

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | “God’s Wisdom in Good Friday”

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1, verses 18 through 31.

This evening, we will be reflecting upon the Cross of Christ, as we celebrate Good Friday today.
[pause]

Many sermons have been focused on what makes Good Friday “good”.

And so they emphasize how it’s good because it has brought us forgiveness, as Jesus Christ was sacrificed in our place.

I would heartily agree with that emphasis!

Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice is the heart of the Gospel.

But I’d like to take a slightly different route this evening, as I’ll give another reason for Good Friday being “good,” - God’s wisdom. [pause]

When you think of the Cross of Christ do you think of wisdom?

I’d say that most people don’t think of wisdom when it comes to the Cross.

They think of humility, sacrifice, love, forgiveness - and rightly so, but as we will see tonight, the Cross also involves *wisdom*. [pauseeee]

Here in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul has been confronting the Corinthians’ division.

They were divided as different people said, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos”, “Cephas”, or “Christ.”

And now as Paul moves on to talk about the Cross, what he’s doing is showing them how their mindset is actually driven by *human* wisdom.

But the message of the Cross contradicts human wisdom. [pause]

And so by focusing so much on the leader they follow and being divided over it, they were following human wisdom rather than God’s wisdom.

And it’s in that context that we find our passage for this evening, so LET’S READ IT. [pause]

Something that this passage points out is that...

I. The Cross causes two different responses. (18)

Not everyone in the world hears of the Cross and responds well to it, for there are some who see it as foolish. [pause]

Before we get to the two responses, let's first briefly understand what the Cross is.

When you hear the phrase, "the word of the Cross," or "the Cross of Christ," it's speaking about Jesus Christ's death.

Specifically, it's speaking about the crucifixion of Jesus. *[pause]*

Jesus Christ lived on this earth, was arrested, and was killed by crucifixion.

Though as believers know, this wasn't a wrench in the plan of God, but the very plan itself.

Jesus voluntarily went to the Cross in order to be the sacrifice for our sins.

He took our sins upon Himself and paid the penalty for our sins so that we could be forgiven and no longer condemned.

He was the perfect sacrificial Lamb, as he was sinless. *[pause]*

And it's that message that there are two responses to.

1 Corinthians 1:18 says, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." *[pause]*

One response is from those who are perishing.

So this is those who have not repented and trusted in Christ's work on the Cross.

They are perishing, meaning they are on their way to Hell. *[pause]*

And the sad reality is that they are perishing *because* they deem the Cross foolish.

That's their response to the fact that Christ was crucified: they regard it as foolish. *[pause]*

Later on in verses 22 and 23, Paul expands upon this when it comes to the Jew and the Greek.

He says that the Jews want signs and so Christ crucified becomes a stumbling block to them. *[pause]*

You see, the Jews desired amazing signs of power, but the Cross was this image of weakness and powerlessness to them.

And they stumble over this truth because they never thought that something like that could happen to the Messiah. *[pause]*

They had in their minds that the Messiah would come in power and vanquish all their enemies.

But they didn't consider the numerous prophecies of the Suffering Servant, who would be smitten by God and afflicted. *[pause]*

They also remembered the truth that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed, so that made them stumble over Christ because here the one who many saw as the Messiah hung on a tree.

So in their minds, it's like, "How could the Messiah hang on a tree?"

"How could the Messiah die?" *[pauseeee]*

That's how the Jews responded, and Paul says that the Greeks also responded the same way, but for a different reason.

The Greeks, who are the non-Jews, sought wisdom above all.

And since the Cross goes against human wisdom, then they saw it as foolish. *[pause]*

You see, they sought out things that were reasonable and made sense according to their wisdom, but the Cross doesn't seem rational.

How could a Savior die? *[pauseeee]*

Imagine a person telling you that their Savior died by the electric chair, you would be baffled and think, "That doesn't make sense." *[pause]*

D.A. Carson gives an illustration and says to imagine a co-worker coming into work with earrings stamped with a mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb on it.

Or to imagine a church with images of the mass graves of Auschwitz all over it.¹

That's what it was like to hear of a Savior dying by crucifixion back in the 1st century because it was such a horrific way to die.

And yet the Gospel says that we are saved through a Savior who died by crucifixion! *[pause]*

If you really think about it, we are preaching that our Savior died a horrible death!

Now of course we also preach that he rose again, but just the fact that he died goes against all human wisdom. *[pause]*

Human wisdom is always self-reliant rather than God-reliant.

Human wisdom hears of the Cross and thinks, "I could think of something better!"

Or, "That's not how I think it should be done."

Or, "My God would never do that." *[pause]*

Because of this, human wisdom deems the Cross foolish.

¹ Carson, D.A., *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, Page 12.

And this considering the Cross as foolish isn't something that only happened in the past; it happens even now. *[pause]*

In a book by Graham Tomlin, he says this...

“Some while ago, I picked up a book in a second hand bookshop.

*It was an old, slightly faded paperback with what looked like an intriguing title: **The God I Want.***

Published in the late 1960s, it was a collection of essays by various public figures explaining the kind of God they could cope with, the God they could bring themselves to believe in.

None of them said they wanted a crucified God.

The cross of Jesus simply bars the way to that approach by confronting us with something that so offends common sense that it makes us start back at square one...

It tells us that the journey to find God starts, not with human wisdom, human chattering and speculation on what kind of God we might like...

...What kind of God we can get our heads around, or what kind of God we can bring ourselves to believe in.² *[pause]*

That's the thing with the Cross, it's offensive, shocking, and foolish to those who don't believe.

It contradicts human wisdom. *[pause]*

And so what Paul is showing us is that human wisdom will never lead you to the Cross, but away from it.

That's why he says in verse 20, “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?”

No humanly wise person has thought of the Cross, but instead, they think it's foolish. [pause]

To those perishing, the Cross is foolish, but to those who believe, the Cross is *powerful!*

They believe because the Spirit helps them to see past the barrier of human wisdom to the treasure of God's wisdom hidden underneath.

They believe because God works in their lives, calls them, and helps them see with eyes of faith the true nature of the Cross.

So we who believe in the Cross, don't deem the crucifixion of Christ as foolish at all, but rather powerful!

² Graham Tomlin, *Looking Through the Cross: The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2014*, Bloomsbury, 2014, pp.27-28.

Why? Because we have understood that the Cross alone saves.

We have grasped the truth that it is through the death of Christ that the bondage of sin is broken, we are freed from it, forgiven, and saved.

The death of Jesus is the only way to deal with the sin problem of humanity.

It is truly the power and wisdom of God. [pause]

What looked like God's weakness was actually God's power on display.

What looked foolish was actually God's wisdom unveiled in full splendor. [pause]

We who believe in Christ's work on the Cross have recognized that Christ *is* the wisdom and power of God.

We have trusted in Him alone and boast in Him alone because human wisdom didn't get us to this point. *[pause]*

Those who believe in Christ's sacrifice have believed in something totally contrary to the world's thinking, so how can we boast?

We can't!

Paul says that God did this so that no one could boast, but we could only boast in the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

There are two responses to the message of the Cross: either you deem it foolish and don't believe in what Christ did...

...Or you trust God's wisdom and believe it. [pause]

For those who think it foolish, you remain condemned and are perishing, but for those who see it for what it is and believe, there is salvation.

What's your response to the Cross? *[pause]*

Not only does Paul explain that there are two responses to the word of the Cross, but he also shows us that...

II. The Cross is where God made foolish the wisdom of the world.

In a documentary movie called, "American Gospel: Christ Crucified," several people are interviewed who can't come to grips with the fact that Christ was crucified in our place.

They claim that it was divine child abuse.

They say, "Why did God have to kill anyone? Why couldn't He just forgive." *[pause]*

Just a couple weeks ago, my son randomly said, “Jesus was tied up. Why didn’t he just use his powers to get out?”

That’s human wisdom coming out, wondering, ‘Why didn’t he just save himself?’ *[pause]*

Now my son said it because he’s still learning about the purpose of the Cross...

...But it still shows the basic tendency of human wisdom to think, “Why would the King of the Universe be tied up and be killed without escaping?” *[pauseeee]*

The Cross of Christ doesn’t make sense according to human wisdom, but that’s because God has chosen to make foolish the wisdom of humanity. *[pause]*

Let’s first tackle the question of “How?”

That is, how did God make foolish the wisdom of this world?

Said another way, how did God make human wisdom not just *look* foolish, but actually to *be* foolish?

Well, we touched on it earlier.

Human wisdom says that the crucifixion of a Savior is foolish.

Human wisdom never leads to a crucified Messiah.

Because human wisdom is all about amazing displays of power and might, and what makes sense in our minds. *[pause]*

Human wisdom doesn’t like things that are low and humble, but likes things which appear successful. *[pause]*

I’ll give two very quick illustrations to demonstrate this...

What does our world promote more? The person with a high up job making six figures, or the person doing manual labor barely making ends meet?

What does our world celebrate more? The proud celebrity or the humble housewife who's a mom of 5? *[pauseeee]*

Human wisdom boasts in the powerful and mighty, but God has made it so that human wisdom can’t save.

That’s one aspect of how God made human wisdom folly, it can’t save!

So even though human wisdom boasts in power, it’s powerless to deal with the biggest problems of life.

Human wisdom may look so wise, but in reality, it's foolish, as it gets the most important and pressing issues wrong.

It's powerless to deal with the problem of sin. *[pause]*

Human wisdom won't lead to being freed from the dominion of sin and the penalty of sin, but human wisdom leaves you under sin and under condemnation. *[pause]*

So God has made it that human wisdom can't save, but he has also chosen what is deemed foolish in this world to be the true power. *[pause]*

The Cross is regarded as foolish and yet that is the very thing that God has chosen to be the power to save!

Through this setup, God has shamed human wisdom and brought it to nothing!

Human wisdom lays dead at the foot of the Cross!

It's incapable of saving, and is shown to be foolish by God's wisdom.

In this way, what is considered foolish and weak of God to do is so much more powerful and wise than man's wisdom and strength. *[pauseeee]*

But the question is, "Why?"

Why did God choose something to save that is so contrary to what our human wisdom tells us?

So that our only boast would be in Him. *[pause]*

In verse 19, Paul quotes from Isaiah when he writes, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

God has promised that he would destroy and thwart human wisdom and he has done so through the death of Jesus. *[pause]*

Paul even tells us this purpose in verses 27 through 31, when he says that God chose what was foolish to shame the wise in order "that no human being might boast in the presence of God." *[pause]*

We can't boast because our wisdom didn't lead to the Cross.

Our wisdom only led *away* from the Cross, not to it.

We can't boast because our wisdom doesn't save, but it falls short time and time again...

...And yet how often do Christians look to the wisdom of the world, rather than God's wisdom to solve issues that arise in their lives? *[pause]*

Human wisdom has been made foolish by God's wisdom and power in the Cross.

And that's what this passage shows us...

Good Friday gave a death blow to human wisdom, and showed off God's wisdom and power. [pause]

Human wisdom has been slayed and brought low by God.

So don't trust in your own wisdom, thoughts, or feelings!

They can't save you and they have been made foolish by God.

Instead, trust God's wisdom, which we find in His Word.

Trust it to save, but also to live each and every day. [pauseeee]

Since God has orchestrated that the Cross alone would save...

...So now each person who is saved must thrust human wisdom aside and trust in God's wisdom, even though it looks foolish to human wisdom. [pause]

In order to believe in the Cross, you can't trust in yourself, but rather, you must trust God's Word.

Because human wisdom says Good Friday is just another day, but God's wisdom makes the truth behind Good Friday "good".

So humble yourself and don't trust in your own wisdom, thoughts, or feelings.

Trust no longer in what you think that God would DO, but rather what God said he has DONE.

And what has He done? Sent Christ to die for our sins. [pause]

Christ was sent by the Father to this earth, and he came and lived a perfect life that you couldn't live.

He then went and died an excruciating death by crucifixion on a cross of wood.

And he did so in order to take your sins upon himself and pay the penalty for your sins, but also to credit his righteousness to your account.

And he then rose again from the dead.

He did this so that we could be forgiven, no longer under condemnation, given new life, and be declared righteous. [pauseeee]

So what's your response to the Cross?

The Bible says that we must repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ's finished work in order to be saved. *[pause]*

Will you do that tonight? If you do that, this Friday can truly be a good Friday for you.

For it will be the day of your salvation.

But if you cling to your wisdom, and reject Jesus' work, then you will remain condemned and you will perish. *[pauseeee]*

The Cross humbles each of us and makes us abandon our own wisdom and righteousness...

...And instead, makes us rest only in Christ "who became to us the wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." *[pause]*

The Cross alone saves, and the Cross makes it so that we **cannot** boast in the presence of God because of *our* wisdom or good works, but we must boast in the Lord.