

The Folly of the Cross/The Wisdom of Christ

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Introduction

In 1807, Robert Fulton built the first commercial steamboat. Christened the “Clermont”, he launched it in the Hudson river at New York City on August 17. The plan was to travel upstream to Albany and back to New York. It made the trip to Albany in 32 hours and the return trip in 30. The ship was called by many “Fulton’s Folly.” They called it this because it was so different from the sailing ships people were used to. With its heavy steam engine and flat bottom, they thought it would either blow up or roll over and sink. Hundreds of people gathered to gawk and jeer, especially when it had engine trouble that took a half hour to fix. That’s the way people are when it comes to things they don’t understand. Paul says, *the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18)*. Let’s look at what real folly and wisdom are.

The Mind of the World

People understand what they are familiar with. They are happy when things keep going the way they’re supposed to. There are laws that govern how things work. There is the law of gravity. This means you can set something down and it won’t just float away. Water will always run downhill. The seasons change every year; Winter becomes Spring becomes Summer becomes Fall. It’s always the same. You can expect things to act in the same way all the time. Anything out of character would be folly, insanity.

Expectations

There are also expectations of how people act. We call them customs or conventions. If you behave in an acceptable way to society, everything’s fine. This is normal behavior. But if you act outside these conventions, you’re crazy, insane, foolish. Abnormal behavior is frowned upon. This brings us to Christ. He didn’t conform to the customs. He didn’t satisfy the status quo.

The Message of Christ

The first thing that stood out about Christ was His message. The Ten Commandments can be summed up in four words—love God, love others. Jesus’ message of love didn’t fit in with the expectations of the world. His message of love was a radical love that didn’t make sense. The law that said to love your fellow man was tempered with an eye for an eye. Jesus, however taught us to *turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:38-40)*.

The Man Himself

Not only was His message confusing and contrary to culture, Jesus Himself was contrary to the expectations of society. They all knew what to expect in the Messiah. He was going to restore the throne of David and free Israel from her oppressors. Jesus certainly showed that He had the power to be able to do that. He had power over disease, as He healed the sick, made the lame walk, the deaf hear, the blind

see, and cleansed lepers. He had power over nature as He changed water into wine, calmed storms, and walked on water. He had power over life and death as He raised the dead. He also showed Himself to be God, as He forgave sins. Yet, He wasn't a warrior. He never tried to resist Rome. In fact, He said to give *to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (Luke 20:25)*.

His Birth and Death

Then there was the way He was born—born in a barn, yet worshiped by angels, shepherds, and Magi. From the beginning, He was on the run, because Herod wanted to get rid of the threat. Then there was the way He died—convicted of the crime of treason, He was executed by the state as a criminal. He was stripped, humiliated, beaten, and killed, while only a handful of family and close friends cared. This wasn't what the Messiah was to look like.

The Wisdom of Christ

But that's what the world doesn't understand. Things in the kingdom of God appear upside-down to the world because the world itself is upside-down. In the world, right is called wrong and wrong is called right. The world doesn't realize that when Jesus died, He cut to the heart of all the world's problems. The root problem in the world is sin. Jesus conquered sin, death, and the devil on the cross. When He was at His weakest and lowest point by the world's standards, He was winning the greatest victory of all time. The world can't see this because the world can't understand the things of the Spirit. That's why they dismiss His teachings and His followers so easily and readily.

Means of Grace

In His wisdom, God has chosen to act through physical means. He has given us His Word to convey His grace and forgiveness to us. When His Word is applied to the bread and wine, we receive the body and blood of Jesus along with the bread and wine and our sins are forgiven and faith is strengthened. This may seem like folly to some since they can't understand it. We embrace **THE FOLLY OF THE CROSS** because it gives life. We know it's really **THE WISDOM OF CHRIST**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
