

1Corinthians 17-12-03b

Let's resume our study now. We're in 1 Corinthians 1, looking at the contrast between the message of the cross, which is foolishness to those who are perishing. The sequence, if you will, is not that the message seemed foolish, therefore they are perishing.

They are perishing, therefore the message seems foolish. And it's important to note that order because if salvation depends on your smarts, on how good you are at making logical deductions, then a lot of us could never get there because we wouldn't have the information, we wouldn't have a good enough preacher or evangelist who maybe didn't make it clear or got the message scrambled. And unless everybody got a wonderfully reasoned, well-documented message and everyone had perfect understanding and capacity to parse the arguments and weigh the various factors and draw a conclusion, in simplest terms, if you think about, well, you can either perish or you can live forever.

You can either have a meaningless life except for eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die, or you can have a life that not only has purpose and meaning and enjoyment regardless of circumstance now and an incredibly bright future. In the simplest sense, who wouldn't choose that? It isn't a matter of balancing the options or weighing evidence, ultimately. It comes down to that heart reaction of either dependence or independence, of either acceptance or rejection of God.

We are either proud or humble. James 4.6, God resists the proud, God gives grace to the humble. He doesn't give grace and then we become humble.

He doesn't withhold grace and that makes us proud. We choose. That's the nature of free will.

We're either going to depend on ourselves, we're either going to trust our reasoning skills and logic, we're going to let ourselves be convinced by our own mental machinations, or we're going to recognize in our heart of hearts that there is a need that we cannot fill. We either decide that we are adequate or that we are inadequate in and of ourselves. From that heart response flows everything else.

If you decide you're adequate, you're going to find all kinds of ways to dispense with the message, to dispense with the need of it, you're going to find it foolish, you're going to find it nonsensical, you're going to mock and ridicule, you will pillory it, you will mock it, you will scorn and deride it, because you've basically already decided in your heart, I don't need anything, I have need of nothing. Remember that can even be a problem when you go to Revelation chapter three, I have everything, I have need of nothing. The whole church was characterized by that attitude.

Or we recognize that we have a lack, there is a hole in our spiritual being that we cannot fill, that we can't mend. There is a flaw, there is a shortcoming, and we are incapable of helping ourselves, of mending ourselves, of achieving anything beyond the momentary. And why would

God organize the message of the cross the way that He has? Paul says that Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel not with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

Now the cross of Christ here is a figure of speech, it's got two or three different names, one of the most common ones is metalepsis, where one thing is put for another. It isn't the actual pieces of wood, the cross of Christ. We understand that this is a metaphor, the specific nature of it is metalepsis.

You have an example of this over in Genesis chapter 19 where Lot is pleading with the frantic crowd outside, they are trying to get to his visitors, they want to have their way with him. And he says, you know, take my daughters instead in this sort of horrifying alternative. And he says, because these men have come under the shadow of my roof.

Well, the shadow of his roof is put for his hospitality and his responsibility as a host for their well-being. But this notion is called the shadow of my roof. It has nothing to do with light and the absence thereof, it has everything to do with intention and responsibility.

The same thing here, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. This is put for the crucifixion as an event, but more so it is put for what was accomplished on the cross during the crucifixion. It isn't the physical death of Christ per se, it isn't the nails and the thorns and the scourging and the ultimate physical death, which actually did not happen until the work of the cross was complete.

Jesus dismissed his own spirit and did not die, so to speak, from his wounds. But how can the cross of Christ be made of no effect? In what sense would it be made of no effect? Is the cross of Christ of no effect in God the Father's eyes? Certainly not. Is it of no effect for those who have already accepted Christ as their Savior and received eternal salvation and are waiting for the great resurrection day and entrance into the eternal future? What does this mean when it says the cross of Christ should be made of no effect? The effect Paul is talking about here in context is the preaching message.

If he appealed to their logic, if he tried to answer all of their debate questions, if he tried to go down this list of ten skeptical observations and refute them all and rebut them all and provide cogent answers to them all, the actual gospel message, the message of the cross, the cross of Christ would be made of no effect because the message of the sacrificial work of Christ on our behalf is easily obfuscated by side trails into the forensics of it. What is redemption? What is reconciliation? What is propitiation? What is atonement? Why are they necessary? Why does it have to be with blood? Why can't God just say, dot, dot, dot, I forgive you, as so many seem to think would make more sense? Well, there are sound and not just persuasive but concrete reasons why these things were accomplished. But Paul says that is not what I came to you with.

I didn't come to you with an apologetics platform. I didn't come to you with a debate to answer skeptic questions. I presented to you Christ and him crucified.

And that message of the cross is going to be foolish to those who are perishing. As long as they choose to remain perishing, it's not going to make sense. There will be plenty of objectionable material.

To us who are being saved, it is the power of God. At the heart and center of the message of the cross, the cross of Christ is the power of God. You remember in one of the gospel accounts when Jesus says, your sins are forgiven you, and somebody in the crowd is whispering, and they say, who does he think he is? Only God can forgive sins.

And he says, so that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins. I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and walk, so that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins. The power of God is in solving the sin problem.

Let me ask you, out of all of these skeptical objections, everything you've ever heard, Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins with his genocidal, misogynistic God comments, and all the rest of it, all of this naysaying, all of this mudslinging, all of this scornful derision, have you ever heard or seen or read anywhere where Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, any of the other famous atheists, Bertrand Russell going back a hundred years, ask them how they have solved the sin problem, the corruption of our nature, our innate selfishness. Ask Richard Dawkins, okay, you've got this selfish gene, and you've got the ancestor's tale, and you've got these guys that write God is not great, and all the rest of it. Okay, you've done all of your disparaging, tearing down.

What have you contributed by way of a solution to sin? Does reading any of your books make me a better person? Am I given moral strength? You can offer what you consider to be a better alternative. Well, why don't you act this way? You ought to be. You should do.

Let's all be altruistic. Let's all emulate a lot of these Christian virtues. Where is the power to do it? The Surgeon General says quit smoking.

Does he give you the power to quit? Chantix is one of these people nicotine patch companies used to have a commercial that said they gave you the power to calm and the power to quit, and they had to take it off because they got in trouble with the FCC because they do not have the power to quit in their little lozenge, in their little gum, in their little patch. It doesn't give you the power to quit. That has to come from somewhere else.

So it's no accident that Paul uses the word here, the power to quit, to power of God in verse 18, the power of God. Now we know that in Greek there are several different words for power. The word that's used here is dunamis.

Dunamis. This is where we get dynamite. You know, there is exousia, which is sort of an authority type of power.

There is kratos, which is the brute strength sort of power. There are many different words, but here we have dunamis. And what is the particular aspect of God's power that we're looking at

here? This is ability, capacity.

A stick of dynamite has the ability or capacity to explode and move dirt, to crack rock, to release energy in a way that is either destructive or constructive, depending on how it is applied. But it is power in terms of its potential, what it can do, its ability. So when you talk about the power of God to save, to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

Does God have the ability, the potential to save everyone? Yes, he does. Is it going to be effectual working of his power for everyone? No, it is not. There are many who are going to perish and are not going to be saved.

Those who are perishing, this message is foolishness. To those who are being saved, it is the dunamis of God. It is the potential every day and into the eternal future to keep on saving us.

I am saved today. I was saved yesterday. I will be saved tomorrow.

I will be saved every day of my life. I will be saved after my death. I will be resurrected.

I will be entered into the eternal realms. That is the active and continual working of God's power. But to those who are perishing, it isn't there and the whole notion is foolish.

So the idea that it ought to make sense before I believe seems to be a valid objection. Well, why would God give me reason and logic and then give me a message that seems foolish and I have to believe that before anything will make sense? Why can't it make sense up front? Well, in reality, it does make sense when you begin with a fundamental premise and this is what we talked about in the first session. The fundamental premise is I have a need.

Without the premise that there is a need, without the premise that I am corrupt and fallen and sinful and I cannot overcome that corruption, I do not have the power. Paul talks about it in Romans. Remember, he says, what I want to do, I don't do.

What I don't want to do, that I do. Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I find a law within me that my mind has all of these noble aspirations, but my actions, my body serves sin. I fall short.

I am corrupt. Well, we can delude ourselves into saying, I'm not so bad. My corruption is not really corruption.

I'll define it away. I'll explain it away. There's your foolishness.

Since I can't meet an absolute standard of good, I'll redefine what good is to fit what I do. And guess what? What I do is now good. So I have no problem.

According to God's standard, I'm fallen. I'm corrupt. I am headed for death.

In me dwelleth no good thing. I need cleansing. I need enablement.

I need a power from outside myself to transcend my flesh and my selfishness and my susceptibility to temptation and to that which is detrimental and harmful to myself and others. I need a power beyond myself, a transcendent enablement. So that I can meet that righteous absolute standard.

That's a recognition that precedes coming to understand the wisdom of God. If you receive my words and hide my commandments with thee, if you seek them as silver and search for them as for hidden treasures, not say I've got my own. Thank you very much.

I don't need your treasure. I don't need what's buried in the ground. Look, I've got some dry leaves here in my hand.

These are my treasure. I define this as treasure. That's all I need.

Well, why would you dig? Why would you trouble yourself? Why would you believe somebody who says there is treasure in the ground if you are willing to seek it and it is a transcendent and eternal treasure? It is better than gold. It is better than silver. And you say, I don't believe that.

I've got this handful of leaves and look, they crumble when I crunch them in my hand. This is all I need. And I define this as treasure.

Well, that may work as long as you are standing there deluding yourself. But on the great final day when we will all stand before God to be judged, your leaves aren't going to make it. And there are people who say, well, that's fine.

If there is a God, if He is anything like what is described in the Bible, I don't like Him and I don't want eternal life with Him anyway. I would just as soon perish. Well, they are going to get their wish.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Well, the Bible has a lot to say about these people who are wise in their own eyes and disputers of the age. Turn back a few pages to Acts 13. We are looking for Acts 13 verse 41.

If you look at the context here, this is the preaching of Saul and Barnabas. They go to Antioch at Pisidia and Paul stands up in verse 16, motions with his hand and says, men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. Notice there is a decision to fear God that is preceded getting this great informative message from Paul.

You who fear God, listen. The God of this people, Israel, chose our fathers. He goes all the way through to the appearance of Jesus Christ.

In verse 27, those who dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled the prophets in condemning Him. There is a heart problem so that the wisdom and knowledge of God don't penetrate. Think about political debate.

If you are a dyed in the wool conservative, it doesn't matter how logical, how footnoted, how full of evidence a liberal argument is, you will find refutations for it. You will reject it. You will push it away.

It's one of those, don't bother me with the facts, my mind is made up things. Do you see talking heads on television? They get the conservative and the liberal representatives around a table and there's a moderator and they say, well, you know, what do you say about this? And you know, the position on the left gives their view and, well, what do you say? And the position on the right gives their view. Do you ever see somebody saying, you know, that's a really good point.

I think you've changed my mind. The logic of that, the facts that you use to back that up, well, I'm persuaded. You've convinced me.

I've got a whole new view of this. What is the power of wisdom and logic when people typically just fight and debate and go tooth and claw and if they can't come up with an answer today, they're going to go home and do some research and give you another answer tomorrow. Does this ever happen to you when you have an argument and you, you know, 15 minutes later you come up with a real zinger and, oh, I should have said thus and so.

Why? Because you didn't actually find what the other person said persuasive, you just didn't have a good answer at the moment. Wisdom and logic and argument don't typically change the heart. You have to really be humble and teachable and open-minded and say, I don't know.

Let me find the best construction, the best evidence, the best argument, the best debate points on this issue and then I can make up my mind. We typically come pre-persuaded. We have prejudice.

We have, and we have what they call confirmation bias. We tend to accept things that reinforce what we've already decided and we tend to reject things that run counter even if we can't really answer them or if they have a pretty good logical punch, we just say, well, there's got to be something wrong with that. I don't know what it is, but there's something wrong with it because our mind's made up.

Well, that's why the gospel doesn't come starting with persuasion. It isn't founded on logical argumentation. It is founded on God's power and we recognize that if God is the creator and he made us and he knows our situation, then he's going to be the one to have the solution.

And in the same way that he is the originator of our life, he is going to be the originator of what we need for life, both now and in terms of eternal life. The author of our deliverance is going to be the finisher and the completer of our deliverance. There's not a lot of argument about that.

If there is a creator God, he's holding all of the power and if he is benevolent and if he loves us, then he is going to exercise that power on our behalf. And the emblem, the symbol of God's willingness to put himself out for us is the cross. Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay

down his life for his friends, for those that he loves, for those he cares about.

Sacrifice, it costs me something to do something for you. That's the message of the cross. For God to say, oh, okay, I forgive you, it doesn't cost God anything and it diminishes the horrific nature and consequence of sin.

If sin is something so light that a word spoken can wipe away all of its presence and its power and its influence and it's like someone coming and saying, well, I've got a metastasizing cancer and it's spreading all through my body and you say, oh, well, that's okay. Saying that's okay has no power to make the cancer go away. And for God to simply say, well, I know you sinned, but that's all right.

It doesn't take away the heart that makes that decision, that buys into that lie. There needs to be a power. People say, well, God created cancer, why can't God cure cancer? He can.

Why doesn't he? It is a picture in the fallen world like so many other forms of suffering of the consequences of sin. Guess what? Before sin, there was no cancer. Before sin, there was no suffering.

There was no pain. There was no death. There were no tears.

It isn't God to blame for the presence of these things. It is the free will. It is the conscious free decision to attempt to live apart from God and disconnecting from the source of health and the source of life and the source of goodness necessarily is going to result in non-goodness, non-life, and non-morality.

He is the source of all of those things. And to say, I can do fine without him is like saying, my car will drive forever with no gasoline. You may have a little in the tank, and a lot of people think they can be moral, but their ideas of morality, slavery bad, pain and suffering inflicted on others is bad.

These are Christian values. I was reading another one of these atheist websites and they were saying, everybody knows that rape is bad and doing harm to others is bad and hurting little children is bad and slavery is bad. We don't need a God to tell us these things.

Excuse me, but look at ancient civilization where slavery was perfectly acceptable in Rome. Rape of little boys was perfectly acceptable in Rome. Abject oppression, galley slavery and all sorts of things were perfectly acceptable in the Roman Empire as they have been in innumerable other not so enlightened cultures.

Look at the Assyrians, look at the Hittites, look at the ancient Egyptians. Gross and cruel and frivolous harm and oppression have been expressions of human power by those in power. Look in Asia, look at the Khmer Rouge, look at Pol Pot, look at Ho Chi Minh.

It is not intuitively obvious to the casual observer as you blithely quote Christian virtues and

Christian values that say, do unto others as you would have others do unto you. That is not humanly derived. That is divine truth.

We lack this in and of ourselves and if there had been no God active in human history and had been no Jesus Christ, you would have no golden rule. You would have no husbands love your wives as you love your own selves. Train up your children, don't vex them, don't do good to those who hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you, turn the other cheek.

The plea that Paul makes for Onesimus to Philemon, accept this guy back not as a slave but as a brother. In Christ there is no slave nor free. There is no oppression based on male versus female or Jew versus Greek or Greek versus Jew or Roman versus Jew.

All of these wonderful supposedly abstract values that people say you can come to independently, have not been come to independently in countless godless cultures down through history. These people simply don't know history. Back to the message of the cross here in chapter 1, but I was reading Acts 13.

Paul is giving this message, says they found no cause for death and then they ask Pilate that he should be put to death. These are the Jews who seek a sign. They didn't get the sign they wanted.

Jesus did plenty of signs, but the sign was not sufficient. The Jews seek a sign. Jesus did plenty of signs.

He did miracles for three and a half years, right? That did not compel. That did not persuade. It did not convince.

They fulfilled all that was written concerning Him. They took Him down from the tree, laid Him in a tomb, but God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days, verse 31, by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.

We declare to you glad tidings. God has fulfilled this for us, their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. Part of the message of the cross is it's an empty cross.

You are my Son, today I have begotten you, and that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption. He has spoken thus, I will give you the sure mercies of David. You will not allow your Holy One to see corruption.

David certainly saw corruption, but, verse 37, he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this man Jesus is preached to you, what? The forgiveness of sins. By Him, everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by any other means.

For the Jews, it was the law. For the Greeks, it was gnosis, higher attainment, philosophy, I can live a better life, I can be a better person by attainments in various areas. Verse 40, we're

getting to the point here, and this is our closing point.

Beware, therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you. Behold, you despisers marvel and perish. For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.

Despisers marvel and perish. I work a work in your days. That's the message of the cross, the work that God accomplished through Christ on the cross that brings about the forgiveness of sins.

Not just I forgive you, it is a remedy for sins. It is a power that cures the presence and the power of sin. Humans don't have that power.

We don't have that cure. We cannot fix ourselves. God in Christ can and does.

We are being saved. We're not sinless. We're not eternal.

We're not inhabiting glorified bodies yet. We are being saved. Part of that cure is to inure us to the temptations of sin by showing us its consequences, by feeling its pain, by observing its corrosive, poisonous effects.

That is part of our salvation, is being here and seeing the suffering, experiencing the pain, experiencing the senseless slaughter that it brings about. We are being saved and we look at the cross. It is the power of God to us.

It is this work that God is working in our days. If you're a despiser, you can shake your head and perish. It boils down to that fundamental reaction or response.

Do we react and recoil and think that we are better than that? Or do we respond and recognize that we need the power of God? We need the work that God is going to work. If you don't trust, if you don't seek, if you don't search, of course it is never going to make sense. When we respond and when we express faith, it still may not make sense at that point, but from that point forward it makes more and more sense.

And we begin to see what we could not see when we were blind. The Apostle Paul couldn't see on the road to Damascus, but some days later when the scales fell from his eyes, he saw it. He couldn't understand the message of the cross.

He couldn't understand Jesus, the Messiah. He couldn't understand Jesus, the Savior, as a Pharisee with all of the learning and a lifetime of training in the scriptures. He couldn't see it.

But when he encountered the Lord Jesus and accepted Him for who He was, that blindness evaporated and it became clear. If you've ever had a dream at night and you're in a weird situation, but what you're doing makes a kind of sense until you start to wake up and you say, are you kidding? Why did that make sense? It's like a part of my mind wasn't engaged. A lot of my common sense wasn't at work here.

Why did I think that made sense? I don't seem to have been surprised by that bizarre circumstance. But now that I'm waking up and I have full use of my faculties, well, that's just weird. It is the same way.

There is a blindness. There is a way that seems right to a man. The wisdom of the world seems to make an iron-clad, air-tight case.

And yet when we come to Christ, we set that aside and say, look, all I know is I have a need and God is the one who can fix that need. I'm going to go to Him and let Him explain it. Once He does, we realize how silly that was, how short-sighted, how in the moment, how shallow, how uninformed, how lacking.

Of course, the workings of God shouldn't make sense to me. If He's greatly wiser than I am, then the things that He does shouldn't make sense. If everything you do makes sense to your dog, there's something wrong with what you're doing.

Because you're running into the woods every time you hear a squirrel. You're licking yourself to get clean. A dog doesn't understand a lot of what we do.

If there was a means of salvation for dogs whereby they could look at us in trust and they said, you know, I don't get what you do all the time, but it must make some kind of sense. Please explain it to me. We have this with children.

They're not much smarter than dogs when they're little. But as they grow and they look to us and we begin to explain, this is why you have to wait for your food. This is why we can't do what you want to do right now.

And they begin to enter into that understanding. Things that made them want to throw a fit when they were little, they develop patience. They recognize, and they will someday be parents themselves doing the very same thing for their children, because what used to not make sense and be completely foolish in their eyes, as they grow in experience and in understanding and awareness of the wider context of life.

You have food right here in the shopping cart. Why can't I eat it? Little one, you got to wait till we get home. You can't eat that right now.

It'll spoil your supper. If you eat that entire bag of M&Ms right now, you will be sick. We need to have supper.

Then you can have some dessert. I don't want to wait. I need it now.

It's right here. Why can't I eat it? You're a bad parent. You're a silly person.

The food is right here. All I have to do is open it and eat it. What's the matter with you? See this thing hanging on the rack? Why can't I have it? I'm grabbing it.

You're taking it away from me and I want it. What's the matter with you? You're cruel. It makes no sense when you've got a limited grasp, limited facts, and things are circumscribed by your own desires.

When we enter through humility and faith into the realm of God, these things begin to make a greater sense, and even the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. Well, that's what Paul is introducing here, and we'll see more of it as we continue through the chapter, but it has ever been the problem. When he talks about the Jews seeking a sign, these are those that are addressed back in Acts 13, verse 41, you despisers.

I work a work in your days, and you're not going to believe it because your heart's not right. The key is humility, both before salvation and after salvation. To grow and to enter into greater understanding, we have to be willing to be taught, be willing to change our minds.

People who form good balanced opinions are those who don't come to the issue prejudiced and just looking for a confirmation of what they've already decided. Help me out here. Give me some facts.

Make your case. I'm open. I'm willing to listen.

I am not coming to the table scornful, derisive, dismissive, abusive, as so many atheists are. Of course, they're never going to come to Christ. The message of the cross is foolishness to them, and it will always be so long as they are perishing and are unwilling to acknowledge the need.

Anybody who is going to learn has to first of all recognize the need. There is a need, and that requires, on our part, humility. Well, let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the truth of your word, and we thank you for the eyes to see and ears to hear that you give us through your Holy Spirit because we have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior. We have acknowledged our own fallibility, our inadequacy, our shortcoming, but we are made complete in Him. We are fulfilled.

We are enabled and ennobled in Him. We thank you for that. We thank you for our ongoing salvation that we day by day have the opportunity to learn and to grow even in our failings, even when we fall short.

Your cleansing grace, your forgiveness enables us to stand up and to move forward and to look ahead to that day when we will no longer be subject to our fallen flesh and a corrupt world and the influence of the adversary. But having experienced these things now, we will be forever inoculated against any desire to come back down this road of pain and death. We thank you for the Lord Jesus, who was willing to go to the cross and demonstrate your love for us that even while we were sinners, He came and died on our behalf.

We thank you for the understanding of that tremendous sacrifice that you give us through your word and through the ministry of your Spirit. We pray that it will be a motivation for us to

present ourselves, living sacrifices, holy and acceptable in your sight as our reasonable service.
We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.