

Stumbling Over God's "Foolishness"

Back when I was only 2 years into the "faith," I wrote a 40 page paper titled "*The Foolishness of God*", where I cited a number of Gods earthly interventions as recorded in Scripture, and which the "world" considers to be foolish myths. The inspiration and title for the paper came from 1st Corinthians chapter one, and in particular, verses 25 and 27 where the Holy Spirit, through Paul, has blessed us with a most precious pearl of information which can serve as a key to the understanding God, His ways and, His purpose. Verse 25 tells us that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and verse 27 explains that "*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confuse the wise.*"

In essence, He toys with those who think they are wise by deliberately achieving His purposes through what the "wise" can only see as utter foolishness, while those who have faith in Him, and admit their ignorance and nothingness compared to Him, are blessed with true understanding.

Of course the ultimate absurdity from the world's perspective is the Gospel, which tells us that Creator God Himself had to enter His own creation so that He could suffer and die, it being the only way in which we could be cleansed of our sins. Through the wisest of worldly reasoning and logic, it can't get any more foolish and ridiculous than that! Yet those of us who have admitted our ignorance and helplessly sinful nature, the Holy Spirit has seen fit to bless us with a deeper insight and understanding which opens our eyes to the sublime beauty of His supernatural love centered wisdom as expressed in the Holy Bible.

In that same vein, the purpose of this paper centers around verse 23 of 1st Corinthians, where we learn that the idea of Christ being crucified for our sins is to the Jews a "stumbling block," and to the Greeks it is "foolishness." At first it may be difficult to find any modern day relevance to this observation. But all Scripture is for our learning and application, if we will but pray for and receive from Him, His blessing of understanding and discernment.

First, let us see what this “stumbling block” is all about. As the Apostles began their missionary teachings, their audiences were made up almost exclusively of Jews. These were, of course, quite well versed in what we now call the Old Testament, it being at the time, the only written expression of God’s Word. They knew that there was but one God, the Creator God of Genesis, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His many predictions through the Prophets were also well known. They knew the commandments, the nature and significance of sin, and the saving power of the shedding of innocent blood, as well as the much-propheesied assurance as to the coming of the Messiah. Their main area of confusion was the nature, purpose, and manner of His coming. They knew well that He would come and one day rule the world from David’s throne. They also knew from Isaiah 53 and other Scriptural references that a Messiah would also come as a suffering Servant. The problem, among other smaller issues, was that they desperately wanted, and therefore expected, the King to come first to liberate them.

So here was the “stumbling block,” the idea that the suffering Servant had already come, not only in a ceremonial sense but also as the actual sacrificial Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world, as God foretold in Isaiah Chapter 53. The stumbling block was also the fact that there was only one Messiah who would come twice, not two Messiahs, as they believed. The fact that the Messiah, the King, had not yet come, and that the same, not another Messiah would come later to be the King was contrary to what most of them were willing to believe.

Thus, we can see that the Jews had believed in a coming Messiah, and were reasonably well grounded in their knowledge and understanding of the Scripture. This would have allowed them to comprehend the Gospel message once the “stumbling block”, was removed. The evidence of this is found in Acts 2 when Peter preached the Gospel to the Jews at the first Pentecost and 3000 of them were saved. Peter spoke their language in terms that they understood. This is not referring to Greek or Hebrew, but to the language of the Scripture. He cited words of the prophet Joel and of David, who both pointed to Jesus. He reiterated the words of Jesus as He preached of His divine purpose.

Peter did not mince words when he reminded them as indicated in verse 36 “...*know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*” His evangelical success was because those to whom he spoke were well grounded in God’s word. They may not have previously caught the full significance of Jesus, but when it was explained to them from Scripture, they had this solid foundation on which could be built, first understanding, then belief, and finally a saving faith.

It should be noted that even though they were well steeped in the ways of God as revealed in the Scripture of the times, this “window” of opportunity to receive the Gospel soon closed to the Jews as this truth became hidden from their eyes even as Isaiah had predicted, and as Jesus, during His triumphed entry, most clearly stated in Luke 19:42. This time marked the beginning of the age of the Gentiles and it will end with the Rapture, after which God will again focus on the Jews, and come back to rule from David’s throne.

This belief, that there were 2 Messiahs makes no sense based on our current knowledge of Who He was. How could there be 2 Sons of God Messiah, given that they knew that the Trinity included only one Son? The only feasible answer as I see it, is that their idea of a Messiah was someone other than God Himself expressed as the Son. Their Messiahs must have been some manner of mortal men who would serve their purposes and then die. This makes no sense to us, but how else could they have believed? It appears that they believed that first there would have been a mortal king who would remove Rome of its dominance. Then he would be the first of a royal dynasty. I suspect that the Royal dynasty of today’s England is such one of those dynasties. Others can be found in Austria, Italy, Romania and other nations. Most of these have been eliminated for various reasons. There are other plausible theories regarding this issue that one might examine and adopt. For me the above makes the most sense.

Now let us examine the “Greek”, or Gentile view of the Gospel as being foolishness. In order to do this we need to examine Paul’s ministry to the Greeks as recorded in Acts

17:16-32. In Athens, Paul found that the Greeks knew absolutely nothing about the Creator God, but instead worshiped numerous idols and false gods, one of which they called the “unknown god.” It was probably thrown in among their thousands of gods to make sure they didn’t miss any. How does one introduce the Gospel to those who have no foundation on which to build such a seemingly foolish doctrine as a Creator God becoming man and then allowing Himself to be tortured and killed for the remission of sins?

They had no concept of sin or repentance. They had no actual history regarding creation, or knowledge of prophets, or the accurate and precise fulfillment of every one of the Prophets many prophecies. They knew nothing of God’s many early miracles nor of those performed by Jesus. To start out preaching the Gospel without first establishing a foundation could only be, and was seen, as foolishness by those who first heard it, and who would not accept it blindly. Think about it, if you knew nothing about God and the history leading up to Jesus, is there anything more ludicrous than hearing that the Creator God entered His own creation as a man and chose to be tortured and to die, and in that manner suffer the punishment due us, for our own sins?

Sins? There are four Greek words that have been translated as sin or sins. They relate to “missing the mark, ignorant, willful error, or offense.” The concept of sins as defined by Scripture was completely unknown. Notice that the Greeks started out referring to Paul as the “babbling” (Acts 17:18). To get their attention, he had to refer them to their “unknown god” and suggested to them that this was He, the Creator God, the God who “...made the world, and all things therein, and who dwelleth not in a temple made with hands neither is He worshiped with hands”. In other words, he wisely began by preaching Genesis, the essential foundation of Christian faith, without which a strong, solid, lasting, real saving faith is extremely difficult, and I believe, rarely achieved.

Now we can see that as Peter preached the Gospel to the Jews, it was a “stumbling block” until it was explained to them that it was consistent with their Biblical background and that it filled in the gaps, as well as completed, that is, brought to a closure what they

could now understand had always been God's plan for salvation. The "stumbling block" could be removed because they had the background required to understand, and were thus capable of being enlightened. However, in Greece, Paul was preaching to those absent any such background, those who could only find the Gospel to be foolishness, unworthy of serious consideration. Therefore Peter was quite successful numerically in converting those early Jews, while Paul had much less success with the Greeks. In referring to the Greek here, we are using it as an example, or analogy representing all Gentiles, as being those who do not know Scripture, as compared with Bible conversant Jews. These then are those who call the Gospel "foolishness".

It is my understanding, that theological seminaries of today teach this distinction of methods as used by Peter and Paul, and their relative success, or lack thereof, but fail to recognize the subtleties of why. They therefore misapply the message. They continue to teach and to preach that the New Testament, with its Gospel message is sufficient to bear fruit, and that there is relatively little need or value in spending much time in the Old Testament. Perhaps up to 50 or 75 years ago, this may have been true and, therefore, appropriate and effective, because in those days, this was a Christian culture. Most homes had a Bible, and it was read daily, both the Old and New Testament. This, along with serious prayer, dedicated church attendance, and convicting sermons, was a solid part of family life. Preaching the Gospel was, for the most, commonly understood and believed. The "stumbling blocks" remained impediments for some, but inspired preaching and witnessing could readily remove them for many others. By comparison, and used here as an analogy, most Americans were "Jews", in the sense that they had a foundation on which the Gospel could more readily be set in their hearts. Today, this is no longer a Christian culture. We are, for the most part, "Greeks" without that foundation, and the Gospel is, therefore, seen as foolishness to most people.

So, continuing to preach the Gospel to "Greeks" will continue to be but foolishness, until the Church recognizes this, and begins to take seriously the dire need for real basic Bible study, study of the foundational Old Testament, as well as the Gospel. Overcoming one's belief of it being foolishness is much more difficult than guiding someone over a

stumbling block. Until the “churches” realize the nature, as well as the gravity of the problem, they will continue to succeed only in drawing entertainment seekers and “graduating” multitudes who are absent of any saving faith, but filled with false, vain, and very weak beliefs which do not meet the criteria for salvation.

In the 1800’s, men like, Wesley, Whitefield, Bunyan, and Spurgeon, and even up to around 1940, men like Ironside and Barnhouse could rightly claim thousands of true conversions because they powerfully preached the foundation as well as the Gospel, the whole Word of God, the unpleasant along with the pleasant. And when they preached, their words were not just superficially accepted, but they were foundationally understood by audiences who had a basic knowledge of Scripture. They were speaking mostly to “Jews” in this sense. The process was therefore a matter of removing “stumbling blocks,” not first needing to overcome Biblical illiteracy and the perceptions of “foolishness.”

Today, in our “Greek” culture, perhaps through the mass marketing techniques, many are coming to churches to hear, and some tend to stay, at least for a while, and others keep coming back as long as it “feels good”, doesn’t take too long, is sufficiently entertaining, not too heavy, and above all not convicting. “Guilt trips” are the kiss of death to the goal of simply filling pews. But what are the results? What is the fruit? Is there a deep rooted, firm belief followed by real lasting conviction, confession, remorse, repentance, and faith unto salvation? Or is it a shallow acceptance of a fanciful image absent any depth of knowledge or understanding, an image which will easily fade when the “going gets rough.” If it’s a faith at all, it may be a blind faith based on a faith and love for a certain pastor who says what they want to hear, and not necessarily a faith based on a belief in the infallible Word of God as personally understood and proven through the study of Scripture. Will this “faith” survive when its professor, the superficial “believer,” is thrust out into the world of mass denial, attractive false gods, humanistic logic, temptations, and tragedies?

Polls tell us that eight out of every ten young people from “solid” Christian homes, after a year out in the world, renounce their faith! Why? Was it ever real? Had it been based on a solid in-depth learning and understanding, starting with a literal belief in Genesis one through eleven, along with pulpit messages expressing the whole Word of God, rather than just some comfortable niceties, this statistic would be much different. How can a superficial faith not founded on the rock foundation of the whole Word of God possibly survive the prevailing government schools indoctrination of evolution, “billions of years” scientific “proof,” and the “great” philosophers of the “age of enlightenment,” many of whom were atheists.

Add to this the multitudes of alternative faiths, temptations and pleasures of the world thrust upon the hormonally excited, curious, and still moldable characters, how can anyone without the solid rock foundation of the entire Scripture possibly even hope, let alone expect “faith” to survive? Given the above noted statistic, isn’t it evident that the 80% of the young who leave home are mere professors of the faith at best, and not really endowed with that true saving faith that can never be lost?

In today’s basically non-Christian culture, it must be understood by those who preach, teach, and witness, that one is dealing with “Greeks” not “Jews” and that all evangelizing must deal with that fact, or it is doomed to failure, where saving souls is the goal and not merely the filling of the pews. To think “if we just get them in here, we can lead them to salvation” is like chasing rainbows, unless the whole Word is preached, both sweet and sour, and unless Paul’s strategy with the Greeks is applied. Furthermore, seeing to it that they are exposed to that one hour of “church experience”, no matter how powerful the sermon and the environment may be, is mere tokenism and not even close to what’s needed in order to nurture a faith that can grow into a genuine saving faith. Sustained parental examples of, love, integrity, true faith, worship, and serious family Bible study are all essential if a genuine faith is to result. It must be a faith well armored with the knowledge and understanding of the Bible truths. It’s not that 80% of children from Christian homes loose their faith after being out in the world.

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These children never had the faith to loose, for if they had, it never could have been lost. It would be better to conclude that that this is an 80% parental failure rate.

One final word regarding our topic is about blind faith. Some profess a blind faith, and seem satisfied that it is a saving faith. How very wrong this is! A bind faith is NO faith! A blind faith is a dead faith because it has no roots in Scripture to nurture it! Absent the rich soil of the “logos”, it is like the seed cast on the rocky places in the “Parable of the Sower”. Again, and finally blind faith is no faith of any beneficial consequences. Unto itself such faith is one of the major stumbling blocks to finding true faith.