

How Foolish and Stupid Can We Be?  
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1 Corinthians 1:18-25

18 The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved. 19 It is written in scripture: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent. 20 Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today's debaters? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish? 21 In God's wisdom, [God] determined that the world wouldn't come to know [Them] through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. 22 Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. 24 But to those who are called—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. 25 This is because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

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In order to be saved by Jesus Christ you have to \_\_\_\_\_

- Be baptized *the right way*
- Say the sinner's prayer

God loves \_\_\_\_\_

- Only those who give up all their worldly possessions and follow Christ as his disciples did.
- Those who overcome their sins and live perfect lives
- God DOESN'T love fags, same-sex marriage, scientists, Muslims and anyone and everyone who doesn't submit to Jesus Christ.

You are TRULY saved if \_\_\_\_\_

- God answers your prayers
- You achieve a perfect, Christ-like, non-sinful life
- You believe that only Jesus Christ as the one true path to God

The ONE TRUE church \_\_\_\_\_

- Is the Catholic church
- Is Church of Christ
- Is a church that believe the Bible is infallible and inerrant
- Is pure and separate from the world

The \_\_\_\_\_ church is the REAL church

- Methodist
- Lutheran
- Baptist
- AME
- Etc.

There is only one way, one path, one faith, one religion, one prophet, one enlightened one, one chance --- so you'd better figure it out and get it right or .... Or else it won't be pretty.

In the process of "doing it right" as only you can because you're a member of the right church, the right faith, the right religion – you'd better win over as many people and souls as you can – CONVERT the masses – because you will be judged on how many souls YOU got into heaven.

They HAVE to hear God's truth, which only YOU can give them...or which only YOUR pastor, YOUR church, YOUR faith, YOUR religion can do...

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THIS IS MUCH OF THE "WISDOM" THAT HAS BEEN AROUND FOR MILLENIA...

Go on the internet and start doing some basic searches for RIGHT religion, the ONE church, CORRECT beliefs or TRUE salvation and you'll find so much wisdom out there.

All of this WISDOM gets spewed from anyone and everyone; from the mentally insane, from financial opportunists, paupers, the holiest of holy pastors and yes - the truly pure and wise ... and it happens everywhere - from the gutters of some of the worst slums on this earth, as well as being prognosticated from the poolside of 26-room mansions or 40,000 seat arenas. So....

To WHOM do we listen?

WHAT is the truth?

WHERE do we find it ... and

WHEN do we hear it?

The questions continue because it's a tale as old as time. We ARE the beautiful design of God called humans and we are perfectly imperfect - routinely forgetting, misunderstanding and getting in each other's (and our own) way when it comes to God, God's creation, the message of the cross and our relationship and role in all of it.

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Today we are in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. He's writing to them because their "humanity" is getting in the way of the message and he wants to encourage them. It's a letter worth repeating, ad nauseum. Preceding our pericope, Paul starts by reminding the Corinthians

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- in every way you have been enriched in him [Jesus Christ], in speech and knowledge of every kind (verses 5) (You've *heard* the Gospel – so you know the message).
- you are not lacking in any spiritual gift (verse 7)
- I desire that you be in agreement with each other, without any divisions....united in the same mind and purpose (verse 10).

Paul confirms his knowledge that they're squabbling about right beliefs, right practices and differences in authority, validity and methods of WHAT to believe, with WHOM to align, and HOW to do certain things. Sounds a lot like our differing Christian denominations, right? Or the trend 'du jour' of independent churches, specifically and intentionally distancing themselves from what they see as fractured and broken institutional churches and denominations, far too lost to be truly authentic or effective.

Do you think that somehow Christ has been divided (verse 13)? Paul posed this question to the Corinthians, but it's extremely important for us to hear this question and be able to respond. With all of our grand intellect, knowledge, information and wisdom about God, Spirit and Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, how is that we continue to keep dividing Christ? Dividing ourselves?

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Paul said that he was sent to proclaim the gospel, simply, straight-forward and not with "eloquent wisdom (verse 17)."

Our scripture reading today is our reminder to stop dividing, separating and excluding because we think we have some kind of special wisdom about God, Spirit and Jesus Christ. Let us remember, always, that God's ways ... ARE GOD'S WAYS! And often, *usually*, when we try to understand and know God's way, we struggle because they seem insane and foolish. Many first century Christians thought that very same thing.

Dying on a cross is about strength, power, honor and life? Yeah, right.

We can't forget what the cross meant at that time. "In Greco-Roman culture, gaining honor and status were of crucial important. Humility was not a virtue. It was a sign of weakness and dishonor. Crucifixion was the epitome of dishonor. It was designed to humiliate the person killed. It was a message, a demonstration of their complete lack of power and dignity" (Sumney 2020). Jesus endured humiliation, torture and death under oppressive rule, in the most horrendous way and did so in the most foolish way - *willing*. God and Jesus teach us that that was the pinnacle of love and authority ... in that asinine, weak and humiliating cross, we should strive to learn, understand and live God's way.

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*Little Zachary was doing very badly in math at school. His parents had tried everything...tutors, mentors, flash cards, special learning centers. In short, everything they could think of to help him with his math, and nothing was working.*

*Finally, in a last-ditch effort, they took him to the local Catholic school. After the first day, little Zachary came home with a very serious look on his face. He didn't even kiss his mother hello. Instead, he went straight to his room and started studying.*

*Books and papers were spread out all over the room and little Zachary was hard at work. His mother was amazed. She called him down to dinner. To her shock, the minute he was done, he marched back to his room without a word, and in no time, he was back hitting the books as hard as before. This went on for some time, day after day, while the mother tried to understand what made all the difference.*

*Finally, little Zachary brought home his report card. He quietly laid it on the table, went up to his room and hit the books. With great trepidation, his mom looked at it and to her great surprise little Zachary got an "A" in math. She could no longer hold her curiosity.*

*She went to his room and said, "Son, what was it? Was it the nuns? Little Zachary looked at her and shook his head, no. "Well, then," she replied, was it the books, the discipline, the structure, the uniforms? What was it?*

*Little Zachary looked at her and said, "Well, on the first day of school when I saw that guy nailed to the plus sign, I knew they were not fooling around."*

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All joking aside, do we choose to take the cross and its message, seriously? As Christians, we choose the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as our sacred scriptures. We choose Jesus Christ as our savior AND our teacher.

There's a quote from CS Lewis in Mere Christianity in which he says that most of the time we don't need instructed about something, we need reminded. As we attempt to be good Christians, we have to be reminded, constantly, that God's ways are foolish, often mysterious and definitely other-worldly ... and if we choose to follow Jesus, it includes foolish wisdom – like seeing an instrument of torture as a source of life.

With all the work, study, research and investigating done by hundreds of thousands of people for so many centuries – humanity has gained great knowledge and learned many things. BUT...at the same time, we still know nothing - because our brains and egos get in the way of our hearts and souls. We misinterpret the message of the cross, a uniting message, too often in divisive and exclusionary ways. God's wisdom and human wisdom aren't the same thing. Human wisdom says that success comes from strength, money, fame and authority. God's wisdom says that success comes from weakness, sacrifice, humility and compassion.

Are we ok with that? I MEAN ARE WE REALLY OKAY WITH APPEARING STUPID AND WEAK?

*Once there was a little girl who always wore a bright, shiny cross around her neck which she proudly displayed for all to see. One day she was approached by a man who said to her, "Little girl, don't you know that the cross Jesus died on wasn't beautiful like the one you are wearing? It was an ugly, wooden thing." At this the little girl smartly replied, "Yes, I know. But don't you know that whatever Jesus touches, he changes?"<sup>1</sup>*

God's foolishness goes against everything our world teaches us. To commit to following Christ and to being changed by the cross, we have to not just be willing to appear to be foolish, naïve, stupid, weak and crazy to the world, but we have to *want it! We have to desire it.*

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In 2015, Gravity CEO Dan Price shocked the business world by taking a personal \$1M pay cut to raise his company's minimum salary to \$70,000 a year. He was called a "socialist and communist" publicly. His company lost several customers — who either considered the move to be political or expected an increase in fees. Two of Gravity's higher-paid employees left, considering the raise unfair to them. After just 5 years, Gravity's payments processing volume went from \$3.8 billion to \$10.2 billion. However, there were other metrics that Price was proud of. Before the \$70,000 minimum wage, [Gravity's employees were] having between zero and two babies born per year amongst the team. After the announcement [there were] more than 40 babies. [Also,] before the pay raise, less than 1% of the company could afford to buy their own homes. Five years after the dramatic pay raise, 10% of the company's employees had their own homes.<sup>2</sup>

To this day, Gravity is doing exceptionally well, for everyone in the company.

As Paul asked the Corinthians, let us ask ourselves... Where are the wise? Where are the experts? Where are today's debaters? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish?

- \$15/hour minimum wage.
- Healthcare for all.
- Free education.
- An end to homelessness, hunger and poverty.
- Clean air and clean oceans.
- No need for guns because life and peace are a higher priority than death and war.

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<sup>1</sup> Newland, Melvin.

<sup>2</sup> <https://entrepreneurshandbook.co/ceo-who-took-a-1m-salary-cut-to-pay-employees-70k-is-thriving-5211a092ee78>

The world is full of opportunities for us to look naïve and stupid. Methods and ideas abound as to how we can wisely bring about God's will on earth, as it is in heaven. There are many foolish ways for us to live the message of the cross.

How foolish are you prepared to be today?

AMEN