

WHAT FOOLISHNESS!

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Strange Story

The message that God has saved the world through the death of His Son on a cross is a strange story, in at least two ways.

The story itself is strange because it depicts God as weak — first, in giving Himself to men as a man, and second, in that He was taken advantage of and injured by men apparently cleverer than Himself.

And the story is a strange way for God to achieve His ends. Preaching a strange message like this one seems an odd way for God to save mankind, if that is what He really wants to do. Again, He works from a position of weakness — depending on men (and not particularly stellar men) to deliver His message, and depending on the hearers to trust the message and act upon it.

In every other culture of the world, the equivalent of salvation is achieved by God's superior demonstration of power or by man's extraordinary wisdom. In some systems the two work in tandem, God angrily or disdainfully destroying those who do not possess or develop extraordinary wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1:18 *The message of the cross is foolish.*

Of course, it is not really foolish, but it appears as such to some.

1 Corinthians 1:18 *The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. ¹⁹ As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."*

Of course, God did not say that He would destroy the wise or the intelligent, but that He would overthrow their wisdom (so-called) and intelligence, revealing them as shallow, if not hollow. Who are those who are "headed for destruction"?

Worldly Wise

Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:14 to show that it is many of those in the world who count themselves wise and intelligent *and lean upon their wisdom and intelligence to bring them to God*. By wisdom and intelligence *no one* can find God.

Such people are not punished because they are wise or intelligent, but because they made wisdom and intelligence their idols (admiring and leaning upon them in place of God).

1 Corinthians 1:20 *So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.*

To the worldly-wise, God's way of salvation seems foolish. From God's perspective (and that of those who see the world His way), the world's so-called wisdom seems foolish.

God had a wise plan, and it is this: He cannot be discovered by means of human wisdom. Instead, He plans to render all human wisdom useless (for spiritual purposes).

God cannot be discovered by means of human wisdom, human intelligence, or any human effort or contrivance. God will evade all such efforts. Thus, many have concluded that if God exists, He is hiding Himself.

But God is not hiding; He has revealed Himself. But not indiscriminately and not universally. In His own wisdom, He has chosen to reveal Himself through the preaching of the message about Jesus Christ. This is His wise plan: to use preaching as the means of discovering Him. This seems foolish to many.

Two Kinds of People

1 Corinthians 1:21 Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him [by means of] human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching [it seems foolish] to save those who believe.²² It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for [miraculous] signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.²³ So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

Biblically, there are just two kinds of people in the world: Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles).

Of all the tribes on the face of the earth, God invited the Hebrew (Jewish) nation into a special relationship, saying that He would be their God and they would be His people. He made Himself known (proved His existence and dominion) by sending His Word to them and working miracles among them.

God intended to reach the non-Jews *through the Jews* as His chosen witnesses. Instead, the Jews became conceited by their knowledge of God and prejudiced against those who lacked their special relationship. They regarded all non-Jews as third-class citizens, who could only hope to attain to second-class status, if they converted to Judaism.

Since God worked His special miracles only on behalf of the Jewish people, the non-Jews attempted to discover God by pursuits of wisdom, or else they dismissed the Jewish God as irrelevant.

So it was said that Jews looked for miracles to prove God's existence and presence; non-Jews looked for God to be revealed through constructions of wisdom (philosophy, teachings).

Preaching the message of Christ (that God became one of us, lived a sinless life, died for our sins, rose from the dead, and returned to Heaven) confounds the non-Jews (where is the wisdom in that?), and it offends the Jews (where is the powerful God in that?).

We may take away the cultural labels, yet, in terms of spirituality, there will still be but two kinds of people: those who demand God proves Himself by miracles, and those who seek Him through wisdom. These two proliferate our wider community today.

God Chooses

1 Corinthians 1:24 But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's [apparent] weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

There is sovereignty in God's election; He chooses to save whom He wants.

Romans 9:15 For God said to Moses, "I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose."

And God has explicitly revealed that He wants *no one* to perish!

2 Peter 3:9 He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

What's more, He has specifically chosen to save all those who entrust themselves to His Son, Jesus.

John 3:16 For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Paul further explained this with an analogy of grafting branches into an olive tree. That cultivated olive tree was God's chosen people, Israel, and the wild branches which were grafted in were the non-Jews who believed in Jesus.

Romans 11:17 But some of these branches from Abraham's tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree. ¹⁸ But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

¹⁹ "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me." ²⁰ Yes, but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn't believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. ²¹ For if God did not spare the original branches, he won't* spare you either.

²² Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree. ²⁴ You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.

Ordinary Choice

1 Corinthians 1:26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. ²⁷ Instead, God chose [people] the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose [people] that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. ²⁸ God chose [people] despised by the world, [people] counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. ²⁹ As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

Wise, powerful, or wealthy — that's what looks good in the world's eyes.

Israel chose their first king in this way. They liked Saul because he stood head and shoulders taller than other Israelites (he looked the part!).

Then, Prophet Samuel sought the one whom God had called to be the king over Israel after Saul. He narrowed it down to the household of Jesse, who had seven sons. Samuel liked the handsome ones, but God chose the "runt" of the litter, David — the youngest, a sheep-herder.

1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height... The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

In 1 Corinthians 1:27-28, “things” are really people — people who are considered foolish, powerless, despised, and nobodies — whom God would use to turn the world upside down (to controvert the world’s values and estimations).

Paul said, “No one can boast in God’s presence,” because no one gets there by their brilliance, power, or wealth.

When Jesus began to reveal to His disciples God’s plan (salvation through the cross), Peter thought it sounded foolish; he still had no idea how God worked!

Matthew 16:23 Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. ²⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

Does it sound like foolishness to you? Then you, too, are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s. For God’s way links you (dependently) to Jesus Christ (without Him you can do nothing).

United with Christ

1 Corinthians 1:30 God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

³¹ Therefore, as the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord.”

Christ Himself is our wisdom; union with Christ makes us wise. Christ Himself is our righteousness; union with Christ makes us right with God. Christ Himself is our sanctification; union with Christ makes us holy. Christ Himself is our liberation; union with Christ makes us free from slavery to sin.

Therefore, we should only boast *about Him* and *what He has done!*

For the cross was effective to blot out our sins and the message about the cross was effective to save us. Simply because we believed it and acted upon it — repenting toward God and trusting in Jesus, His Son.

Therefore, let everything that has breath *praise the Lord!*