

## #67 Fools for Christ's Sake

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In the Book of 1 Corinthians, Paul spends a great deal of time explaining to the Corinthian believers that the wisdom of God is perceived as foolishness by the world (1 Corinthians 1:18). In fact, Paul says that the gospel is not naturally palatable to the world, and it is only because of the mercy of God that some even receive this message of “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:21). The way that leads to destruction is wide while the road to life is very narrow. Few find it, and thus few will respond in faith to the gospel of Christ (Matthew 7:13-14). It is the greatest story that will ever be told, and yet the world in its wisdom can't grasp it. The reason for this is that it takes grace to see and divine power to enlighten a natural man to become a spiritual man (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is truly a battle of spiritual power (1 Corinthians 4:20), and our giving the words of truth of the gospel along with committing to prayer are what God asks of us as we go through this world. We don't know whose eyes will be opened and who will respond, so we must go into all the world and preach the gospel. This is our calling, and this is the work that was initiated by Christ and given to the apostles to launch. They laid the foundation (Ephesians 2:20), and now we must keep building (1 Corinthians 3:10).

When we hear the Great Commission, it is often invigorating and exciting as we go to harvest. And we must always have faith to pray for a harvest and to trust God for the salvation of souls. Yet we must understand the nature of the battle of the commission of our Lord. It is not easy, it is not always fun, and it is not for our glory or ambition. If it is for our own gain, we will be prone to distort the gospel, we may lack boldness, and we might rely upon our abilities to advance the kingdom rather than the power of God, something Paul adamantly refused to do (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). What we must understand is that the work of the kingdom is very frustrating, laborious, and difficult. It is also very satisfying and has the potential to yield great joy and reward if done properly and obediently. But in order to have full joy, we must be willing to make a full sacrifice. The work of the gospel is not for the faint of heart but for those full of faith. The reason for this is because of the nature of the battle. We preach a message that the world perceives as foolish and which can only be understood by the intervention of the Lord. Therefore, it will not be an infrequent occurrence that people will look at us like fools who are wasting our lives and their time. We can expect insult and persecution (2 Timothy 3:12), but we can also expect joy and a reward in heaven. If one is willing to accept the hardship now, there can be great gain later.

Paul was willing to accept hardship, and eventually it cost him his life. But it wasn't just in death that he sacrificed; it was in life. In 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 Paul sarcastically rebukes the Corinthians for thinking that they have been willing to pay the price such as he has. He says,

“For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. *We are fools for Christ's sake*, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now” (italics mine).

If we let the gravity of what Paul is saying about the nature of his apostleship sink in, it is severely sobering and humbling. He recognizes that he is a fool for Christ's sake. He had it all before his conversion: fame, glory, the respect of persons, status, and so on. Now, he was rejected, reviled, persecuted, without food, poorly clothed, homeless, thirsty, roughly treated, and so on. This man suffered greatly for Christ's sake, and he worked extremely hard to support himself and to do the work of the gospel. He was a radical, a perceived nutcase, one whom the world thought had become a raving religious madman speaking incessantly of Christ, repentance, and salvation. He went against the grain and took the shame, like Jesus before him, albeit imperfectly. The world rejected Jesus Who came in love, doing good for people. What makes us think they will like us? Paul's explanation of himself and the apostles as the “scum of the world” and the “dregs of all things” is highly telling. Society regarded the apostles as despicable, worthless, and as foul matter. They were expendable, annoying, and an insult on humanity as they preferred it. The question is, do we love the world, or are we willing to let the world think of us as scum? Seriously, are we willing to be despised as worthless refuse? If we trust in the simple power of the gospel and preach it, we will be treated this way. It will happen. If we start standing for truth and defend the purity of the church, even professing believers might start to despise us. If we want to imitate Christ, we must realize that *part of Christlikeness is to accept the ridicule which Christ accepted*. If we want to be those who truly labor for Christ, we will also have to be fools for His sake. If Christ was willing to be regarded as a fool, so, too, must we.