

FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS

What are some things you consider foolish? Folly? Wastes of time, talent, treasure? Youth often think adults pursue folly, even as adults know how children carelessly chase foolishness. Churchgoers and professing Christians probably have a different list than those who rarely if ever darken the door of a house of worship. And the Bible presents the "cross of Christ" as the one thing that separates people, regardless of other beliefs or opinions. The cross is the heart of the gospel. Jesus died so you can live.

1- What the world thinks. The apostle Paul spells this out in his first letter to the church at Corinth. It was one of the largest cities of the first-century Roman Empire. One of the most commercialized and corrupt. Not unlike your locale. The worldly wisdom of the surrounding culture had greatly influenced people who had become followers of Christ. Paul spent about 18 months establishing this church in AD 50-52. When he wrote to them three years later, he reminds them that Christ had sent him *"to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."* The Roman world was preoccupied with power. It was the projection of their empire, and the pursuit of its people. These cultural values were corrupting the church, which was becoming increasingly polarized by people who viewed themselves as more spiritually knowledgeable and mature than others, particularly those who could gain influence through their rhetorical and persuasive gifts. The apostle rejects their assertions, and inserts the cross as the defining measure, not only for the church at Corinth, but for all mankind. *"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"* (1Corinthians1:18). Ten times in this letter, Paul uses words translated "foolishness" or "folly" or "fool" in relation to the gospel of the cross of Christ. That's what the world thinks it is. Absurd.

2- What God's Word says. Human nature has not changed in all of human history, so God's Word in the Bible speaks as clearly and directly to us today as it did to the Corinthians nearly 2,000 years ago. God says, the very thing the world thinks as absurd actually is His power and His wisdom. He draws a clear distinction. *"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"* The world's wisdom does not lead them to God, but away from Him. God uses what the world considers folly to transform fools into godly people saved by Christ. In contrast, the apostle Paul says religious Jews sought "signs" to confirm light and truth. Non-Jews, Gentiles or Greeks of various ethnic backgrounds in the Roman Empire, sought "wisdom" as they followed Romanized ideals of Greek culture. *"But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* God chose to pay for the sins of the world by the sacrifice of His Son on the cross of Calvary. The symbol of folly, the means of execution of the failed, becomes the very sign of God's wisdom and God's power.

3- What will you do about it? Some choose to wear or display a cross as an emblem of faith in Jesus Christ. You can be persecuted just for that, whether or not you have true saving faith. It can be a mark of sincerity or hypocrisy, depending on the wearer. But in the largest sense, the cross of Christ stands at the crossroads of history as the great divider of mankind. The speeding masses of people intent on the broad road leading to destruction take little notice of the cross. Yet it is the exit marker for the narrow way that leads to life. Years ago, wandering streets in a large city in Scotland, I asked a shopkeeper which way was west; he didn't know, but he could tell me how to get to an address. But signs were unfamiliar. The only way to keep from getting lost was to focus on the cross on the spire of the tallest church in the center of downtown. Is the cross of Christ your marker for life? Your way of salvation? Paul says *"we are fools for Christ's sake."* What the world regards as weak, God says is true power. What the world regards as absurd, God says is the only way of salvation. *"He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption"* (1Corinthians1:30). It was in Christ on the cross that God worked salvation for His people, all who will put their trust in the only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Perhaps the two wisest and most powerful words in all the world are: *"Jesus saves."* This is the message He has given you to show and tell to everyone around you. That's why you can confidently share the good news about Jesus. It doesn't depend on your remarkable rhetoric. It's not about abstract concepts, it's about a Person. As the Bible says, *"believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."* The cross of Christ proclaims ultimate wisdom and power. *"Jesus saves!"* □