

Foolishness of the Cross (Part 1)

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Preacher: Tom Holland

[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Elder Tom Holland teaches on 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18.

! We're going to be back in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Interesting that the Apostle Paul, brilliant, brilliant theologian, refers to this portion of Scripture as the foolishness of God.

Now don't jump into conclusions, he's not committing blasphemy there. We'll get into that. But tonight, I'm going to try and cover 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 18.

This is verse 18 right here. 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.

Great verse of Scripture. Now, we are not very far into the study of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. And already, I think it's easy to discover that Corinth was divided on a number of issues.

[1:28] And we'll get into that more as we go through the book. And Paul here speaks of the foolishness of God. And he contrasts that with the wisdom of men.

And we're going to be camping out in verse 18 this evening, and then we'll move on from there. But Paul is not committing the ultimate blasphemy by declaring God to be foolish.

Far from it. What he's doing is he's drawing a line in the sand. Paul knows, as we should, that there is a difference between the way God thinks and the way man thinks.

Lost men, of course, think they are wise. Many lost men also think God is foolish. But there is a contrast between these two types of thinking.

It is a contrast between true wisdom, which belongs to God, and foolishness, which belongs to man.

[2:45] A foolish man thinks that he is wise. And that God's supposed wisdom is in reality foolishness.

You know, when I was working on this lesson, my mind kept drifting back to the world of Dr. Carl Sagan.

And that may be a name that many of you are familiar with. He was a brilliant astronomer. But coupled with his brilliance, he didn't mind telling his audience that there is no God.

He doesn't exist. And when we look up into the heavens, all we see and study concerning the heavens is all there is and all there ever will be.

Dr. Sagan was a supreme denier of the truth concerning the universe. He went to his grave and he died young and he went to his grave denying the existence of God but he practically worshipped the stars and galaxies and black holes and everything that makes up the universe now Carl Sagan resides in the blackest of pits and he's in a place that light does not and cannot penetrate and he has to be thinking how could I have been so foolish and he had people that tried to reach him

[4:55] I know Dr. Sproul talked to him on a number of occasions called him on the phone in some regards Paul found himself living in such a world he discovered that the ancient Greeks loved and practically worshipped philosophy that was their world now I have a college education I have a college degree I have a minor I did graduate work but somehow I escaped any classes on philosophy I never had to take one and I'm glad but the Greeks loved philosophy they created a word to describe all of this it was the word philosophia and meant love of wisdom and they built their whole culture around it well the Greeks also created a host of gods and if we were to study them we would quickly brand them as false gods in the Greek world there is many varied philosophies as there were philosophers and people chose which philosopher to follow and then tried to follow him vigorously and one thing these various philosophies had in common is all of them rejected any concept of moral absolutes they rejected moral absolutes and when there are no moral absolutes in a person's world there are no standards for truth

I remember seeing a debate years ago with a Christian man and there was a liberal college and a whole line of students had lined up and this one guy worked his way to the front and he said I just want you to know I don't believe in absolutes I reject that and he said well how sure are you though that there's no absolutes well I'm I'm absolutely sure and the instructor the Christian guy says so you're absolutely there's no absolutes oh absolutely well by now the audience which was pretty much in favor of him a fellow student they were laughing and he couldn't figure out why but he tried to make this impassioned plea that I'm absolutely certain there's no absolutes and finally the instructor said you've already named one and he tried to explain it and the guy he couldn't understand what he was trying to tell him in the Greek world there were many different varied philosophies and they had a philosopher over each one of them and people chose which one to follow and they rejected moral absolutes as I've said the next step is that any belief in the concept of right or wrong flees because such a concept depends on human opinion which in their world view was flawed because they believed in moral absolutes particularly the Christian world now in Corinth which is in Greece this aberrant thinking made its way into the church of Corinth many in the congregation wanted to belong to the church but they didn't want to sacrifice or abandon their particular brand of pagan beliefs philosophy that they adopted they had a basic understanding of the grace of God but they insisted that it must be joined with their brand of human wisdom developed by their brand of philosophical learning that was just a given for them but there was a serious problem which Paul fully recognized once we are joined to Christ by the unmerited unearned and undeserved favor and grace of God we don't need human wisdom generated by human philosophy it flies the coop as we sail up at the farm we don't need it it's not only unnecessary it is grossly misleading we cannot add to the grace of the atonement through human wisdom you can't do it Paul believed all of this listen to his inspired words and this is actually taken out of the second chapter of the book of Colossians verse 8 see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ now I would say that is the defining statement by the apostle Paul concerning his understanding of human philosophy he even equates such philosophy as equal to empty deceit that's what he calls it empty deceit and Paul understood something that the Corinthian church apparently did not and let me paraphrase it and this is a very close paraphrase to what Paul understood you have now become Christians as converts to Christ you have been filled with God's spirit you have the Holy

[12 : 20] Spirit of God living in you and as a result of his indwelling you are able to recognize the scriptures as the word of God coming from him without any mixture of error you no longer need to vainly pursue human philosophy it did not help you when you were unbelievers and it will certainly not help you now that you believe give it up you hear Paul saying that give it up it has nothing to offer but confusion and division you are now united around God's supreme revelation in Jesus Christ don't be misled or split by human speculations and those words actually came from the mind of

John MacArthur but I believe the apostle Paul would hardly agree society in the Greek culture in Paul's day and in our culture today is still in love with philosophy which boils down to the human way of understanding things many in the world and in the liberal church have created gods to try and explain things such as where have we been where are we going men and women in our day have almost deified human education and human opinions and it is interesting to note that human opinion is constantly changing in spite of these changes men and women continue to put great stock in the current flow of humanistic ideas and people in our day are significantly devoid of divine authority which has largely been discarded and when people reject divine authority they have nowhere else to turn there's nowhere else to go this is true of the church today the liberal church is in love with human philosophy and human trends people are looking for answers to life's problems but they are largely looking in the wrong places all spiritual truth is found in scripture alone nothing need be added nothing can be added the great pastor from England Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones said this the whole drift toward modernism that has blighted the church of God and nearly destroyed its living gospel may be traced to an hour when men begin to turn from revelation and turn to philosophy now I hope I have not overstated my distrust of human wisdom and I mean overstate it in the context of scriptural truth I like truth I have read dozens of books on the great battle of the civil war I'm fascinated by the American Civil War but as I got older I

began to leave that behind books on the great battles and conflict and as I got older I began to focus on the great authors of the books concerning the Bible and I have around 1500 books with Bible references authors that I trust in my home library whenever human wisdom gets mixed in with divine revelation revelation loses people and were arguing with members of the Corinthian church since they had been saved and now possessed the spirit of God they no longer had any need of humanly devised schemes of philosophy this church should have been united around Christ and here they were being ministered to by a man who met Christ Paul sometimes people blow up and say he never met him yeah he did remember that road to Damascus he met him and they should have been united around Christ Paul does not want them split by human speculations concerning truth the truth of Christ is absolute not subject to error or speculation now in many churches these roadblocks to truth still exist the world still loves forms of worship human forms and still has human desires to know truth on their own terms and as a result mankind has many gods gods of education gods of human opinion gods of false religion!
[18 : 53] it is easy humanistic thought and false beliefs may may may may which always leads to speculation.

And the speculation is, I wonder which one of these philosophers is correct. I wonder which one is right. They cannot all be correct.

That's true. But they can all be wrong. And that's true. Now, we could go on with this for a very long time.

But I want to move on. And the natural place to go is superiority of God's wisdom. Again, 1 Corinthians 1.18, For the word of the cross is folly or foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. The only way unsaved man thinks that he can elevate his own wisdom is by lowering God's wisdom.

[20 : 44] I wouldn't want to be on that ice pond in the middle of a hard winter. The cross comes across as foolish and that word is a Greek word, moria, from which we get the word moron.

I'd like to wear that brand. The foolishness is moronic and nonsense to unbelievers who are dependent upon their own wisdom and that will ultimately lead to their own destruction.

Lost mankind, utilizing human wisdom and only human wisdom cannot understand the cross. They can't understand it.

That's why the Holy Spirit must draw us to the cross of Christ. Man's not going to draw you there. It takes the Holy Spirit to do that.

We cannot save ourselves. Only God can save us. A step further is that the lost man can't even understand the cross.

[22 : 00] We cannot understand the atonement. We cannot understand the substitutionary work of Christ. One proof of these facts is that of Peter.

When he heard the Lord Jesus say that he was going to the cross to pay a ransom for many with his own life, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him. O foot and mouth Peter.

You've got to love him. Matthew 16.22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, Far be it from you, Lord.

This shall never happen. Look how Jesus responded to him. But the Lord turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan.

You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Apparently, this statement by the Lord didn't make that large of an impression on Peter.

[23 : 08] Because a few minutes later, soldiers came into the garden of Gethsemane and Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of one who was trying to arrest the Lord.

And this is what Jesus said to Peter about his attack. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.

The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword in its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?

That's in John 18, verses 10 to 11. And according to passages in the book of Acts, only after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus did Peter grasp what had occurred during the garden episode. By then Peter was saved and understood because he was by then filled with the Holy Spirit. Only then was Peter able to write these inspired words.

[24 : 26] And we studied these not too long ago. 1 Peter 2, verse 24. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been

healed.

When I read that I was reminded of the words of Dr. John Owen in his book *The Mortification of Sin*. And in that book Dr. Owen says this, You need to be killing sin in your life or it will be killing you. Great wisdom from one of the wisest men that ever lived. Now we still have further to go in our lesson on the foolishness of God.

This is part one. I'm still going to be in part one next time. But when I read Peter's inspired words and then quoted John Owen, the thought came to me about seven o'clock this morning, there's no better place to stop tonight.

And next time we're going to finish part one on the foolishness of God and launch into part two. Let's have a word of prayer.

[25:51] Thank you Lord for these men. They mean so much to me and to all of us. Thank you Lord Jesus that you've given us eyes to see and ears to hear and tongues to confess.

and may we be busy confessing Christ to the lost around us, lost neighbors, lost church members. The time is short and the time for Christ's return is at hand. You're with us Lord in the coming days as we focus upon the Master.

We pray in His name. Amen. To learn more, visit us in person or see the website at highlandparkbaptist.net