

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians *Unity out of Division*

The Foolishness of Preaching the Gospel Pt. 1

1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 07.10-11.10

1 Corinthians, chapter 1 – that's where I want you to turn. If you don't have your bibles there should be one somewhere in arms reach. 1 Corinthians, chapter 1. We're back in that study. We're going to be looking at verses 18 all the way through to chapter 2, verse 5. That's the segment that we're going to be studying. We're not going to get there today. We're going to be lucky if we get to about verse 25 of chapter 1. I've titled the message The Foolishness of Preaching the Gospel. Now, that might sound like an oxymoron but what we're going to find is that Paul really deals with our life philosophy and what is it. He sets the course for us to begin thinking diligently about what is it that guides our life and his thesis statement is baseline. His foundation is found in verse 18. Look what he says.

He says, for the word of the cross, which is also the Word of God, the word of the cross is folly or foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved is what? What does it say? It's the power of God. Now you need to remember that Paul doesn't just launch off into some new thought. This is a carry over from the previous section. Remember we've talked an awful lot about context. You need to understand the scripture in context. You just don't pick out a particular verse and claim that. You have to understand it in context. Remember what the context is. He had calling the Corinthians from the very beginning of the book saints. That's verse 2. By the time we get to verse 10 we realize that they haven't been acting like saints. There are all kinds of problems at the Corinthian church. For one thing, there's all this quarreling and bickering and division and Paul was essentially writing this letter to end those disagreements and to restore peace. But how does he do that? How does he do that? Where does he start? He starts in verse 18 with this core concept. He's going to start by helping them understand what is the wisdom of God and why it is important.

Remember, when Paul came to Corinth he made a commitment to preach Christ alone. Now why is that important for us and how is that linked to the issue of divisions and quarrels in the church. Why is that such an important point for us to understand that he made this commitment to preach Christ alone? You have to remember the culture that he was writing into. We're talking about a culture that valued human wisdom. That valued human philosophy. We're talking about the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire is known for its philosophers and its philosophies. In fact, some experts say that there were fifty identifiable philosophies floating around the Roman Empire with just as many philosophers. Paul comes to Corinth and basically says I don't want you to consider me as just another philosopher. I'm not just espousing just another philosophy to put in your bag of philosophies. This is THE philosophy. This is the absolute standard for truth. Now that's exactly what was lacking in the Roman Empire. That's what was lacking in Corinth.

Actually, that's what is kind of lacking today, isn't it? And absolute standard for truth because what happens when you don't have an absolute standard for truth? Everything is permissible, right? Paul enters into the Corinth community and says I'm not just a

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philosopher. I'm not just wielding another philosophy. I'm giving you the very wisdom of God.

Remember what he said in, not just in the church of Corinth but over in Colossians chapter 2? You don't have to turn there but he says, see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy, by empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ. This was the same issue that Paul had been dealing with time and time again – peoples world view. Now, that's what I want you to think of when you hear the word philosophy because when you hear the word philosophy you might already start to drone, you know, I'm not into philosophy. It's some aereodite, kind of some thinking for the ivory tower universities. That's not real life? Do you know what philosophy is? Philosophy is real life. It's how you make your life work in today's culture. You might not realize this but we as Americans, we're very much into philosophy. We're probably a lot more like the Roman Empire than we would like to admit. We're looking and we're scouring the land to find someone who has a life philosophy that makes sense, that makes our lives work.

One of the things about being off for several weeks and not having a lot of mobility, not being able to do much I was stuck watching a lot television. I don't normally like to watch television but there wasn't much else to do. I was shocked, I was surprised at the proliferation of talk shows that are on. Now, I've known of one or two of them. I didn't know that there were twenty or thirty of them. Everybody has an opinion. A talk show twenty years ago used to be just someone who would interview a celebrity and that would be about it. Now talk shows have morphed into these specialists, these self-help gurus who are telling us how to live our lives. And everybody has an opinion. Do you know what that is? That's a philosophy.

After I got tired of that I was searching around the television. Isn't it amazing that as many channels as we have, our cable providers provide for us that there is still nothing on. I mean, nothing. I looked all over and finally I find myself watching PBS. That's pretty bad when you're watching Public Television. And I was shocked there after about a week of how many philosophers were on Public Television. Andrew Weil, I saw him in one of his courses. I don't know if you know of him. He's kind of a mystical kind of guy. He wrote *Spontaneous Healing*, some of the other things that have to do with mysticism. He's one of those gurus. Also saw an episode with Eckhart Tolle. I don't know if you know about him. He wrote a book called *New Direction*. Big thing going around. He's like a pseudo psychologist. He's trying to teach people how to create their own environment, their own reality. He says you have the power to do that. You can speak that into reality. I watch Daniel Amen, he ought to be put into that group, *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*. All of these are philosophers and if we're not careful, if we're not discerning with what we bring into our minds we can begin to accept these philosophies.

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Paul is writing to say there is one central philosophy. I want you to understand. He is confronting this mass of human, philosophical ideas. I don't know if you caught it but he actually starts this conversation back in verse 17. Look at it. It's where we stopped last time. He said, remember, Christ did not send me to baptize but to what? Preach the Gospel. Not with words of elegant wisdom. That can be, by the way, cleverness of words or wisdom words. He says, Christ didn't send me to be a philosopher less the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. He came with something that was unique. The problem is, verse 18, the world sees it as folly or foolishness. The Greek word there is *mōria mōria* where we get the word moronic or absurdity or nonsensical. That's what the world thinks of our philosophy.

If you think about it, look into it you can somewhat understand what they're thinking. Look, for example to the crucifixion, the cross. Here the cross looks and appears as if the greatest form of defeat and weakness, yet, God turns that around and says no. This is the very point of your faith. Or look at the resurrection. We say the resurrection demonstrates Jesus is who He says He is. Others look into it and say that's absurd. Nobody has ever come back from the dead. By the way, that's not something new. That's not a new issue that we as believers have to deal with. Remember where Paul was when he got to Corinth? Remember the second missionary journey. He's moving around Asia Minor. Where is he right before he gets to Corinth? He's in Athens and he's at the Areopogus where all the philosophers are hanging out. And there they are and he goes and he begins to tell them about the wisdom of God and when he gets to the point, Acts 17, verse 32. When he gets to the point where he's talking about the resurrection, what do they say? It says that when they heard of the resurrection, some sneered or some mocked him. See, we're being mocked because we embrace the resurrection. That's something that's been going on for eons. That's something that Paul, himself was dealing with. It's foolishness to them who are what? Perishing. That's a present participle by the way. It means an action in the process of continually occurring. So, here's what it says. This is basically a description of someone in the process of continually rejecting Christ. So to those who were rejecting Christ our life philosophy is foolishness, but he goes on end of verse 18. But to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Paul's philosophy is that if you want to understand true wisdom, true power you understand the wisdom of God. In fact, wisdom is the key of this whole passage. He uses that word eight times in about seven verses. So, clearly he's trying to communicate that wisdom is his topic and it's the wisdom of God that we ought to move in on.

Now, what does Paul do with them? Paul, listen, he's going to show us why God's wisdom is superior to man's wisdom. He is going to demonstrate to us why we can trust God's wisdom. We're going to see four aspects of why we can trust God's wisdom and it helps us understand our place when we come to submitting our lives to this life philosophy. So let's get into it.

First thing we'll see in verse 19 – Gods wisdom is superior to human wisdom or human intellect. Listen to what I'm saying. God's wisdom is superior to our wisdom. So, what

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should we do? We ought to pay attention to God's wisdom. This is where Paul takes us in verse 19. He says, for it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Now, when we look at that you're thinking this verse doesn't make any sense. It doesn't even work in context. What is Paul saying here? Actually, what is going on is Paul is quoting an Old Testament prophet by the name of Isaiah. He is quoting Isaiah 29:14. Isaiah, listen to me, he wrote during the time that was very tumultuous for the nation of Israel. Isaiah wrote these words because of what was going on with one specific occasion that has to do with the choice between following God or following human wisdom. So turn in your bibles to 2 Kings 19. I'll tell you the story while you're turning there. 2 Kings 19, around verses 14 and 15. Here's the story.

Judah was in all kinds of problems. Hezekiah was the king and he was a righteous king. He followed after God, but he reigned during the time when Assyria was the super power and the King of Assyria was a man named Sennacherib. Sennacherib was basically going around the area and gobbling up these little countries and carting the people up as slaves, as prisoners. Who's in his line of sight but Judah and so here's Sennacherib brings his commanders, his armies, he's encircling them with hundreds of thousands of men around Judah that is now fortified with these walls and the entire army of Judah is on the inside. The entire army of Assyria is on the outside. It really looks bad because there is no way that Judah has the military might to overcome Assyria and so Sennacherib tells his commanders to start taunting the Israelites and they do. They're down below the walls and they're saying if you don't open up the doors of the kingdom and let us cart you off peacefully in slavery you have no idea what we're willing to do to you. We're willing to set up a siege wall around you and we're going to stay here for years until you run out of water and you run out of food. The text literally says until you are eating your own feces and drinking your own urine. Now, imagine that. Here is, you know that they are stronger than you and they're saying we're willing to do this to you if you don't give up. Inside, Hezekiah and the wise men have to make a choice. The wise men are all nipping in his ear and saying you need to surrender. That's the logical thing to do. That's the intellectual thing to do. We're not going to survive this.

Isaiah comes to Hezekiah the king and says that's not what God is saying to do. God says I'm going to thwart these people. I'm going to thwart what you think is discernment and wisdom. Don't listen to it. Stay faithful. God will care for you. Now that's the choice that he had to make. Now, we see that as a big choice but move this down into the real world. We all have choices that we have to make when we follow after Christ. Sometimes the choices don't make any sense whatsoever and the world or our advisors or our own self, we're saying that's just not, I'm not going to do that. That just doesn't make sense. I want to be happy. That doesn't look like the road to happiness. That doesn't look like the road of prosperity. That doesn't look right and yet God's Word is over here saying no, follow this, follow this path. This is what is right. We have to make choices.

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Hezekiah had to make a choice. What would he do? Well, to make his choice he does something wise. He goes to God in prayer. This is a great prayer. Do you want to see a man's heart? Listen to him pray. But he teaches us, Hezekiah teaches us how to pray. About verse 15 or so he says, Oh Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God. Stop right there. Great way to start your prayers. God, you're God. I'm not. I'm willing to listen to you. That's what Hezekiah is saying. God, you're God. You're God alone of all the kings, of all the earth you've made heaven and earth. Incline your ear oh Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Oh Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib. Notice this – he's getting very specific. Another lesson about prayer. Don't be general in your requests to God. Be specific. If something is going on in your life talk about it specifically with God. He's saying look at what Sennacherib is doing. He's mocking the living God. Verse 17. Truly, Oh Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, Oh Lord our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Oh Lord, are God alone. Hezekiah makes the hard choice. He chooses to follow the wisdom of God.

What happens? Run the clock forward. Verse 35. What happens? That night the angel, notice the definite article. This is one angel. Not a whole crowd of angels. One angel. The angel of the Lord went out and struck down a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians. And when the people arose early in the morning behold these were all the dead bodies. I love this. Then Sennacherib, the King of Assyria departed and went home. Yea, you bet he went home. He woke up and a hundred and eight-five thousand of men were laying dead. Can you imagine standing up on the top of the walls of Judah looking down thinking that one night you're going to bed, you're not even sure if you're going to wake up alive. You get up and your enemy is dead, laying dead all around. This is what God is doing.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? Come back down to 1 Corinthians. Paul is saying listen. You've got to follow the wisdom of God because the wisdom of God will always thwart the wisdom of man. It may not always make sense to follow God but do it anyway because we can trust the wisdom of God.

The next thing he says, number 2, God's wisdom is superior to spiritual experts. In other words, this book is superior to your teachers or to spiritual experts. Notice verses 20 and 21. He says where is the one who is wise? Where's the scribe? Where's the debater, the philosopher of this age? Notice, three back to back questions, rhetorical questions. Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, through philosophy. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. Let me help you understand what this is saying. These three questions are all rhetorical. All three categories in these questions are perceived, notice this, spiritual experts. The wise, the scribe, the debater. Paul is saying,

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where are these wise men? They're not trustworthy. That's what he's saying. In other words, he's saying just because someone stands up and says something authoritatively about a life philosophy doesn't mean it's true. You need to be asking where did you get that? By the way, just because someone stands up behind a pulpit and has a bible in his hand doesn't mean what he says is true. You need to be asking where did you get that? That's the same principle whether you're listening to some philosopher that is far outside of Christianity or someone who's proclaiming and saying that they are teaching the Word of God you ought to be discerning and say where did you get that?

That was one of the other downfalls of not having anything to watch on television. Eventually I found myself watching Christian television. And I have to tell you. I normally don't watch Christian television and I was appalled at what I was watching people say in the name of God. Why has someone not stood up and said that's not right. You need to be taken off television. You're misleading the people of God. I was watching this guy. I don't know where he was from. He looked like he was from the Philippines. He had this huge church with a huge television ministry and he was saying to this huge, massive crowd, this massive television network that what you need to do to have the power of God and he was using all kinds of scripture. He was slick. But he was saying if you really want the power of God in your life you need to take the Lords Supper every week. That is your source of power. You put it in your body and that causes Gods power to go throughout your life. So, if you need healed from cancer you need to be doing that. If you need to heal your broken marriage you need to do that. If you need some kind of financial resource you need to do that. And this is what he was telling people. And every week he would have people come down and they would have this elaborate communion service and he would be telling people, promising people that this was the source of Gods miracle.

Now, here's the problem with that. The bible doesn't say anything about communion or the Lords Supper being used as a purpose, as a process to receive a miracle from God. So, this is what happens. Thousands of people come down. They believe it. They take it and they don't get their miracle. They don't point back to the guy and say you know what. He's a fake. He's a charlatan. He's not teaching the truth. No, they don't go there. Do you know what they say? They say something is wrong with me. I must be a person of such little faith that it's not working. That's why it's so important to be discerning about what people are teaching you because we tend to believe it.

So you need to be going back to the Word of God and saying is this here? I have to be careful of my teachers because I want to know is this here? And Paul says, so I didn't come with elegant wisdom. I came simply, look at the text, preaching the Word of God. He says in verse 21 for since, in the wisdom of God, and the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach. I love that. The folly of what we preach. You might want to write this down. Do you want to know how to discern what is true, what is untrue? You always live by this principle. It is the wisdom of God, revealed by the Spirit

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of God, through the Word of God. It's the wisdom of God, revealed by the Spirit of God, through the Word. If it's not in the Word of God you need to be asking your teachers, where did you get that? Because Paul says it's through just the folly of preaching, not elegant speech, not this repertoire of us telling this is what you should believe. It always goes back to the Word.

I was studying this. I was fascinated by David Garland who wrote Baker's Exegetical Commentary and he was saying Paul was basically going completely against the grain of culture. If you know anything about Greek culture you know that they love a good orator. They loved a good speech and it wasn't so much about what the content of the speech. It was the speaker that they elevated. Paul is turning that upside down and saying, you know what. It's not about the speaker. It is about the material. In fact, he calls the speaker of the Word of God a herald and heralds had completely different style of communication and responsibility than the philosopher. Do you know what a herald is supposed to do? A herald was used by a king to take his message to send it out to the masses. He wasn't supposed to change it or alter it. He was supposed to give it exactly like the king wanted.

Garland writes this: *"No self-respecting orator or (Greek orator you could say) could have used such verbs to describe his own modus operandi." The reason...is that the role of the κήρυξ (kēryx, herald) was not "to discover the persuasive probabilities inherent in his subject, or search for arguments that will carry weight with his listeners, much less to package the whole so that the message will be irresistible... . That sort of thing belongs to the persuader (the philosopher). The herald's task is not to create a persuasive message at all, but to convey effectively the already articulated message of (the Word of God)."*

Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying my primary responsibility as a herald of God's Word is not to teach you what I think or create my own philosophy. My responsibility is to teach you the wisdom of God through the Word of God. That's my responsibility. The simple, unadorned, uncomplicated truth of God is true heralding; is true preaching. That's actually what you should demand. And that if it's anything less than someone teaching you the Word of God, proving to you this is what God's Word says you ought to be suspect and wonder if they're not tickling my ears. It's the Word of God.

Paul's point. Paul's point says that the wisdom of God is superior to human intellect. The wisdom of God is superior to spiritual experts and number 3, the wisdom of God is superior to spiritual experience or verifiable truth. The wisdom of God, this book is superior to any kind of religious or spiritual experience or verifiable proof. Look at it. He says in verse 22 and 23. For Jews, they demand signs. Greeks – they seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles. There are two groups of people represented here. Do you see that? The Jews. What did they want? They wanted a sign. What is a sign? A religious experience. They're saying give me an experience. Part the Red Sea for me. That's what they were asking of their prophets. Prove you are who you say

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you are. Pharisees come to Jesus. Prove that you really are the Messiah. Now, Jesus had just been wandering around Asia Minor healing everybody, right? Restoring people, raising the dead and the Pharisees come along and say prove it. We want a sign. What does he say? Matthew 12. An evil and adulterous generation ask for a sign. We do not base our faith on an experience, on a sign. I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with an experience. It's not just what we base our faith on. You know why? Because when you have one experience you say I want another and I want another and I want another. You never can get enough experience. And so God say, my wisdom, my Word is superior to any kind of religious experience you're going to receive.

And then the second group he says are the Greeks. They seek wisdom. In other words, they wanted verifiable proof. They're like Thomas. Remember Thomas the Disciple? What is Thomas famous for? He's what? He's the doubting Thomas, right? Why? Because the Disciples come running to him. Jesus was just crucified. Now he's raised from the dead and they say to him did you see it? Jesus is alive. And Thomas says, well, unless I can see Him; unless I can put my finger in his nail scarred hand I'm not going to believe. It's typical Greek. He wanted to have verifiable proof. What's funny is Jesus shows up, right? And He says you want proof? Stick your finger in my hand. Is that really what you want? Thomas didn't do it. Jesus said, turn your disbelief into belief. Don't wait for verifiable proof. Now listen. We believe in the supernatural. We believe in empirical, verifiable evidence and proof. There's nothing wrong with that. That's a part of our, but that's not the basis for our conviction. That's where I'm going.

It's not what we put our hope in. It's the willing heart that comes to the Word of God and says I believe. God says we start there. God's wisdom is superior to human intellect, spiritual experts, religious experience an verifiable proof and finally in verse 24 and 25 Gods wisdom is superior to personal power.

Gods wisdom is superior to personal power. But to those who are called, that's you by the way. You are the called. Both Jew and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Where's our power? Christ. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom and God and in verse 25, he almost says this tongue in cheek. You need to understand that. He says for the foolishness of God is wiser than men. God's not foolish. He's just saying if God could be foolish the foolishness of God is wiser than men. The weakness of God if stronger than men.

Let me help you understand this with a little story. I once was meeting with a college student. I love college students. They're fresh. They just make you think. They're kind of on the cutting edge of life. And this college student came to me and said well, why shouldn't I believe the experts? We're talking about the geniuses of our world, like the Steven Hawkings or the Einsteins. Why shouldn't I believe. Here are people who have more brain power than most of us could ever imagine. They are the shear geniuses. He said in particular, in these two cases both of these men are not Atheist. They might be labeled

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Agnostics. They believe in a God but they don't believe in a personal God. So, why shouldn't I embrace these geniuses over any other philosophy or even over what is written in the bible? Why? That's a good question. There are smart people in this world. Why shouldn't we believe them over anything or some piece of antiquity? Well, what does this passage say? Because you can find the wisest person on earth and they don't even compare to the foolishness of God. You can find the strongest person on earth and they don't even compare to the weaknesses of God.

God is saying, listen. Trust in the wisdom that is found in the scriptures. Trust in this book. His wisdom is superior to our own; superior to our experts; superior to our experiences; superior to our personal strength. That's where we put our faith.

Where is your life philosophy? What is it based in? Do you even know? You know when the Hezekiah experiences come into life, when you have to make difficult decisions. So what is Paul saying? Paul is saying I'm going to help you make difficult decisions by teaching you that you can trust the wisdom of God. Let's thank Him for it.