

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven. Luke 10:19-20

If you are being saved, here is the proper evidence:

1. You are a living example of God's power. This is not about seeking to perform signs and wonders but displaying evidence that you have been raised from the dead.
2. You are a believer. That is not a title but a description. Being saved from sin brings you to believe God even at risk of looking foolish to the world.
3. You are a preacher. The burden for explaining the central message of the Christian faith falls on those who have believed it.
4. You are a contented "fool." Fear of man must not keep you from standing for truth the world finds distasteful.