

1 Corinthians 1:10-17, 26-31

¹⁰Brothers, I am making an appeal to you using the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I ask that you all express the same view and not have any divisions among you, but that you be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹For the news I heard about you, my brothers, from members of Chloe's household, is that there are rivalries among you. ¹²What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one can say that I baptized you into my own name. ¹⁶(I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides them, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel—not with the wisdom used in speeches, so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power.

²⁶For 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. ²⁷But 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, ²⁸and 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, ²⁹so that no one may boast before God. ³⁰But because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹God did this so that, just as it is written, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

Are You Foolish?

I.

Your so-called friends stand gathered around you, literally doubled over with laughter; tears streaming down their cheeks because they are laughing so hard. In the midst of all the chortling they manage to sputter out: "You fool!"

This scene has been played out over and over. Nearly everyone has been called a fool by those he or she thought were friends. Sometimes it's just a momentary laugh at your expense because you didn't know something everyone else considered obvious and well-known. After some momentary embarrassment, you all can walk away still friends.

But there are other times. The moniker: "fool" hurts you deeply when the insult is directed at the very core of your beliefs. The "wrong" set of political beliefs will get you included in the category of "fool" by the news media. Taking a stand against the politically correct social views in modern society will have you branded a bigot and a fool.

Perhaps the deepest wound when stamped as a fool is when the label is attached to you because of your religious beliefs. Often what God says has affected your beliefs about certain social norms like homosexuality or abortion or transgenderism, as well as influencing your beliefs about so-called "scientific" theories, so the term "fool" gets attached to Christians pretty frequently.

"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" (1 Corinthians 1:26, EHV). *That* is for sure. As far as the pundits are concerned, if you are a Christian, you are a fool. They will be doubled over laughing at you with tears running down their cheeks because you are a big enough rube to believe the things God says in his Word.

II.

Sometimes, however, "foolish" applies to people *in* the Christian community *from* others

in the Christian community. What else can you say when Paul had to report: “For the news I heard about you, my brothers, from members of Chloe’s household, is that there are rivalries among you” (1 Corinthians 1:11, EHV). Rivalries within the Christian Church tear apart rather than building up.

“What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’” (1 Corinthians 1:12, EHV). Many of the so-called megachurches, especially the really, really big ones that become TV ministries, are built almost completely on the personality of their preacher. When the founder of that church retires or dies, the ministry begins to flounder, because the people were following a personality, not a specific set of doctrines or teachings. Even more damaging to such a church is when the charismatic founding preacher becomes embroiled in some scandal. When scandal at the highest levels occur, such a ministry usually crumbles.

“What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ’” (1 Corinthians 1:12, EHV). Notice the last one: “I belong to Christ.” What impression do you get of those who said: “I follow Christ”? Are they right? Did they just zing all the rest of the factions? I see it as the smug little know-it-all who wants to sound superior to all the other Christian factions in the group—maybe even someone who is implying that he or she is such a superior Christian they don’t really *need* some human shepherd to lead them in this life of faith.

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13, EHV). “Foolish,” Paul is calling them all. Paul was the presiding minister who had baptized a few people in Corinth, but when he did that he wasn’t trying to create a little faction who would zealously follow him. Who baptized this Corinthian Christian or that one wasn’t important.

I know that customs are changing, even in the Lutheran church. There are some pastors who no longer wear vestments—a robe and a stole. The vestments—especially the robe—are intended to hide the man. *Who* is preaching is not important. You might have personality conflicts with this preacher or that one. You might prefer this preacher’s style in the pulpit or that one. The preacher might have annoying little mannerisms or idiosyncracies. In reality, it’s inevitable, isn’t it? Some things about every pastor are annoying. None of these things are what is important.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel—not with the wisdom used in speeches, so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power.” (1 Corinthians 1:17, EHV). What is important is that the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and that the sacraments are rightly administered.

III.

Let’s face it: this is *not* the greatest congregation. You are *not* the best parishioners. Despite coffee mugs and t-shirts my children could find for me, I am not the world’s best dad. And would you believe that *I* am *not* the greatest preacher ever to walk the face of the earth? Jesus holds that title, obviously. But people laughed at him, too. People called him a fool. Naysayers surrounded him and constantly tried to catch him in some sort of error so they could laugh all the harder.

We don’t have to think very hard to remember how many times our wisdom and clever arguments have proven to be flat-out wrong. Go ahead. Write some down so that you can remind yourself after the event is over. Who will win the Superbowl—the 49ers or the Chiefs? Predict for me the Democrat who will stand as the winner of the Presidential primary?

Between the two sections of Paul’s letter we read as our text for today, Paul writes: “It is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will bring to nothing. ²⁰Where 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?" (1 Corinthians 1:19-20, EHV).

The smug pundits who laugh and call Christians fools do not have the last laugh. God shows their alleged wisdom to actually be foolish.

So what is *true* wisdom? "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, ²⁸and 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" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28, EHV).

The world dubs the foundations of Christianity as foolish. God chose the foolish things to put to shame those who think they are so wise.

"God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things." Jesus humbled himself to come into this world as a regular human being. He came in at the lowest social structure. He was born in a cattle shed. He lived with peasant parents, not in a king's palace.

"God chose the weak things of the world." The One who the disciples called Messiah was hung out on a cross to die. The smug ones doubled over with laughter as they stood below him, looking up. Foolish, they called him as he hung there. Foolish seemed any idea that God could *save* the world by putting to death the One who was called the Son of God. Foolish seems the concept that *God* could—or would—abandon *God* hanging there on the cross so that the demand for payment for the sins of the world could be met. Foolish and weak.

Foolish and weak are the characteristics the world applies to Christians who follow Jesus, too. Christianity is called a crutch. Karl Marx called it the opium of the people. Believers don't seem to have the rugged individualism the world says strong people should have. You and I lean on Jesus. He is our strength. He is our ever-present help in time of trouble, and there beside us even when times are good. We are weak and foolish to need such support.

IV.

"God chose the weak things... ²⁸and God chose the lowly things... and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before God." (1 Corinthians 1:27-29, EHV).

God had a reason for choosing the weak and the despised. He had a reason for choosing things—and people—that seem helpless on their own. He did it this way so that no one may boast before God.

Salvation is not something anyone can boast about, because God accomplished it in such an unusual way that no human being could ever have dreamed it up. Even the faith you have in Jesus is illogical, because who would logically choose to believe such a crazy story? There is no one who can boast before God. What he has done seems foolish and a little bit crazy.

"Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30, EHV). God chose you. God made *you* a believer. God became your wisdom. He became your righteousness and sanctification and redemption. God did it all, and God chose you to be his own.

"God did this so that, just as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:31, EHV).

Go ahead and boast. Don't boast in yourself, though. Boasting in yourself will only make you truly foolish. Boast in what makes you *seem* foolish to the world. Boast in the Lord. Boast in what he has done for you. He has made you a believer. When you boast in *him*, rather than in yourself, you can lead others to see and understand what is truly important.

God bless your foolishness. Amen.