

God's Way vs the World's Way

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[0 : 00] My Bible study groups were about to study 1 Corinthians and it's an extraordinary church. If by extraordinary, we mean extraordinarily messed up.

So if this was the 1030 Corinthian service, there'd be a man over there who's sleeping with his mother-in-law and all the rest of the church would be happy about it.

That's chapter five. The people in the back rows, you'd be suing everyone in this row here for fraud. That's chapter six. The husbands in the room, you'd all be on this side because you hate physical contact and affection with your wives.

That's chapter seven. The wives, you couldn't care less anyway because you've long since thrown away your wedding rings. That's chapter 11. In the middle of the service, a white Anglo-Saxon Australian would stand up and start speaking Mandarin just to impress all the Chinese people.

That's chapter 12. There'd be no music in the room. Sorry, musos, because the musos were too hurt that they weren't asked to give the sermon. And so they've stayed home. That's chapter 12. But the truth is only half the church would turn up today because only half the church likes how I preach.

[1 : 05] Everyone else prefers Andrew Price. And so the church is only half full, which is chapter one, our passage today. They were an extraordinary church. An extraordinary church.

If by extraordinary, we mean extraordinarily messed up. Now, they are Corinth and we are HTD. We are not them. But we will glimpse ourselves in them from this passage today.

Just so you know, Corinth was a rich and successful city. It had everything a big city has, all the cleverest ideas, the best thinkers, all the cultures and, of course, every religion of the empire.

It was all there in cosmopolitan Corinth. And in a city where being impressive was everything is this messed up church of unimpressive believers.

Look at verse 26. 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.

[2 : 04] And that left these Christians feeling insecure. They struggled with how unimpressive they were in a rich and successful city. They thought, if the gospel is wise, why are we a laughingstock?

If the gospel is powerful, why aren't more people flocking to our ranks? If the gospel is true, why aren't more people saved? Perhaps something has gone wrong with the message.

So to feel more in touch with the city around them, they brought out the polish. They brought out the polish. They wanted to buff and shine Christianity into something more impressive because they'd lost confidence in the word.

And they started with their leaders, which for them was the apostle Paul. You see, Paul had become an embarrassment in Corinth. Corinth loved clever reasoning, impressive rhetoric, wise philosophy.

But when Paul turned up, chapter 2, verse 1, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

[3 : 12] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words.

And that is surprising that that is how a Paul sermon would have sounded. It's no wonder in chapter 1 that many of the church flocked to another preacher called Apollos.

In Acts 18, it says that Apollos was an eloquent speaker, that he was a great Bible teacher. If we all follow Apollos, we won't feel like such a laughingstock.

We'll feel more secure in our faith and comfortable in this city. And Paul says no. He says no. Top of your page, verse 17.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. To trust in a preacher's eloquence is the way of the world.

[4 : 15] And Paul warns that that empties the cross of its power. It's like saying Jesus didn't need to die because we've got slick preaching instead. And remember, they are Corinth.

We are HCD. But we will glimpse ourselves in them. And so, if we're worried why Christianity is not taken seriously in Melbourne, or why lots of people don't seem to go to church anymore, or we're worried why our loved ones don't want to know about Jesus, or we've lost confidence in the word, we will reach for the polish.

We'll want to buff and shine Jesus and his gospel into something more attractive. The pressure to do that is very real. We need to listen to what Paul says today.

And what he does, he gives them and us three facts. Three facts so we'll throw the polish away. Three facts so we'll feel more secure in a city like ours.

Firstly, fact one, the gospel looks weak and foolish. It looks weak and foolish. And that is a fact. Verse 18, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

[5 : 30] You see, Paul's gospel is about a God who comes in weakness to die on a cross. And on face value, it sounds foolish. Verse 22 says that Jews demand signs.

Did you know that one time Paul brought someone back from the dead? The person fell asleep in one of his sermons and fell out a window. But Paul brought him back from the dead. Did you know, verse 22 says, Greeks demand wisdom.

Did you know Paul was trained in the best schools of rhetoric? He was a Pharisee in the scriptures. He knows what the market wants, signs and wonders, bells and whistles. He can do it all.

But instead, he chose to look weak and foolish. Verse 23, because he preached Christ crucified. Even though it would make the Jews stumble and send the Greeks and the Gentiles away laughing.

And to believe in the same gospel as Paul is to declare yourself a fool in our city. You see, in Melbourne, to make Easter about anything more than chocolate and some days off work is foolish.

[6 : 39] You're really saying that that humiliated figure on the cross is your God? Yep. That's what I'm saying. And that moment when they killed him, that is the big rescue. Yeah, that's what we believe.

And that God chose the weakest thing in the ancient world, a man on a cross, to demonstrate his power. Yeah, that's what I'm saying. Fact one, the gospel looks weak and foolish.

But fact two, really, it is wise and powerful. Verse 24. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, 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 stronger than human strength. You see, God at his most foolish is still wiser than human wisdom. God at his weakest on a cross is still stronger than human strength.

If you believe fact one, but don't know fact two, you'll reach for the polish. You'll want to make the gospel seem more attractive to the world.

[7 : 45] But all you'll do is empty the cross of its power. You see, when the atheists poke fun at Christianity and clever people discount the role of the church, you need to know where the power is.

Verse 24. Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. You see, the gospel sounds foolish to clever people in the world, but it does save.

The gospel looks weak to powerful people, but it's strong enough to forgive them of their sins. If you want to feel secure about Christianity, the test isn't whether it impresses people, but whether it saves them from perishing.

Fact one, the gospel looks weak and foolish. But fact two, really, it is wise and powerful. And you can see this in verse 18. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. You see, there are two types of people in the world. There are those who hear the gospel and think it's foolish. They are fact one people and they are perishing.

[8 : 54] And then there's us who see it as the power of God. We are fact two people and we are saved. And it makes us wonder, why does salvation work that way?

Why is it that when we see the gospel and see the cross, we think, wow, that is genius. But our loved ones hear the same message and think, wow, that is stupid. Why did God organize salvation this way?

And the answer is fact three. It is deliberate to oppose human pride. You see, God intended a right and wrong reaction to the gospel.

That's what verse 18 is. And verse 19 tells us why. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the intelligence of the intelligent.

I will frustrate. That is a quote from Isaiah 29, which Dean brought to us, our Old Testament reading. It was about a city so arrogant that God said, if I'm going to save you, I'll have to work in a way that frustrates your intelligence and is opposite to your pride.

[10 : 03] It seems the big problem with people being saved isn't necessarily their atheism, but their human pride. Verse 20. Where is the wise person?

Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? God at his most foolish is still wiser than the world.

Communism, capitalism, socialism, feminism. What is their answer to eternal salvation? Liberalism, conservatism, environmentalism, selfism.

Come and tell us how our loved ones can be saved. Wisdom and success. Power, intelligence, philosophy. Come and fix the burdens we carry for our loved ones deep in our hearts.

You see, God wanted to undo the ways of the world. Verse 27. God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

[11 : 05] God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are. Why? So that no one may boast before him.

You see, God wanted to undo the cleverness of the clever. So he chose a method of salvation that opposes human pride. He wanted to ensure that no one in heaven could say, I'm here because I was really intelligent or I was already a pretty good person or I was rich and successful.

He wanted to ensure that no one in heaven could say, I'm here because I follow Paul or I follow Apollos or I follow Andrew or I follow Vijay. All that jostling empties the cross of its power.

It says we don't need Jesus to die for us because we go to HCD instead. For those here who wouldn't call themselves a Christian, there is no path to God.

There's no path out of perishing that doesn't involve you humbling yourself before Jesus and his cross. And that is deliberate. Verse 29.

[12 : 16] So that no one may boast before him. So we're clear, verse 30, that our righteousness, holiness and redemption come from Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Why? Verse 31. So that the one who boasts, boasts only in the Lord. It seems the big problem with people being saved is not necessarily their atheism, but their egos.

Think of all the rescues God has in his rescue toolbox. Noah's Ark, the parting of the Red Sea. Daniel from the lion's den. His friends from the fiery furnace.

All of them are very impressive by human standards. But God reaches to the bottom of his rescue toolbox and picks out a dusty little cross and says, you know what, let's save the world this way because that will put an end to human pride.

And that is genius. It's genius because it means only humble people will be saved. And in Corinth, he proves the point by choosing the most messed up group of Christians, the weakest sounding message and the most mumbling, bumbling apostle.

[13 : 25] And he saves a whole church and sets them apart for his service. You see, the Corinthians were well aware of fact one. They were insecure in their faith, but they didn't know fact two.

And so they reached for the Polish and tried to chase the best preachers. And they had no idea about fact three. God organizes things like this to oppose human pride.

And like them, when we feel unimpressive in this city, it is tempting to reach for the Polish. The pressure to make Christianity seem more appealing just so we feel secure in our faith is very real.

And so here are some examples of trusting in the Polish rather than the gospel. When our sense of security as a church comes from how eloquent our preachers sound, how white and middle class we are, how many people are in the pews, that is Polish.

When we think about loved ones who aren't saved, it's tempting to wish that they were more sophisticated Christians at church, more rich and successful ones, more good looking ones, more famous celebrity ones, because we think that is what will really win our family and friends.

[14 : 42] Perhaps we see a movie or a TV show on the ABC and we think, do you know what, this is the thing that will really win Melbourne for Christ. That is trusting in Polish, because we know as soon as we mention Jesus Christ crucified, it will send people away laughing.

And so we never mention it, but just keep pointing them back to the TV shows instead. A snazzy church service, an emotionally charged meeting, cultural engagement, the best arguments, the best music, these are good and useful in their place.

They make us feel secure because they're so impressive in this city. And while they might attract people through our doors, they won't save them from perishing.

It's easy to forget that the power to save people is in the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified. It's easy, isn't it, to lose confidence in the words.

I don't know if you know this, but in St. Paul's Cathedral right now is a massive art installation of the earth. I don't have a photo, but anyway, it's a huge, it's enormous. It's a massive globe.

[15 : 47] It's the planet earth spinning around. But what they've done is, and I was going to mention it this last week when we're talking about idolatry from the Ten Commandments, because what they've done is they've given it the name Gaia.

Gaia is the pagan goddess of the earth. And apart from, you know, putting a graven image of a pagan goddess in a Christian church, and apart from seeming to replace a father God with a mother earth, it seems the goal of the art piece was to raise awareness for climate action.

The idea is that it will get more people in the pews. But my worry is that the cathedral is feeling the pinch of being irrelevant in a diverse and ever-changing city.

And so they're trying to polish Christianity to make it seem more appealing. My worry is that they've lost confidence in the power of the gospel. And so here are some pointed applications to finish.

First, don't worry when your least favorite preacher steps to the pulpit on a Sunday. An elegant turn of phrase is just polish.

[16 : 53] People always ask me, why do you wear the same thing every week? The same jacket. It is no accident. I'm trying to do what David Attenborough does, and that is he wears the same thing in every video for 50 years, so the attention is on the thing he's pointing to and not on the man.

An elegant turn of phrase is just polish. I should have worn board shorts and torn t-shirt, and I should have started stuttering deliberately just to prove the point. It's just polish.

The power is in the message, not in the man. Secondly, don't stop evangelizing your loved ones until you've told them about Jesus' death for them.

I know some people can't make it out to talk to non-Christian family and friends, so pray instead. But when you pray, don't just pray that God would send a good moral Christian along their path.

Pray for God to send a good moral Christian who's willing to speak about Jesus' death and resurrection. Because the power to save is 100% in the gospel, there's no right time.

[17 : 57] There's no right person. And actually, I think that's quite liberating, isn't it? For Christians, we can just open our mouths and speak, and God will do the rest. His power is in the words.

And I'm not playing down the value of building friendships. Building up trust is important, but important because they'll win us a hearing when we speak about Jesus Christ and his gospel.

It's important for Christians to be good and kind and winsome and servant-hearted and likable and honest, but eventually we'll have to open our mouths and speak if people are to be saved.

Evangelism is not being nice to people. It is the verbal proclamation of the gospel. And finally, therefore, don't lose confidence in the words.

There will always be a latest thing. Always be an attractive thing. Always be a revolutionary thing. A thing that we think, wow, this is the key that will really reach Melbourne for Christ.

[18 : 56] And the pressure to get on board will be palpable. You'll feel it. And you'll watch other churches go and rethink their whole strategies in line with that new latest thing.

And whatever it is, it might be good and useful and fine. But the power to save is 100% in the gospel. It's in the message about Jesus. If we don't talk about him, no one else will.

It's not our job to look wise and sound impressive. It's not our job to seem relevant in this city, but to give our lives to the gospel.

It sounds weak. We might look foolish, but it is God's power to save. Fact one, the gospel looks weak and foolish, but really fact two, it is wise and powerful.

And God organized things because of fact three. To undo human pride. Verse 18 says, The plain old message of a dusty old cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

[20 : 05] How long would we see it that way? Let me pray. Father God, thank you for the good news of Jesus Christ crucified.

Thank you that you have opened our eyes to see it as your power and wisdom in the world. And Father, when we're tempted to trust in polish, please warn us.

Please remind us that the power is in the message. Help us not to be distracted if we feel weak and insignificant in a city like ours. Help us recognize fact three, that you've organized things in a certain way to undo the ways of the world.

Father, please give us confidence in your word. Help us be clear where the power is and where it isn't. And we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.