



FOOLISHNESS?

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

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**by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on January 24, 2021**

1:18 – 31 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in

His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

If you have been a child of God for more than about 5 minutes, you are keenly aware that to those on the outside, it's all craziness. To outsiders, the cross is just a lot of foolishness. It's just silly, religious mind-control. But for us who are *being saved*, it is the very power of God. Yes... "*being* saved." The vernacular is clearly specific. Paul refers to those who *are perishing*, and those who *are being saved*. Both of these conditions are in the *continual* and *present* form. This means that for both groups, the *result* of our decisions continue long after the moment of our initial determination. One must essentially say no to Christ everyday of their lives in order to win that illustrious prize of eternity in hell.

Yes, there are those critical moments of time where we choose the right or the left road, and thereby determining the course of our lives. Certainly the moment of salvation is one of those moments, and God says He sees you from that rebirth onward as positionally complete...positionally "sanctified." He thereafter declares your standing before God as righteous. But we also know that *practically speaking*, salvation does not stop on the day you say the "sinner's prayer." Our lives will continually change and grow. They *must* ...

Maturity, growth, and development into a servant of God is the whole of scripture after John 3:16. It is a constant process and a continual event. That is why scripture so vividly describes our life in Christ as a "walk." It is an active participation and a work in progress. Paul knew that when he wrote this letter and when he finished his life saying, "*I have (now) completed my course...*"

This innate aspect of our redemption often is problematic to many. For men indeed love the gospel, but generally only the gospel that *leads* to salvation. Most of the time though, we do not love the *process* of salvation. We are much less fond of the *life* of salvation, which entails the disciplined seeking after holiness, the rejection of the lusts of the world, servanthood, and the dedication and lordship of our lives. The *process* of salvation is hard...often difficult and sometimes painful. We love the *results* of salvation, as we want to be released from the guilt of sin, but truthfully we are far less keen on the idea of actually being released from the world as a whole.

(19-20) Note that the text doesn't read, "I *destroyed* the wisdom," it says, "I *will* destroy..." Either that is *going* to happen, or it was happening both then and now. Truthfully, I think it's been happening every day since that fateful day on Golgotha. One need only read the daily paper or watch an episode of the evening news to see it all played out in real time. We live in a world that relies so heavily on the "wisdom of the world" to make it through this life, and let's face it, such "wisdom" is overwhelmingly failing.

We need to clearly understand that such a remark does not mean that all of man's advancements have failed or are negative in their impact. Man has made great strides to alleviate hunger, disease, crime, and disorder. So this isn't a call to shun all modern advancements and hunker down in an amish-like compound deep in the Yukon someplace. It is amazing though, when we look back at the things we once were told was okay for us or good for us that are now considered disastrous.

Back in the late 1800's, if Little Bobby has a nagging cough, you could go to the medicine cabinet and grab a bottle of ... heroin. Sounds nuts right? Heroin at one time was hailed as an everyday cure for the common cold and marketed by the German drug company Bayer, especially 'for use in children'. In the US the Heroin Act of 1924 banned heroin production and usage but it wasn't until 1953 that heroin was banned from legal prescription in Australia. In 1946, one ad for Camel cigarettes stated "More doctors smoke Camels than any

other cigarette", and brands like Lucky Strike claimed they were less irritating to the throat than others. However, as people dropped like flies, the public eventually caught on. In the early 1900s radium was new, exciting and it *glowed!* Thus it was a popular ingredient in toothpaste, cosmetics and the "health tonic", called radium water. That was until a wealthy American playboy named Eben Byers died from his radium water habit. Like heroin, cocaine was once touted by pharmaceutical companies as a wonder drug. The stimulant is derived from the coca leaf, which South American Indians have been chewing on centuries. When it first hit the market the concentrated version was promoted as a painkiller and a cure for morphine addiction, among other things. Sigmund Freud was a famous champion (and prolific user) of the drug, until he became addicted and his health rapidly deteriorated. And if you think your Coca-Cola habit is tough to kick now, imagine if you'd been around when the original recipe hit the shelves. When the sugary drink was created by Atlanta pharmacist John Pemberton in 1886, it is said to have contained a significant dose of cocaine, which remained in the recipe until 1903.

History is fraught with man's "wisdom" being terribly destructive, yet we are so willing to swallow all of it. We still overwhelmingly want to believe in science and the human advances to solve the problems of the world. I'm absolutely not touting an anti-science agenda herein, as man has come up with some pretty great stuff, which to me only gives kudos to our Creator. Yet despite all the advances in medicine, science, and other technical areas, humanity is still sinking, and honestly faster by the day. We're losing our minds, our health, and our families. There is still starvation around the world, unprecedented violence, sex trafficking and disease plagues every country. We are inundated with incredible instances of man's *inhumanity*, and personal satisfaction and inner peace are long gone. Ravi Zacharias was once quoted: "I am absolutely convinced that meaninglessness does not come from being weary of pain. Meaninglessness comes from being weary of pleasure. And that's why we are bankrupt of meaning in a land of so much."

We are failing miserably, all the while clinging tightly to the wisdom of the world. Despite all the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, humanity unrelentingly believes man has the answers and of course you creation-believing Christians are idiots. I have witnessed so many people who have embraced every tried and proven method of man, but still eventually found themselves in bondage to drugs, alcohol, marriage problems, and depression, and often eventual suicide.

God "made foolish the wisdom of the world." God will do this to the end of time. You may be saying, "Hold on! Are you saying God holds the answers to every issue I might face?" Yes I am. Romans 11:33-36 tells us "*Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! For who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back. For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.*" 2 Pet 1:3 says "*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...*"

This does not mean you should go home and stop taking your medication, stop wearing your seatbelt or these days, stop wearing your mask. However, a lot of people need to stop and honestly answer the big question: "Where is your trust? In God or men?" Many people who call themselves Christians need to make some changes. Because the bible has clearly told us that "*it is impossible to please God without faith*" in Him. (Heb 11:6)

(1:21) Many folks want to believe in the *idea* of salvation and the *idea* of scripture. But only as it fits into man's wisdom. We discount the six-day creation because it is "foolishness" in light of evolution. We reject the teaching of a universal flood, because we can't wrap our minds around such a concept and despite the plethora of *science* evidence which supports such.

It *all* seems...well, kind of “foolish.” Our human “wisdom” has effectively pushed God out of our lives. Certainly christianity does not mean we check our brains at the door. But if you think that you can “take to the bank” everything the world is spoon feeding you, then you have a faith that on any measurement is unfounded. After all, the internet never lies and the news only ever tells the truth right? Like hey...we weren’t in Laos during the Vietnam war, right? Because we were told so innumerable times by news outlets and the government after all. Yet now we know that during the '60s, the CIA began a secret program that aimed to curb Communism by arming and training local fighters in Laos. This fact has been called "the largest covert operation in US history."

(22-25) The Jews, according to Paul, were always looking for a miraculous sign. Many folks are still looking for such signs today. These folks are the “signs and wonders” people of our day. They’re into Christianity for the show and the ‘buzz’ of personal gratification. God isn’t impressed by such folks saying “*A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*” Matt 16:4. The “sign of Jonah?” Yes...three days “in the belly of the whale” and resurrected after.

Man says, “*Show me and I will believe.*” God says, “*Believe, and I will show you.*” Despite our best efforts, we cannot enter into a relationship with Christ according to our own personal agenda, criteria, and parameters. Such a fact is the root of many of our individual struggles as a church-going American. To be born again is only to receive God as a “package deal.” He is leading; we are to follow. He is our Lord and we are the servants. He holds all the cards; all the answers, all the power, all the wisdom and foresight. He does not “need” man for anything. Acts 17: 24 - 25 “*He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, and human hands can’t serve his needs — for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need.*” And Psalms 50:10-12 “*For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird on the mountains, and all the animals of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for all the world is mine and everything in it.*”

Next come the Greeks: they would have today taken their computers apart to try to see what was happening in there. They sought after wisdom. They needed to know how it all worked. They sought to understand it all. This is the same reason there are theistic evolution and the intelligent design movements today. We have invented other doctrinal concepts such as “soul-sleep,” Calvinism and Armenism, and ecumenicalism. Folks who couldn’t handle not having all the answers so they forced issues into submission. Despite His saying in Isaiah 55:8-9 “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*” declares the LORD. “*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*” This issue is all a manifestation of the words of Paul in Romans: “*Professing themselves wise they became fools...*” All of this can be and is easily settled when one critical fact is embraced: **He is God**. Therefore nothing is impossible, He knows everything, sees everything, made everything and is not swayed in the least by mankind.

(26) To argue his point, Paul called upon the church in Corinth to take a look around. What kind of men had God actually been calling to duty? What’s the history of His vetting process? The questions still plays today. What kind of men is God calling to duty? Who is He profoundly using? What kind of people is God drawing near to Him? Are they wise, mighty, and noble? Indeed, He doesn’t say not *any* but he does say not *many*. Indeed, God has manifested Himself in some pretty brilliant guys over years. Often, they are the ones who made the papers. But there are untold thousands that are nobodies from nowhere. Inexplicable choices on the human level. After all, what does some farm kid from Hicksville Iowa with no seminary degree, that got thrown out of bible college because he wouldn’t cut his hair have to offer?

Paul reminds them that the church in Corinth was not built by, for, or with, high philosophy and wisdom, rather it was the simple gospel. And, *by the way*, so was this church in Menomonie, Wisconsin. The church in Corinth, as well as we today, need to remember who we are and where we came from. We need to remember our roots. The longer we continue forward, the easier it is to forget. We are in truth a bunch of mutts led by a hack pastor.

(27-29) Why would he do such a thing? After all, He could have gotten anyone to stand in this pulpit and filled this church with the well-to-do and the well known. But instead he found a goofy guy who was busy baking bread, a recent stout art grad, and a guy who was debugging peoples computers at IBM, not to mention some south LA Mexican dude to herd the sheep and filled his church with a bunch of students, jailbirds, drunks and druggies, self-proclaimed art'sy folks, threw in a couple of loggers, ...the lost, the depressed, the little, the inconsequential, the nobodies, and put us on the field to play NFL ball. By using the weak, the simple and the small, God shows how strong and in control He is. It's been said that as soon as you figure out why God is using you, God is no longer using you. ***Why would He do such a thing?*** Because the world, when looking at people like us, has to say, "There is no other answer...It must be the Lord!"

Jer 9:23-24 "...*Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!*."

"I delight in these things..." Oh, praise God! This passage speaks not only concerning those who would lead and teach, but also those who would make up the body of believers there in Corinth. Certainly, one does not have to check their brain at the door when coming to church. In fact, it's highly advisable that you don't. But rarely does the intellectual or the intellectual argument win people to Christ. It's even more rare when those who see themselves as intellectuals profoundly alter the world for Christ. When pride enters in, nothing good ever comes from it, and God's work is ultimately lost.

At the root of every sin is pride. No single issue has been more destructive in a body of believers. It is essentially one part of the body exalting itself over the other, believing that it is not only more important than the other parts, but also that it does not *need* the other parts. Yet, scripture strongly argues that assumption:

Ro 12:5 "*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*"

Col 2:19 "*...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.*"

Col 2:19 "*...all the body, (spiritual) nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.*"

Eph 1:23 "*(The church) is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.*"

NOTE: 1 Cor 12:12-20

We need to stop dancing around the issue in today's church and face the truth: **to go it alone is sin**. You cannot live the Christian life outside of a local body of believers. To attempt this, you might as well toss out over half of the New Testament because it would not speak to you or affect you whatsoever. You cannot serve, exercise

your gifts, be accountable, bless others, give tithes and offerings, participate in communion, fulfill missions calling, or be in unity, (all of which are instructed in scripture) if you are not part of a local church.

(30-31) Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that everything they have and everything they are, they owe to Christ. “...of Him (God) you are *in Christ Jesus*...”

Scripture tells us that the church as a whole is His body. We are both individually and corporately *in Christ* because of the Father. It matters little how smart you are, how biblically intellectual you are, or what a great leader you are; *it's all God, all the time.*

NOTE: How trite are words like righteousness, sanctification, and even love or redemption if there is no one to share these with! The body, *His church*, is the vehicle by which God manifests His plan and forward motion. Pride is the antithesis of unity in the body of Christ. It is the wrecking ball, ...the corrupting element that destroys the church. And along the way it will destroy us individually and personally. It has taken away from us...from me...countless people that I have loved as my own flesh and blood. Without Him, we *have* nothing and *are* nothing. Without Him we are lost. Our job, *our life*, is to glorify God. When we attempt to take that glory for ourselves, we will fall. And how far that fall can be! Whether that be humanity as a whole or each one of us individually! **Isa 42:8** “*I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another...*”

The church in Corinth had every gift present and active, but such a dynamic can be bittersweet. In that kind of body, it is easy to become quite independent and self-satisfied. We can begin to look for opportunities to stroke our egos rather than for opportunities to serve Him humbly. Today Christian, we are either the greatest of fools, or we are the most blessed and “in-the-know” individuals on earth. From my view point, the truth of that question is self evident. Just stop and look around. What side do you want to be on?

“*Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain. What was once foolishness to us—a crucified God—must become our wisdom and our power and our only boast in this world.*”

— John Piper