

## *“The Wisdom of the Cross”*

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Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5



“A basic truth easily confirmed by looking at human history is that God’s ways are not our ways. How could it be that God would allow His own creatures to nail Him to a cross?”<sup>1</sup> Why is the cross considered foolish by those who reject it? Why did God use the cross as the means of delivering His people from their sin? How is it possible for life to come from death? In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote to a church divided. They were consumed and distracted by the shadow. They had failed to look beyond the veil to see Him who alone is worthy. In the very first chapters, Paul sets forth what is most important. It is not an idea that competes with other ideas as to value or worth. It is not our solar system inside of the Milky Way or one galaxy among multitudes of galaxies. It is the only idea that matters. It is the only Sun around which all other celestial bodies revolve.

Paul’s argument establishes the intrinsic value of the cross by noting that plainness of speech is incapable of making it void (1:17). Tragically so, those who are perishing consider it foolishness, yet for “us who are being saved it is the power of God” (v. 18). It is by means of the cross that God destroys the wisdom of the wise and sets aside the cleverness of the clever (v. 19). There is a base or vulgar character to the cross. It is both crude and violent. The worldly wise and culturally clever ignore its visibility and brilliance (v. 22). “The cross did not make sense to the Jews who wanted signs, wonders, a superman, a triumphant messiah. The cross didn't make sense to the Gentiles whose philosophers and sophists could not understand the wisdom of Christ's sacrifice.”<sup>2</sup> They stumble over the cross as if it were but some earthly object without any meaningful worth.

It is only those who are foolish who find the cross wise; it is only those who are weak who find the cross strong; it is only those who are base who find the cross attractive; it is only those who are despised who find the cross welcoming; it is only those who are not who find the cross everything (1:26-28). The cross is as effective as an instrument of death that it categorically and conclusively destroys the self-deception of the rebel so that their only boast becomes the cross (1:29-31). The work of the cross is so efficient that the only thing left standing after an encounter is the cross. Thus Paul’s preaching was simply and simple, “Christ crucified” (2:1-5). No matter what the issue or concern raised by the Corinthian fellowship, there was only and always but one response, “Christ crucified.”

What does this mean, “Christ crucified?” The power of the cross cuts through the destructive delusion we have embraced as it relates to the multiplicity of shadows. In weakness there is found strength, and in death, life. The cross pronounces peace in war, clarity in confusion, and rest in turmoil. The cross speaks of equality in the face of blatant bigotry and justice when crime appears to prevail. The wisdom of the cross brings us back to reality. It tells us what is true. Its power severs us, perhaps violently, from the attachments we have to all things good and leaves us only with what is best. “The word of the cross, the very substance of the

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Christian gospel, is absolute madness to those who are perishing. It is irrationality. It is insanity. It makes no sense whatsoever. It is not just that this message is a little off balance; it is not simply that it is in need of a bit of polishing. It is sheer madness. Yet this message of the cross, for all its foolishness, is the very essence of our identity. This is who we are. It may be foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved; it is the power of God.”<sup>3</sup> It is the cross that forces us to cry out, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner!” It is this fundamental element that shapes the gathered community of the believing. This is what calls and compels the gathering.

Hearers of the word come to church not in order to be entertained, much less to be lectured or scolded, but rather hoping to hear a word that will enable them to enter more deeply into the paschal mystery that is already there in their daily lives, hoping to believe again the promise that is almost too good to be true: that death is not the end, that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible, that work for justice and peace is not in vain, that the power of love really is the mystery at the heart of the universe.<sup>4</sup>

May the Church of Jesus Christ embrace with joy the wisdom of the cross as she seeks to be His body locally, nationally, and globally.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.pilgrimcenterofhope.org/publication\\_index/pu\\_tc\\_2005\\_03.pdf](http://www.pilgrimcenterofhope.org/publication_index/pu_tc_2005_03.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.st.ignatius.net/03-19-06.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2006-04-24](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-04-24)

<sup>4</sup> “Preaching the Folly of the Cross,” Mary Catherine Hilker, *Word & World*, Volume XIX, Number, Winter 1999. [http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/19-1\\_Preaching/19-1\\_Hilker.pdf](http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/19-1_Preaching/19-1_Hilker.pdf)

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.