

This morning, I am in the second week of a new sermon series called The Gospel Changes Everything, based on the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians, which is the Apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. In Paul's day, Corinth was a part of the Roman Empire, a major port city on a narrow land bridge between Peloponnesus and mainland Greece. As a result, it was a significant economic and cultural hub, and a great place for a missionary like Paul to start a church, which we read about in Acts 18.

1 Corinthians is the first of two letters of Paul that we have addressed to the church in Corinth. He wrote 1 Corinthians from the city of Ephesus, probably about 54-55 AD. In this letter, Paul addresses issues of divisions in the church, heretical teachings, sexual issues, idolatry issues, and issues in their worship gatherings. Last week we began to look at how he confronted the divisions and rivalries in the church and reminded them of the gospel of Jesus and how rivalry and division are incompatible with an identity rooted in the gospel. Paul defines the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 - Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead to conquer sin and death, so that all who trust in Him will be saved from their sins and eternal separation from God. In order to better understand today's passage, I think it would be helpful to more fully understand what happens when you put your faith in Jesus.

On the human side, there are two things that happen: repent and believe. To repent is to turn from self-centeredness, and to believe is to faith in Jesus, that his death on the cross pays the penalty for our sins and is the only thing that can make us right with God.

On the heavenly side, there are three things that happen when we repent and believe: justification, adoption, and regeneration.

Justification - The legal act of God in which he thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us and declares us to be righteous in his sight (**God as judge**)

Romans 3:21-24 - *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 - *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Adoption - The act of God whereby he makes us members of his family (God as father)

Galatians 4:4-7 - *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "**Abba**, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

Regeneration - The act of God by which he imparts spiritual (eternal) life to us (God as heart surgeon)

Titus 3:4-5 - *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,*

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

When we come to faith in Christ, we are justified, adopted, and regenerated. We have the Spirit and see the world in a whole new way. With that background, let's read 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:16:

1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:16 - *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; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. ²⁶ Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." ^{NIV} **1 Corinthians 2:1** When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. ⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"-- ¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except

the Spirit of God. ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: ¹⁶ "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

In this passage, Paul confronts the Corinthian understanding of wisdom. They are too confident in their own knowledge and trusting in the wisdom of the world, but Paul knows that they are not as wise as they think they are. He wants them to know clearly that the wisdom of the world is not the same as the wisdom of God. In fact, without the Holy Spirit, the gospel and the things of God are foolishness.

1 Corinthians 1:18 - *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.*

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 - *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

1 Corinthians 2:14 - *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*

Apart from the Spirit, the things of God appear to be foolish. But the Spirit reveals the things of God to us so that we gain spiritual understanding:

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 - *However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"-- ¹⁰ but God has **revealed** it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*

One analogy is to consider the different levels of consciousness there are: from a rock to a plant to an animal to a human, and finally to a human with the Holy Spirit. The one with the Spirit has a different level of awareness of the world and of spiritual matters. **But to the one without the Spirit, the gospel is foolishness.**

How is the gospel foolish?

Think about what the gospel message is: a Jewish man who it is claimed was born to a virgin teenager in a stable grew up to gain a sizeable following as he taught and performed miracles. But then he was killed on a cross, a cruel and shameful death reserved for the worst criminals and rebels against the Roman state. He was rejected by the very people he came to save, he was deserted by his own disciples, he was executed by the proper authorities, and he could not even save himself. And then he reportedly rose again from the grave. And this crucified Jew from some backwater of the Roman Empire was none other than the divine Son of God, the Lord of all, the judge of the world, and your eternal destiny depends upon how you respond to Him. Madness!

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 - Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Rabbi Trypho in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho – *“Sir, these and such-like passages of Scripture compel us to await One who is great and glorious, and takes the everlasting Kingdom from the Ancient of Days as Son of Man. But this your so-called Christ is without honor and glory, so that He has even fallen into the uttermost curse that is in the Law of God, for he was crucified.”*

It's foolishness to those without the Spirit

Acts 17:18 - A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

What does this mean for us?

1) You will be seen as foolish by those who do not believe

Acts 17:32-33 - When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."³³ At that, Paul left the Council.

Consider some quotes:

"Faith is believing in that which I know ain't so." - [Mark Twain](#)

"All thinking men are atheists." - [Ernest Hemmingway](#)

"The world holds two classes of men - intelligent men without religion, and religious men without intelligence." - Abu Ala Al-Maari

"Religion is fundamentally opposed to everything I hold in veneration--courage, clear thinking, honesty, fairness, and, above all, love of the truth." - H. L. Mencken

"Religions vary in their degree of idiocy, but I reject them all. For most people, religion is nothing more than a substitute for a malfunctioning brain." - Gene Roddenberry

"Christianity is the most ridiculous, the most absurd and bloody religion that has ever infected the world." – Voltaire

"Nothing could be more idiotic and absurd than the doctrine of the trinity." Robert Green Ingersoll

"I would never want to be the member of a group whose symbol was a guy nailed to two pieces of wood." - George Carlin"

In other words, the atheist says to the Christian, “what you believe is foolish, and you are a fool for believing it.” The reality is that either they see it as foolish because (a) it IS foolish and Christians ARE a fool to believe it, or (b) it is spiritually discerned, and apart from having the Spirit of God, an atheist will never “get it.” Either way, recognize that you will be seen as a fool for believing in Jesus.

2) The wisdom of God is not the same as the wisdom of this world

Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that if they follow worldly wisdom, they will have stripped the gospel of all spiritual power. He will not depend upon worldly wisdom in his preaching, and he does not want them to depend upon worldly wisdom in their discipleship.

Think of Jesus’ beatitudes – blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in

heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted because of righteousness. They are the happy ones. Not the rich and powerful but those who in the end learn to abandon self-reliance to seek the grace of God

Think of a couple contrasts between worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom. What about money. Worldly wisdom says save as much as you can and spend as much as you can on yourself. Enjoy what you can with your money. Godly wisdom says it's better to give than receive and to trust in Him for tomorrow. Godly wisdom tells us that the rich are not the ones with millions in their bank accounts. The rich are those whose lives are not controlled by money, but are free from both greed and fear as they trust their heavenly Father. This is why Americans who go on mission trips reliably come back saying "they have nothing but they are happy, while we have everything and are miserable."

What about sex. Worldly wisdom tells you to get as much as you can and live for your own pleasure. Godly wisdom tells us to treat people with absolute purity and to reserve sex for marriage.

What about power? Gain as much as you can. Jesus tells us that the greatest are those who serve.

What about how to spend your life? YOLO vs. YWLF.

Worldly wisdom is based on the belief that there is nothing outside of this world. Everything must have a natural cause, and we must do everything we can while we are here on earth. But with the Spirit, we know there is a purpose, and there is an eternal destiny, and that changes everything about how we think and how we live.

3) You can not convince someone apart from the Spirit revealing God to someone

Matthew 11:27 - "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Share the gospel and pray that the Lord will reveal Himself to them.

This means that I will not try to convince by worldly wisdom; I will proclaim Christ crucified and trust in the power of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 - When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

In those days, the Sophists were the standard for public speakers, and those who could not meet their standards were viewed as seriously inferior. It would boost the status of the church if their leaders could compete with other professionals on the platform. But Paul refused to allow the gospel message to be judged by the speaker's rhetorical ability.

D. A. Carson writes, *“What Paul avoided was artificial communication that won plaudits for the speaker but distracted from the message . . . [Paul's words] warn against any method that leads people to say, ‘What a marvelous preacher! [or apologist!]*’ rather than, ‘What a marvelous Savior!’”

Paul knew that he was not an orator but a herald. *“The herald's task is not to create a persuasive message at all, but to convey effectively the already articulated message of another.”* (Litfin). He would not distract from the gospel by his methods, because he knew that his methods had no power to save or transform hearts. Today it might be music or lighting or many other things that might divert attention from Christ and the cross to the antics and style of the speaker or band.

The gospel is foolishness to the world, and you will appear foolish to many. Do not be afraid. Trust in the wisdom and power of God, even when it contradicts the wisdom of the world. Believe the gospel, and pray for those who do not know Jesus, that the Spirit would reveal God to them.