

# A Foolish but Powerful Gospel

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Date: 15 April 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] My small group that I lead with Doug on Tuesday nights, we're just about to finish One Corinthians. We've been doing it for about six months. And One Corinthians is an extraordinary church.

If by extraordinary, we mean extraordinarily messed up. So if this was the 1030 Corinthians service, there'd be one parishioner over there who's holding hands with his mother-in-law.

And everyone's happy about it. That's chapter five. Like everyone in the back row, you would be suing everyone in the middle rows for fraud. That's chapter six. All the husbands in the room, you'd be on one side because you hate sort of icky physical contact.

You can't be bothered to sleep with your wives anymore. That's chapter seven. All the wives, well, you couldn't care less anyway because you've long since thrown away your wedding rings and you stopped listening to your husbands.

It's chapter 11. In the middle of the service, an Anglo-Saxon person would stand up and start speaking Mandarin to impress all the Chinese people here. That's chapter 12. And there'd be no music at all because all the musicians are too hurt because they weren't asked to do the readings or the prayers.

[ 1 : 06 ] That's chapter 12. And the truth is, the truth is, look, only half the church would be here today because only half the church likes how I preach. The other half likes the way Andrew Price preaches.

And so they haven't even bothered to turn up today. That is chapter one where we're at today. They're an extraordinarily messed up church. Now, Corinth is Corinth.

We are HCD. So we are not messed up like them. But in issue after issue, we will glimpse ourselves in them and we'll be tempted to react the way they did when faced with the same issue. So their city, Corinth, was effectively built on a canal, if you like, a small road. And rather than the merchants and the traders, rather than sail all the way around the bottom of Greece, they could just cut nine miles across this road with their goods.

That made the city incredibly wealthy and successful. And they attracted everything a wealthy and successful city does. So the latest ideas, the cleverest thinkers, every culture and, of course, every religion in the empire.

[ 2 : 17 ] It was all there in cosmopolitan Corinth. And in a city where being impressive was everything is this small church who are struggling with how unimpressive that Christianity looked.

In verse 26, we said, Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential.

Not many were of noble birth. And there's lots more to say about the heart of the Corinthian problem. But for today, we're going to consider how insecure they were.

How insecure and unassured they were. Because like everything else in Corinth, why is the gospel not more impressive? Why is the gospel not more impressive?

And I've put that statement or question at the top of your handouts. You see, if the gospel is powerful to save, why don't more people in Corinth believe?

[ 3 : 19 ] If the gospel is true, why are we a laughingstock in this city? If the gospel is powerful, why don't more Corinthians join our ranks?

Why is the gospel not more impressive? Maybe something has gone wrong. And so last week, to feel more secure about their faith, they brought out the polish.

So they wanted to shine their Christianity into something more spiritual. Something more impressive to the city around them. And so they started with their leaders. You see, the apostle Paul, he had become an embarrassment in Corinth.

Chapter 2, verse 1 tells us that Paul did not come with eloquence or human wisdom. Greco-Roman Corinth prized excellence in speech. Powers of rhetoric and debate in its philosophical circles. But Paul, in chapter 2, verse 4, we learn that his message and his preaching were not with wise and persuasive words. And all of this helps to explain why the Corinthians were fighting over better leaders.

[ 4 : 32 ] They didn't feel secure enough in their spirituality with unimpressive Paul. And so last week, we learned that some of them said, in verse 12, I will follow Apollos.

You see, Acts chapter 18 tells us that Apollos was an eloquent speaker. That he was a fantastic Bible teacher. If we all follow Apollos, we'll feel more spiritual.

So we won't be laughed at by everyone in this city. And Paul says, no. He says, no. He warns them in verse 17.

Chapter 1, verse 17. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Not with wisdom and eloquence. Lest or unless the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

You see, to trust in an apostle's eloquence rather than his gospel message is what the world would do. That is trusting in impressive worldly polish.

[ 5 : 35 ] And Paul warns that that empties the cross of its power. Now, let me say again, we are HTD. We are not messed up Corinth. But we glimpse ourselves in them in some of these ways.

So when we look at the laughing stock that Jesus and his church are in this city. When we realize that Melbourne functions by how rich and successful everyone is.

And most importantly this. When our families and friends reject Jesus. The pressure on us of all of those things is to polish Christianity.

To make it more impressive for them. More impressive for us even. That pressure is very real and very tempting. And so we need to listen to what Paul says today.

And so Paul gives them three facts. Three facts. So they will throw the polish away. Three facts to stop them and us feeling more secure by how impressive our Christianity looks.

[ 6 : 42 ] So on your handout. I've got the three facts. And it tells you where I'm going. And as I said. If you keep your Bibles open. That would really help me. So fact number one.

The gospel. The gospel looks foolish and weak. The gospel looks foolish and weak. And that's because of verse 18. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

You see in Melbourne. To make Easter. About something other than chocolate and a couple of days off work. Is foolishness. Foolishness. Look also verse 23.

Verse 23. But we preach Christ crucified. A stumbling block to Jews. And foolishness to Gentiles. When Paul preached the gospel in the public square.

All the Jews heard was a stumbling block they couldn't get over. All the Greeks heard was foolish gibberish. Here is a slide.

[ 7 : 44 ] Can I have a slide please? Next slide. This is 2,000 year old graffiti on a Roman wall. And someone is mocking a Christian called Alex Aminos.

And you can see. They say Alex Aminos worships his God. That's if you're ancient Greek. Isn't that great? Don't worry. Mine is. Not really. Anyway. It says Alex Aminos worships his God.

And you notice they put a picture of a donkey's head on Jesus on the cross. To put your hope in the cross is foolishness. Says the ancient world.

Verse 22 says that Jews demand signs. If you Christians want to convince us. Get your Jesus to show up here. And show us one of his miracles. It says that Greeks demand wisdom.

Thanks. Gil. That's enough. Says that Greeks demand wisdom. If you want to persuade us. Give us some wise words. Give us eloquent speech and arguments. Paul's foolish message to both is.

[ 8 : 49 ] Verse 20. Is of a God. Who comes to earth to die in weakness. Our world. Still says that same message is foolish today.

So to say that we trust in Jesus. Is to say that we are fools. Is to say that we are fools. In the world's eyes. It's the same thing. You're really saying that that humiliated figure on the cross is your God.

Yeah. That's what I'm saying. And you're really saying that that moment when they killed him is actually the rescue. Yeah. That's what I'm saying. And you're really saying that God chose the weakest thing in the world.

A man dying on a cross to demonstrate his power. Yeah. That's what I'm saying. Fact number one. The gospel looks weak and foolish.

But. But. Fact number two. Really. The gospel is wise and powerful. Verse 24.

[ 9 : 50 ] But to those whom God has called. Both Jews and Greeks. That's everyone. Christ. The power of God. And the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser.

Than human wisdom. And the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. You see God at his most stupid. Is wiser than the world. God at his most weak.

Dying on a cross. Is more powerful than the world. If you believe fact number one. But you don't know fact number two. You will reach for the polish.

You'll want to improve your weak looking Christianity. Into something more impressive. Paul warns that all you'll end up doing. Is emptying the cross. Of its power.

You see. Even when clever people stump us. With questions about. Why does God allow suffering. Or they stump us with. How can you Christians be responsible. For so much damage in the world.

[ 10 : 50 ] Or they stump us with. Tell me about the Trinity again. I don't understand it. Even when they. These clever people. And the clever atheists. Stump us with these questions. There will be a day.

When they will all say. Jesus you are king. You are powerful enough for me. There is a day. When they will say. Jesus you are right. And you are wise enough for me.

You see. The gospel doesn't sound wise. To clever people of the world. But it does save. The gospel. Even though it sounds weak.

To powerful people in this world. It does. Rescue them from perishing. If you want to know. How powerful. And how wise the gospel is. The test is whether it saves people.

Not whether it impresses them. So fact number one. The gospel looks foolish and weak. But really. Fact number two. The gospel is wise.

[ 11 : 47 ] And powerful. Because. Verse 25. The foolishness of God. Is wiser than human wisdom. And the weakness of God. Is stronger than human strength. You see.

There are two kinds of people. In the world. There are two kinds of people. And we've all got a version of this. So. There are two kinds of people. There are. Apple people. And.

Silly android people. There are. People. Who squeeze the toothpaste. From the bottom of the tube. And those irritating people. Who squeeze it. Just wherever they want. There are.

Those. Morning people. Like my son. RJ. And there are those. Who aren't. Like me. Which always ends in tears. Every morning. My tears. The Corinthians thought.

You're either a Paul person. Or an Apollos. Or Cephas person. Well here. The Bible lays into. The discussion. In verse 18. It says.

[ 12 : 43 ] There are those. Who hear the message. Of the cross. And no matter how many times. You explain it to them. Think. They think it's foolish. They are. Fact. One.

People. People. And they are perishing. And then there are those of us. Who hear the message. Of the cross. And we see. It's the power of God.

We are fact. Two people. And we are saved. But all of that. Makes us wonder. Why is it then. When we hear the gospel.

We think. Wow. God. You are a genius. God. You are amazing. And when our family. And friends. Hear the exact same message. They think. Wow. That is ridiculous. Why is that the case?

If the gospel. Does save. Which it does. If the gospel. Is true. Which it is. If the gospel. Is powerful. Which it is. Why is the gospel. Not more impressive.

[ 13 : 41 ] Why has God. Organized salvation. This way. And the answer. Is fact number three. Fact number three.

You see. In verse 18. God. Intended. A right. And a wrong reaction. To the gospel. And verse 19. Tells us why.

For. Or because. It is written. I will destroy. The wisdom of the wise. The intelligence. Of the intelligent. I will frustrate. Verse 19.

Tells us. That God. Wanted to thwart. The cleverness. Of the clever. So he deliberately. Chose. A method of salvation. That opposes. Human pride.

Verse 20. Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher. Of the law? Where is the philosopher. Of the age? Has not God. Made foolish. The wisdom.

[ 14 : 36 ] Of the world. To those. Who fancy. Themselves. Who trust. Their big. Brains. What is their answer. To eternal.

Salvation. Where is the teacher. Where is the philosopher. What are they to say. When it comes to. Matters of God. And human perishing.

Communism. Capitalism. Multiculturalism. Pluralism. Conservatism. Liberalism. Feminism. Humanism. Come and tell us. How our families. Can be saved.

From perishing. To proud people. Self-righteous people. They demand signs. And wisdom. If God can satisfy me.

With the right signs. And the right argument. Then I will believe. As if they were the examiner. And God is sitting. Their test. Or as if they're the judge. And God is sitting in.

[ 15 : 31 ] Their courtroom. It's the other way around. We. All of us. We are in God's courtroom. He doesn't. Owe it to our intellectual curiosity.

Have a look at verse 27. But God chose. The foolish things of the world. To shame the wise. God chose. The weak things of the world.

To shame the strong. God chose. The lowly things of this world. And the despised things. And the things that are not. To nullify. The things that are.

And why? Verse 29. So that no one may boast. Before him. If people are going to be saved. They're going to have to humble themselves.

And put their trust. In a servant. Who died for them. On a cross. That way. No one can pat themselves. On the back. About their salvation. God wanted to ensure.

[ 16 : 30 ] That no one in heaven. Could say. I am made righteous. Because my big brain. Figured the Bible out. It empties the cross. Of its power. Paul himself.

Paul's on the same wavelength. As God. Paul knows. What the market wants. In verse 22. It says. That Jews demand signs. Did you know.

That Paul. Has such. Gifts. Of healing. That at one point. He brought someone. Back from the dead. That's in Acts 20. Did you know. That in the ancient world. If you had a disease. You literally. Literally. Had to touch. Paul's hanky. And you would be. Made well. That's Acts 19. Paul could do. All the signs. That would impress. The Jews.

We're told. That Greeks. Demanded. Wisdom. He was no slouch. There either. He was trained. In the best schools. Of rhetoric. Trained. As a Pharisee.

[ 17 : 26 ] In how to handle. The scriptures. He could provide. All the polished. Arguments. To persuade. The Greeks. He knows. The market. Wants. Science. And wisdom. And he can do it all.

But instead. Have a look at. Chapter 2. Verse 2. He says. I resolved. Or I decided. To know nothing. While I was with you. Except Jesus Christ.

And him crucified. He chose. To simply preach. About the gospel. He chose. To deliberately. Make himself. Look weak. And trembling. And fearful. And foolish.

He knows. The Jews. Will trip over that. He knows. That that will send. The Greeks away. Laughing. But you see. He wanted to ensure. That no one.

Can say. I am more holy. Than you. Because I follow. Paul. Or Apollos. Or Cephas. Or. I am redeemed.

[ 18 : 22 ] Because I went. To. HTD. The powerhouse. Of eastern suburbs. Christianity. No. That empties. The cross. Of its power.

Verse 30. It is because. Of him. That you are. In Christ. Jesus. Jesus. Who has become. For us. Wisdom. From God. That is. Jesus. Is our righteousness. Holiness.

And redemption. Therefore. As it is written. Let the one. Who boasts. Boasts. In the Lord. Good old. Colin Buchanan. He was right. All along. Think of all.

The rescues. God has. In his rescue. Toolbox. Noah's ark. Parting of the Red Sea. Daniel. From the lion's den. His friends.

From the fiery furnace. Rescuing Israel. From exile. All of Jesus. Miracles. All of them. Very. Very. Impressive. By. Worldly standards. But God.

[ 19 : 18 ] Reaches. To the bottom. Of his rescue. Toolbox. And picks out. A dusty. Little. Crucifix. And he says. You know what. Let's save the world. This way. Because it will put an end.

To human pride. And in Corinth. He proves this point. By choosing. The least impressive. Group of saddos. The most foolish.

Sounding message. And the most. Unimpressive teacher. And he gave them. Every. Spiritual blessing. And he gave them. A rescue. From. Perishing. That means.

God's method. Of salvation. Is very. Sophisticated. Because it means. Only. Humble people. Will accept. God's rescue. Proud people.

Who think. They know better. They will hear. The gospel. And despise it. And not be saved. For those of you. Here. Who wouldn't call. Yourselves. Christians. There is no path.

[ 20 : 16 ] To Jesus. No path. Out of perishing. That doesn't involve. Humbling yourself. Before God. And that is deliberate. So that. Verse 29.

There will be salvation. Without boasting. Verse 30. So that our righteousness. Holiness. And redemption. Can only be found. In Jesus. And not in anything.

We could boast about. And verse 31. So that if we are going to boast. It's only going to be in the Lord. And that is important.

Because. When it comes to salvation. Atheism. Is not the big problem. Remember. Jesus.

Performed his signs. And his teaching. In front of people. They saw it.

Yet they didn't believe. Because they were too proud. To humble themselves. Before God. The real problem. When it comes to. Salvation.

[ 21 : 10 ] Is human pride. Now all of those limitations. Doesn't mean. That no one will be saved. Paul. Expected big results.

He converted thousands. But if people can. Only be saved. By humbling themselves. It stops us. Trying to polish. Christianity. Into something.

More impressive. Something we could. Boast in. It bursts. All our attempts. To polish up the gospel. Because we're trusting. In something weak.

And foolish. Instead. The Corinthians. Were well aware. Of fact number one. They knew. How foolish. The gospel sounded. They didn't know. Fact number two.

And so they got out. The polish. And they had no idea. About fact. Number three. God deliberately. Does this. To undo our pride. To stop us.

[ 22 : 03 ] Trusting in. Polish Christianity. And like. The Corinthians. We here. Are tempted. To reach. For the polish. To make Christianity. More impressive.

Polish Christianity. Makes us feel. More secure. About our faith. More certain. That that is. What will win people. For Jesus. Rather than. A foolish cross. And so just to.

As we round out. Our time. I want to give us. Some examples. Of trusting in the polish. Not the gospel. So here are examples. That we all do. Or me included. We all do this.

It's examples. Of trusting in the polish. Rather than the gospel. So here it is. When our sense of security. As a Christian. Comes from how impressive. Our preachers sound.

Or how middle class. Our church is. Or how many people. Are in our pews. That is the polish. When we think about. Family and friends.

[ 22 : 59 ] Who aren't saved. We're tempted to wish. There were more. Sophisticated Christians. More clever Christians. Christians. That are more rich. And successful. With better answers.

To their questions. Because that is what will. Win them. We think. Oh. Do you want. A Christian with a clever answer. I'll find one for you. Do you want a famous Christian. I'll find a famous Christian. Athlete or actor. If that's what it will take for you. Do you want rich and successful. I've got a couple. Right here in my church. I'll introduce. I'll show you how cool. And relevant. And all these things. We can. But how impressive we are. If that's what it will take. For you to believe. We all do it. That is trusting. In the polish. Imagine if there was.

A TV program. Ever. On the ABC. And it. It gave a clever answer. To all. All of the big questions. About. Why does God. Allow suffering. And all these things.

[ 23 : 54 ] That we talked about before. And we think at the end of it. Wow. That's the one thing. Melbourne really needs. And we try. And everyone. Listen to this program. On the ABC. It's amazing. This will.

Sort you right out. That is trusting. In a polished. Christianity. Because we know. We know. The minute we say to them. Look. What you really need. Is Jesus.

And his cross. They'll think we're foolish. And so we never say that bit. We just keep pointing them. To the impressive. ABC program. See trusting in. A more snazzy church service.

Cutting edge. Cultural engagement. The best arguments. The best music. All of that makes Christians. Feel wise. And strong. And secure. Because it's so impressive. It's so polished.

In the world's eyes. It may attract people. Through our doors. But it will never save them. From perishing. Every time I go to another church.

[ 24 : 52 ] For a visit. I do this. And I'd like you to do the same. Every time you go to another church. Ask yourselves. Where do they show. The power is. In the way they structure.

Their church services. And their church life. Where do they show. The power is. And you can always see. Where they think it is. So some churches think. The power is in. The music they put on. The heightened sense of emotion. The grandeur of their old building. The pomp and ceremony. Of their dog collars. The sense of community. The middle class. University educated.

Professionally employed. Demographic there. Where all of us. Attempted to trust. In the polish. Rather than a foolish sounding message. Of Christ.

Crucified. And so as we finish. Here are some suggestions. For us. Some suggestions. To help us. So. Don't look. In the church diary.

[ 25 : 48 ] And see when your favorite preacher. Is speaking. And think. Ah. That's what I'm going to really make an effort. To turn up. An elegant turn of phrase. Is polish. Trust in the message itself.

I was so tempted. To wear board shorts. And flip flops today. I was so tempted. Here's another one. Don't stop evangelizing. Your family and friends.

Until. You've told them. About Jesus. Cross for them. Don't wait. To speak to them. Until you think. You've made yourself. Look cool enough.

Or good enough. Or polished enough. In their eyes. Or. Don't wait. To speak to them. Until you think. You've built up. Enough of a friendship. Or you think. They're ready. To listen. You'll never get around to it.

And because. The power to save. Is 100% in the cross. There is no right time. There is no right person. It's a relief for us.

[ 26 : 47 ] It's liberating. We can all just. Tell them. It's not our job. To look wise. And impressive. Like the world does. It's to preach.

About Christ. And him crucified. A foolish message. But one. That we hope. Will save them. We trust God. To bring the power. That is.

Next week's talk. But for now. Verse 18. The message of the cross. Is foolishness. To those who are perishing. But to those of us. Who are being saved. It is the power.

Of God. So let us pray. Lord Jesus. We declare. That our hope. And our trust. And our assurance. Is 100% in you.

Forgive us. For the times. When it is in. Worldly. Impressive. Polish. And we pray. That we would stop trusting. In these things. And we beg you.

[ 27 : 42 ] For our family. And friends. Who are currently perishing. We beg you. That they. Would humble themselves. Before you. Please father. Bring your power. Into their lives. Please bring them.

From death. To life. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.