

The eight verses preceding our reading this morning were written by Paul because of the divisions that had developed within the church at Corinth. Paul saw these splits as dangerous and warned the believers against such attitudes of judgment and criticism. Paul viewed the four conflicting parties as evidence of how the culture of Corinth was influencing the church rather than the church influencing the culture. These believers were judging, deciding and living by a Corinthian, worldly, carnal point of view.

Paul saw this narrow view as a great tragedy and it was a great burden on his heart. He believed that this was a great misunderstanding of the gospel and a great misrepresentation of church life to the world. He felt that this was a great offense to the Holy Spirit.

Paul contended that the seeds of division within the Corinthian fellowship was growing in the soil of intellectual pride and worldly wisdom. He attacked this attitude of worldly wisdom. 1 Cor 1: 18 and 25 are perhaps part of a sermon Paul would have preached had he been with them. *“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* *“For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,”* And like every Christian preacher, Paul had a scriptural text, and he actually had two, one at the beginning and one at the end. He begins with Is. 29:14 and concludes with Jeremiah 9:24. What we have therefore is Paul’s exposition of these two Old Testament texts. *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being save it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate,’ or, the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ So that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.*

I might title Paul’s sermon, Human Wisdom Is Not The Way To Find God. The sermon is the pattern of Reformed Church preaching with three sections. First, vv 18-25, the central fact of the gospel is nonsense to human reason. Second, vv 26-31, this inscrutability is supported by the composition of our own fellowship with/in Corinth. Third and final, 2:1-5, My own preaching and living among you emphasizes this fact. In v.18, Paul begins his theme, *“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.”* Here is the gospel! God took human form and visited our world. He taught and lived love among us. He was misunderstood, rejected, nailed to a cross and lock in a tomb. But He defeated the power of sin rising victoriously over death, empowering His followers with His own Holy Spirit and commissioning them to take this gospel to the ends of the earth. He has promised to return one day in victory and in judgment. This is the message of the cross, a message that divides people into two groups: those who are perishing because they consider the message as foolishness, and those who are being saved, having experienced within their own lives the power of God.

Why do people consider the gospel foolishness? That is a simple enough question, but its answer is profound. People have always considered God’s behavior foolish when compared to their own wisdom. Our thinking that God is foolish is part of God’s wondrous plan. He is determined that people will not discover Him through human wisdom. If salvation were the result of human wisdom only the smart would ever find God. That would be terribly tragic and unfair. And, once discovering God, the smart person could claim the credit for this achievement. Salvation would become human centered rather than God centered, and those saved would have grounds to boast.

Throughout human history even the smartest of people have not been able to find God. Human wisdom does not work. The sooner we learn this, the better. *“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”* [1:21].

Think about the foolishness of God. In many instances throughout the Old Testament, God’s foolish behavior wins the day. I think of story of Gideon in Judges 6. The Israelites had been persecuted by the Midianites for seven years; they had forced the Israelites to live in caves. God came to Gideon and said, *“The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”* [Judges 6:12] Gideon’s response is nothing short of interesting and amazing. *“But sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.”* [Judges 6:13]. The Lord coaxed Gideon into obedience. Finally, he consented, but only after the display of two signs. Gideon sought to serve God and the nation with his army of 32,000. The Lord told Gideon that he had too many men. The ranks were shrunk from 32,000 to 22,000 to 10,000 to 300. Victory was finally given to the Lord and to Gideon. But I am sure that Gideon was tempted to think that what he was doing was utter foolishness. When it is tested and tried, the foolishness of God is wiser than our wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than our strength.

Think of the foolishness of God in the lives and the stories of Joseph [Genesis] and Naaman [Kings]. Think of Jesus’ foolish word to Nicodemus about being born again and that intelligent man’s response to him in John 3. Or think of Jesus speaking to his disciples, *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them.”* [Jn 16:12].

Because of all this, God’s appeal to you and I cannot be on the basis of our human reason or experience. Our reason clouds our way to God and it always will. God appeals to us on the basis of faith. Salvation is not an act of intelligence. Salvation is more a move of trust and confidence toward a loving God. We need to stop our natural inclination to think and decide on human terms only. Please do not misunderstand me on this point, God gave us a mind and we should use it, but to use only our minds is dangerous. We make things difficult or nearly impossible for God when we act on our opinions and our own judgment.

Paul then turned his attention to a second fact, the make up of the Corinthian church. He told the Corinthians that Jesus Christ is the source of wisdom, strength and was of noble birth. He is righteousness, holiness and redemption. He told them and now he speaks also to us, that when you boast before others, when you form petty cliques or groups, when you make judgments of one another, you are only displaying your ignorance of God’s true wisdom, Some times I think it is too easy to forget that God has said, *“Judgement is mine, says the Lord.”*

Jesus said, *“Apart from me you can do nothing.”* Most of us do not believe that. You may be able to accomplish a lot from your own point of view, but in terms of heavenly evaluation you can do nothing. Paul was apprehensive about whether his simple gospel would receive a hearing among those sophisticated people in Corinth. We know after the fact that by God’s grace there were results!!!

Isaiah guides us and invites us. *Seek the Lord while He may be found: Call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him. And to our God, for He will freely pardon. 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. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without*

*watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so it is with my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” [Is 55: 6-11].*

Can salvation be achieved through human wisdom, grasping and trying? Never! Salvation is and must be through God’s wisdom. His wisdom is foolishness to some, but it is God’s power for those who have experienced it. I encourage you to meditate on these words and then accept anew, God’s fullness and experience His Holy Spirit. Take His Word and sacrifice to be your personal wisdom. Amen