

**THE KEY TO WISDOM IS FOOLISHNESS****1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5**

**INTRO:** I'm a slow learner and it often shows up in what, how, and when I learn new stuff about my vehicles. I bought my 1990 Chevy Silverado in 1993. Over a year later my family and I were visiting my cousin and his family in Arkansas. We were looking at the engine compartment of the truck at one point and my cousin asked "What's this?" and reached down along the inside of the wheel well and pulled out a retractable light on a cord that allowed the user to have light anywhere on the truck it was needed. We had travelled from Colorado where we had camped out in Rocky Mountain National Park and knowing about that light would have been a big help!

My friend Bill Schaefer has a Ford Fusion that is one year newer than the one Kathy and I own. Bill moved away from Ashland in late 2014 and sometime right before he left I was with him in his Fusion and I commented on the good music he had playing. I asked him what it was and he reached inside the console compartment between us and pulled out a flash drive of music he had downloaded. I no longer was interested in the music as much as I was jealous of the fact that his car had a USB port that would take a flash drive. That was when he told me my car had it too. I didn't believe him. I was sure it was only on a 2011 or newer Ford and certainly not my 2010. But when I got home and checked out our car, Voilà! There it was! Along with a plug-in to receive a cord to attach an Ipod or Cell phone to the stereo system. We had the car for at least four years by then! I'm a slow learner!

But what really takes the cake happened just a few weeks ago. Evan, Fiona, and I were installing our new truck tent on my pickup. I wanted to make sure I knew how it assembled. Once we figured it out and had the tent in place, we then placed the air mattress made specifically for our truck bed in the tent and I put Fiona in the tent to test it all out. It being early evening, Fiona thought it was a little dark in the tent so she began looking for the light switch in my truck bed. I laughed, "Ha! A light switch?! How funny! There isn't any light switch!" And then the lights in the truck bed went on. Because Fiona had found the light switch for them! I'd owned the truck for 18 months at that point! A three year old is much smarter than this 63 year old. I'm a slow learner. All these situations are examples of times when I've felt pretty foolish and for good reason. It was silly that it took so long to figure these simple things out. Our text for today shows how, from its very beginning, the way of Christ has been seen as foolish. But instead of taking offence at the thinking of those who put Christianity down, Paul showed how the key to wisdom is actually foolishness. Let me read it to you and then we'll look at it.

**(Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5)**

Last week we talked about divisions in the church. Our text today has Paul continuing in that vein by saying, essentially, "Forget about factions, the church needs to be about Christ and Christ crucified. While we are arguing among ourselves about who was the best teacher, the world is looking at us and laughing – all the while, they were lost as ever."

Barclay points out that Paul "*cites the undeniable fact that for all its wisdom the world had never found God and was still blindly and gropingly seeking him. That very search was designed by God to show men their own helplessness and so to prepare the way for the acceptance of him who is the one true way.*"

We live in such a world and COVID-19 is revealing it. Humanity was so sure of itself and prancing along, so sure of itself, and along comes a virus has turned them inside out. They can't deal with it. They can't control it. They can't stop it. The solution then, was to just stop and cower in fear. Mankind finally hit a wall. Such is the problem with humanism – the more you think you are the measure of all things, the harder the impact is when you run headlong into the truth that we don't have all the answers. The funny thing is, it still doesn't make us look to the endless power of God.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (v 18a). That's still true. It's still true and so let's look at where Paul was coming from. In 2020, we have little concept of...

**The huge scandal of the Cross**

- Paul's thought that salvation does not come through wisdom but through the foolishness of the event of the Cross was mindboggling. In 50 AD, The fact that the Savior of the world had died on a cross was inconceivable. Gordon Fee writes, "*To the Jews and the Greeks, Christ crucified was as incongruous as fried ice.*"

- To the Jews the message of the Cross was a stumbling-block for two reasons.
  - Jewish law said “*anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse.*” Deuteronomy 21:23b. That alone told any self-respecting Jews that Jesus could not be the Messiah. Barclay writes, “*The Cross to the Jew was and is an insuperable barrier to belief in Jesus.*”
  - People claiming to be Messiah were a dime a dozen during this time so Jews looked for signs that the Messiah had come – they wanted to be sure. Jesus had produced adequate signs, but the Jews still wrote him off – because he had died on a cross. They didn’t trust God enough to accept Jesus on faith – they dismissed him out of hand.
- To the Greeks the message was foolishness and again there were two reason – and they were more cerebral about it.
  - The Greeks could not believe in a God who experienced emotion. Just look at the gods the Greeks revered and you see beings that caused suffering For that reason, to them, a suffering god was a contradiction in terms. Also, their gods didn’t give a rip about humanity. A god who cares and loves was out of their realm of reasoning.
  - Greeks fancied themselves thinkers and sought wisdom. The cross took no wisdom. To the Greeks it was brainless. Thus it was foolishness. Roman writer Tacitus described Christianity as a “*pernicious superstition*” and “*utter foolishness.*” And Pliny the Younger, writing at about the same time said Christianity was “*a perverse, extravagant superstition.*” People still think like this. We should not be surprised, and we can show them otherwise. Discrimination and hatred are huge buzzwords these days and slung about with the destructive force of a Louisville Slugger, but if you just spend a little time reading the descriptions of Christians by the writers of the day you would blush. Christians were lower than slime.
- Paul assures the Corinthians there is glory in the shame. Today, the Cross is a symbol of the Prince of Peace, and of mercy and sacrifice. But in 52 AD it was shame and the lowest of the low. In Gordon Fee’s says, it was “*the depth of folly and scandal.*” No human could dream up such a plan and foolish or not...

### **Faith is what is needed to survive**

- Gordon Fee writes “*The cross is foolishness to the perishing, but by means of it God himself has rendered as fools the world’s wisdom.*”
- But Christ is wisdom. As we follow him we see and hear the truth.
- Christ is also righteousness. As in all his teaching, in Paul’s mind righteousness always means a right relationship with God. I’ll say a bit more about this in a bit.
- Christ is also consecration. As Jesus lives in us we can be what we ought to be.
- Most of all, Jesus is our deliverance. There is nothing like a worldwide pandemic to show the utter hopelessness of people without Jesus. Barclay writes, “*Jesus Christ can deliver a man from past sin, from present helplessness, and from future fear.*”
- Finally, we see, through the false accusation of foolishness...

### **True righteousness comes from a broken heart and not brains**

- In the first verses of chapter two Paul talks about his message when he came to Corinth. He had come from Athens, which you read about in Acts 17. He had taken on the philosophers and debaters on Mars Hill. They had been a tough crowd and Paul realized that it’s almost impossible to argue a person into faith.
- That is why he took a different tack. He came with a simple message. Barclay puts words in Paul’s mouth and says Paul’s proclamation was “*Never again! From henceforth I will tell the story of Jesus in utter simplicity. I will never again try to wrap it up in human categories. I will know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him upon his Cross.*” Only Jesus can repair a broken heart.
- Paul also knew the deadly necessity of his message. He didn’t care that it was seen as foolishness – people were perishing without it and that’s why we was not ashamed of the Good News.
- And people came to Christ through Paul’s simple message. He preached and people from all walks of life were converted. There were rich rulers and common slaves and they accepted the same Savior. Going back to chapter one and verses 26 to the end, he reminds the Corinthians of where they have come from. They

may not have been wise or influential or rich, but Jesus changed them. The same Jesus living in hearts of people from all walks of life. He's an equal opportunity Savior.

**Conclusion:** I need to wrap up. Jesus turned the world upside down by turning an unthinkable end on a shameful Cross into the only wise choice for life because it brings life eternal. In the eyes of the world, it's crazy. The key to wisdom truly is foolishness.

A quick aside as I finish up. It's a word in the form of an extensive quote that really convicted me as your pastor and as the one who most often brings the word of God to you. I want to read it to you and make a pledge as your pastor to effectively and faithfully bring you the word of God as he speaks through me. Here it is:

Referring to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Gordon Fee writes, *"This paragraph has had an interesting history of application in the church, depending on where the emphasis has been placed. Some emphasize what Paul did not do, that is preach with excellence of word and wisdom, and glory in a more rough-hewn presentation (which, interestingly enough, is often accompanied by a kind of bombast that seems intent on persuasion of a rhetorical kind, despite protests to the contrary). Others wish to emphasize the "positive", the "proofs" of the Spirit's power, which they see as in contrast to mere preaching. On the other hand, the polished oratory sometimes heard in American pulpits, where the sermon itself seems to be the goal of what is said, makes one wonder whether the text has been heard at all. Paul's own point needs a fresh hearing. What he is rejecting is not preaching, not even persuasive preaching; rather, it is the real danger in all preaching—self-reliance. The danger always lies in letting the form and content get in the way of what should be the single concern: the gospel proclaimed through human weakness but accompanied by the powerful work of the Spirit so that lives are changed through divine-human encounter. This is hard to teach in a course in homiletics, but it still stands as the true need in genuinely Christian preaching."* End quote

As I read that, I realized again, the tremendous responsibility of being a minister of the Gospel who is to bring the word of God to his people – and make sure it is, indeed, God's word, and not my own agenda. I want to avoid self-reliance and truly seek the Spirit as I speak and lead. Amen.