

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

The Gospel Appears Foolish to the Intellectual 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5

Introduction

- Here Paul explains that the gospel message seems like foolishness to those who are caught up in intellectualism, philosophy, and the preeminence of human reasoning.
- He begins by discussing how the gospel might appear to be foolish, and later he will discuss how it really is wisdom. Here he addresses three issues:
 1. The apparent foolishness of the content of the gospel (1 Cor 1:18-25)
 2. The apparent foolishness of the recipients of the gospel (1 Cor 1:26-31)
 3. The apparent foolishness of the preachers of the gospel (1 Cor 2:1-5)

The Foolishness of Its Content (1 Cor 1:18-25)

- Paul begins by discussing the apparent foolishness of the gospel message itself. From a purely human perspective, the word of the cross appears to be foolishness (1 Cor 1:18).
- But God delights in negating so-called worldly wisdom (1 Cor 1:19-21). It was God's plan that the world would not come to know Him by means of its own human wisdom.
- Those who are perishing (whether Jews or Greeks) are not able to reach God through their own systems of effort (1 Cor 1:22-23). Jews demanded supernatural signs from those who claim to speak for God, and Greeks were constantly searching for systems of philosophy that depend on sophisticated human reasoning.
- But to those who are called by God into salvation (whether Jews or Greeks) the simple gospel message represents the true power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).
- What seems to fallen mankind like a foolish act of God is really wiser than the insignificant wisdom of man (1 Cor 1:25). What seems like weakness to fallen mankind is really stronger than the puny strength of man.

The Foolishness of Its Recipients (1 Cor 1:26-31)

- In this section Paul explains that the gospel also could be viewed as foolishness because of the type of people who receive it. Christianity seemed to appeal most to the people who are least qualified, from a human perspective (1 Cor 1:26). There were not many believers who were from the ranks of the intellectuals, the ruling leaders, or the aristocracy.
- Instead God deliberately chose the least qualified people, from a human perspective (1 Cor 1:27-29). He chose those whom the world viewed as foolish, weak, and non-existent. He deliberately did this in order to shame and humble those who took pride in their human qualifications, and to render useless all of their self-effort. By doing this, God made sure that no human being could boast in his own human efforts, abilities, or accomplishments as far as salvation is concerned.
- It is by God's work alone that anyone comes to salvation (1 Cor 1:30-31). The true wisdom of God was contained in His plan of salvation through the substitutionary death of Christ on our behalf. It is by this plan alone that believers have access to the righteousness, sanctification, and redemption which God provides. If anyone is going to boast, he can only boast in what the Lord has accomplished on his behalf, rather than in his own wisdom, strength, status, or power.

The Foolishness of Its Preachers (1 Cor 2:1-5)

- The gospel also has no claim to wisdom on the basis of the superiority of its preachers. Paul had come to the Corinthians from Athens, which was the headquarters of Greek philosophy. There he had spoken to the philosophers at the Areopagus, which was actually a court. This was where Socrates had been tried and sentenced to death for “introducing strange gods.” In Paul’s day, however, he probably received nothing more than a hearing rather than a trial (Acts 17:17-21). In his presentation to the philosophers, Paul had not spoken of Christ’s death on the cross. Even so, one member of the court was converted (Acts 17:34).
- Paul mentioned five important points regarding the preaching of the gospel, and he used himself as the point of illustration.
 1. Paul did not use a manner of speaking that was eloquent. He spoke in a very ordinary way (1 Cor 2:1).
 2. Paul deliberately limited his range of subject matter to what Jesus Christ had accomplished through His work on the cross (1 Cor 2:2).
 3. Paul did not trust in his own strength or abilities. He demonstrated his own personal inadequacy and limitations (1 Cor 2:3).
 4. Paul’s method of argumentation did not use persuasive rhetorical techniques (1 Cor 2:4). By avoiding this, anything that was accomplished was clearly the result of God working in their midst.
 5. Paul’s reason for using this simple approach was to eliminate any hint of human effort as a requirement in the process of salvation. The skillfulness of a preacher is never an adequate foundation for faith. True faith is the result of God’s powerful working in and for people.

Points of Application

- Our own society is also filled with humanism, intellectualism, and an emphasis on human reasoning. When we share the simple message of Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross on our behalf, we too need to realize that it will probably appear to be foolishness to those who are perishing. Some will believe – those whom God has called out from the world. They will see (like we do) that this simple gospel message is really the power of God which is working in and for us.
- Just like in Paul’s day, in our time God delights in humbling the arrogance of mankind. All of the best efforts of man can never be enough to reach God. It is God that must reach down to us, and He does this on His own terms and in His own way. Even when His ways don’t make sense to us, His ways are the only basis for our salvation. We do not have anything to offer Him or to contribute in the process – it is God’s work from start to finish.
- A person doesn’t need to be a trained orator or philosophical thinker in order to be used by God to share the simple message of salvation through Christ. This is very reassuring, because very few of us have all of the qualifications and credentials that the world always desires. Each of us can say, “God can use even me!”

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Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)