

The Theology of the Cross (1 Cor 1:18-25)

The age in which we are living is a humanistic one. If you know our schools, universities, and TAFEs today, you know that everything is relative. There are really no absolutes, no rights and wrongs, no blacks and whites, just different shades of grey. Human beings and human reason are what decide things, not the absolutes of God's Law or the doctrinal correctness of the sweet gospel. For Christians the solution is not simply to keep away from all education with the purpose of preserving the faith. It is, rather, to keep reminding our students who are involved in these institutions about the great difference between God's wisdom and human wisdom, and the great difference between letting reason arbitrate over questions of faith and humbly accepting the Word of the cross. This seems foolishness to people of the world, but it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Jewish people took great pride in their Old Testament Scriptures, and especially the books of Moses. One of the passages in Deuteronomy said:

“When anyone is put to death for committing a crime that has a death-penalty, and you hang him on a tree, you shall not leave his body stay on the tree all night. Rather, you shall be sure to bury him on the same day. For a hanged man is under God's curse” (Deut 21:22-23).

So when Christians claimed that Jesus, who had been crucified, was the Son of God, this was to Jewish people like a stone that vicious people deliberately put in the path of a blind man. One who was under God's curse simply could not have been God's Son!

In addition, the Old Testament recorded many miraculous signs and wonders that involved the Israelites. It therefore became an obvious thing for Jewish people to ask that miraculous signs from God should support claims. However, that was what we call “a theology of glory.” To receive a miracle and be benefited by it is one thing, but to demand one is something else. God does not overwhelm people by spectacular demonstrations to pressure them into believing. Jesus was not impressed with a demand for signs, and wanted people to believe in Him without such props to lean on. Demanding miraculous signs was an attitude that came from closed minds rather than from people who were genuinely seeking the truth. Jesus said that the unbelieving people of His day would be given only one sign, the sign of Jonah. That pointed to His own death and resurrection after three days. His death on the cross was the only sign that really mattered. That is precisely what Paul is saying about the message of the cross, which he calls “the foolishness of God.”

This passage in 1 Corinthians is good for us to take deeply to heart. Paul here talks about God's way of salvation, which seems foolishness to those who are being lost. Yet, to those who believe it, the crucified Christ is the wisdom of God and the power of God. The wisdom of God is not simply that God has perfect knowledge of everything, but His plan of salvation that is the reverse of what human wisdom expects and knows. It is a hidden, or secret, wisdom. It seems foolish to those who do not believe it. To unbelievers of our modern times, too, the idea of the Son of God's being executed as a criminal is scandalous. Paul even dares to call the Gospel that he preached “the foolishness of God.” However, he asserted that it is wiser than human wisdom. The crucified Christ looks like God's weakness, but Paul asserted that it is stronger than human strength.