

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (EHV)

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ In fact, it is written:

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;

the intelligence of the intelligent I will bring to nothing. ^{Is 29:14}

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Jewish law? Where is the probing thinker of the present age? Has God not shown that the wisdom of this world is foolish? ²¹ Indeed, since the world through its wisdom did not know God, God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message. ²² Yes, Jews ask for signs, Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified—which is offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ We preach Christ crucified, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For example, consider your call, brothers. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, ²⁸ and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before God. ³⁰ But because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹ God did this so that, just as it is written, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” ^{Jer 9:24}

Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may boast in the cross of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever thought God should have a better marketing plan?

For example, why doesn't he just give everyone what they want? If someone prays for healing – give it to them! If someone prays for success – give it to them! If someone prays for rain so their crops would grow – give it to them! If someone prays for sunshine so they can enjoy a leisurely day outside – give it to them! Surely God's powerful and clever enough to direct sun in one place and rain on another!

Of course, it might get a little complicated if two people in the same family prayed for opposite things, such as children wanting to play loud games while their parents prayed for peace and quiet, but surely God can work it out!

If God gave everyone what they wanted, our churches would be full of people praying for power, success, prosperity, intelligence, beauty, health, long life, Powerball and lotto wins, and so on.

If God gave everyone what they wanted, then wouldn't the whole world be filled with dedicated disciples who constantly look to him for every good thing?

But what does he do instead?

He markets peace, life, and salvation through the death of Jesus by crucifixion on a cross, which was one of the cruellest ways to die in Roman times.

He asks us to 'foolishly' believe our God who created the universe and all its amazing wonders, came to earth as a humble human being, born to a homeless couple spending the night in an animal's enclosure!

And what's more, this God-in-human-flesh suffered and died on a cruel cross without even putting up a struggle, and that somehow through the shedding of his innocent blood, he gives us forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

He then gets human beings who are weak, self-centred, uninspiring, and incompetent to preach the message of Jesus Christ crucified to a doubtful and disbelieving world who would rather God just gives them what they want, and who often blame God for everything that goes wrong in their lives (even though they're more to blame than he is)!

He also gets proud, selfish, and fiercely independent people (who want to get their own way) to gather together to admit to each other and the world they've stuffed up and sinned against this creative and crucified holy God. He asks his people to believe his words of forgiveness are effectual even though they're spoken by funny looking and imperfect pastors who might think it's a wonderful fashion statement to wear strange gowns! He then expects his people to forgive everyone who hurts them, without seeking revenge or attempting to damage their reputations!

But wait! There's more! He also asks us to believe a few drops of water placed on the heads of people (while naming our Triune God) joins us to Jesus and grants eternal life in God's kingdom. He also expects his people to believe a small wafer of bread and a little sip of wine is the true body and blood of Jesus Christ!

Do you realise how foolish, absurd, and ridiculous this sounds to most people? And we wonder why more people don't come flocking to our churches in order to be disciples of Christ!

While we might think God needs a better marketing plan, God instead, in his infinite wisdom, expects us to believe in, follow, and market the shameful and humiliating death of Jesus Christ on a cross, with all its weakness, humility, and at least in the world's eyes, foolishness!

God seems to delight in doing things all mixed up, turned about topsy-turvy, and the wrong way around! He doesn't do what we expect him to do according to human wisdom and logic, but does things in unexpected ways, including giving his divine gifts (such as forgiveness of sins and eternal life), to undeserving people like you and me.

Because of the love and forgiveness and mercy he shows us, he calls us to forgive our enemies, and willingly and humbly serve those around us, including all those we consider as undeserving or difficult to deal with.

But, like it or not, this is the way and wisdom of God – and thank God for that!

I mean, if any of us were God, wouldn't we only choose the good, strong, intelligent, beautiful, or wise? Wouldn't we only choose those who do the right thing by us? Imagine then, if it were up to us, how few people there'd be in church or in heaven!

So, if God were to work the same way as we reckon is right, would he choose you or me? Would any of us truly be good enough, faithful enough, or perfect enough for God?

Sure, our God demands perfection, and he makes it clear through his word and through our consciences that we all fail to live according to his ways, which means none of us deserve eternal life in heaven, but God, in his wisdom, sent his only Son to us as a human in order to live perfectly and obediently for us.

This means he willingly and lovingly took all your sin into himself, was punished for your sins, and died for those sins which were once yours. Since he paid the full price for all your sin, you no longer need to fear any punishment from God anymore. Through faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and rose from the dead, you've been made acceptable to God, are at peace with God, and are worthy of heaven because of what Jesus did for you.

As people who believe the foolishness of the cross, you choose to gather as his holy family of brothers

and sisters in Christ to receive his gifts of grace and support each other in this seemingly ‘foolish’ faith.

God, in his wisdom, calls you to love and forgive others as he first loves and forgives you. This is foolish in a world which demands payback, defamation, and revenge, but strangely it’s the only way which offers true reconciliation and peace for troubled consciences, hearts and minds.

God, in his wisdom, doesn’t always give you what you want, because you’ll never be truly satisfied if he did. Not only this, but he doesn’t always give you what you want because getting your own way may end up hurting you and those around you. He’s got a better plan in mind, even if it involves suffering, because suffering never invalidates his eternal promises to you.

God, in his wisdom, chose to love the fools of this world. This doesn’t mean you’re all idiots or stupid, but you have the courage to trust the wisdom of God when your own understanding falters. This may make you ‘fools’ in the world’s eyes, but in God’s eyes your faith in him makes you the wise ones.

God, in his wisdom, chose the weak, because if you were strong, you might think he chose you for your strength or physical abilities. But because you’re not strong or powerful or mighty, you’ve come to rely on, and trust in, his strength instead of your own.

Unfortunately for so many in the world today, the stumbling blocks to faith are pride, self-glory, intellect, strength and nobility, yet these are what Jesus gave up on the cross...for you, so that you may live with him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. In the world’s eyes this is foolishness! But God’s foolishness is greater than all the world’s wisdom.

You may also consider it this way: when you get to heaven, and as your knees shake before almighty God as you give an account for all your life: all your words and actions (or lack of them), what will you point to? Your intellect? Your strength? Your good intentions? Your good works? If you were to point to any of these, you’d be labelled a fool and laughed out of heaven.

But you know your only boast, your only claim for salvation in front of God, is Jesus Christ crucified on the cross.

In this way you boast in his suffering. You boast in his death. You boast in his resurrection. You boast he’s forgiven you even though you don’t deserve it. You boast in his gift of washing, adoption, and new life given in baptism. You boast in the precious and holy gift of his body and blood to nourish and reassure you of his love and forgiveness through his Holy Supper. You boast in his proclamation of Christ crucified through human beings, no matter what they look like or how long their sermons go for.

You boast in the cross of Jesus Christ, crucified for you, to save you and reconcile you to his Father in heaven.

While it’s not the best marketing plan in the world, it’s the wisdom of God to proclaim Christ crucified. His suffering and death, which takes away all your sin, proclaims God’s love for you better than giving you everything you want.

Therefore, if any of you think you’re not good enough, smart enough, or able to be a good person by your own strength, then that’s good! Only then, as fools who totally rely on the grace of God through Christ Jesus and what he achieved for you on the cross, are you wise enough to no longer boast in yourselves or your own achievements, but you’re ready to boast only in Christ and his death on the cross so that...

...the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding and wisdom, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, the crucified. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig

