

1 Corinthians 1:18, 21-24 (NIV)

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.

21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

46-01-02 -The Power of the Gospel
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1 Cor 1:18, 21-24

God invests His personal power in transforming sinners into saints.

INTRODUCTION: (Scripture reading: 1 Cor 1:18-24)

—My last message [“The Foolishness of the Gospel”] came from **v.18a**, “...*the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.*” Today’s **title** is “The Power of the Gospel” from **v.18b**, “*but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” The last sermon addressed Greek wisdom-seekers in **v.22**, *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom...* Now, we’ll look at the Jewish sign-seekers, or those seeking the miraculous.

—[**Dan Wakefield** in “In Search of Miracles,” says, “We have moved from ‘death of God’ theology to intense interest in the supernatural.” Then he talks of New Age thinking as a “*desire for belief in some power in the universe beyond the box of conventional mainstream religion.*”] But New-Agers have a big problem: the **God of the universe invested His personal power** in a conventional box called *the Gospel*, so that by it **He could transform sinners into saints**. *Sinners* who trust their own ideas remain *sinners* and ultimately die as sinners. *This is why...*

I. God Hides Himself from the Sinner’s Wisdom

- A. Man’s wisdom asks, “Why doesn’t God just show up?”— **v.21a**, *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him...— God wisely remains **hidden from sinners****
1. *When their pride of knowledge blinds them. (He won’t let them succeed spiritually in the vanity of their own wisdom.)
 2. *When religious knowledge makes them controlling [Think of the abuses of powerful ministers; the ugly atrocities of religious persecution.]
- B. God’s wisdom says, “I did show up, and you crucified Me.”— **v.21b**, *God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. — Man thinks God’s investment foolishness*, because:*
1. *It eliminates human effort in salvation (Law says, “do and live” but Christ declares “it is finished ... Come unto me!”)
 2. *It trades the goal of self-fulfillment for self-denial (Jesus says, “Come, take up your cross and follow Me.”)
 3. *It makes trust in God’s plan the threshold of God’s blessing.

TRANS: What *pleases God* is not intelligence, moral effort or self-achievement, but *faith in His finished work on the Cross*. *In His wisdom, God invests His personal power in transforming sinners into saints*. But some are looking for miraculous signs, and so...

II. God Lets These Sign-Seekers Trip over Christ's Cross— v.23a, but we preach Christ crucified: a **stumbling block** to Jews....

A. The Jews wanted *outward change*, not *inward heart conversion*:

1. They sought **political** power, but He brought **resurrection** power
 - a. Mat 12:39-40, He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
 - b. [The sign of Jonah identified Jesus, but it preaches a short sermon about us, too: Like Jonah, we tried to sail away from God's will, but the tempest of God's Spirit overtook us. *Our repentance* threw us overboard to be swallowed up by the *power of Christ's Cross*. Then *His Resurrection power* returned us to this world as *transformed people* to bring change to a godless society, not by *political force*, but by a message of repentance and faith in God's forgiveness! (To some, this was a sign of foolishness, but “to us who are being saved it is the power of God”)
2. Upon seeing Jesus *feed 5000* or *raise the dead*, some thought He might be the coming Messiah, a Prince capable of raising up an invincible army against Rome! But *Jesus offered them a spiritual life* nourished by what His sacrifice and His own rising from the dead would accomplish.
3. Unable to accept these words about His *Cross* and *Resurrection*, they tripped over Jesus as a *stumbling block* [Gk., *skandalon*].
 - a. He seemed to be a political weakling, so they didn't want Him.
 - b. They ate the Passover, but they refused to feed their souls upon “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.”
 - c. [columnist Cal Thomas.: “For Christians, the vision of worldly power is not a calling, but a distraction. It is a temptation Jesus rejected, not because it was dangerous, but because it was trivial compared with his mission....”]

B. Today, many seek miraculous power: some are seeking...*

1. *To attain spirituality without a relationship with God's Son.
2. *To have angelic power instead of power to live a holy life.
3. *To gain occult knowledge instead of God's truth that brings

spiritual life now and *prepares the soul* for life after death.

4. *To follow fortune-tellers and horoscopes instead of instructions from God's Word. [Being set free from Gong Hee Fat Choy, my answer now to “What's your sign?” is “*I was born under the sign of the Cross!*”]

TRANS: [Referring to the bronze serpent raised on a pole for Israel to look at for healing from poisonous snake bites, an old Jewish writing says Moses complained, “*This serpent is a stumbling block to the world.*” God replied, “*Not at all. It shall be for punishment to sinners, and life to upright men.*”] Jesus explained His Cross by telling us in John 3:14-15. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. To some this message is still a stumbling block, BUT...

III. God Blesses “Faith in Christ” with Transformation— v.24, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

A. Conversion brings the power of God and the wisdom of God together:

1. The human question is: “*Can absolute justice and absolute mercy meet together?*” (Yes! *They've already met at the Cross!*)
2. The human problem is: “*How can we become holy like God?*” (Forget self-help courses! *Come kneel at the Cross of Christ!*)

B. God invested His personal power in this one plan and calls us to respond with full faith in His Son! [FAITH's best definition is “Forsaking All I Trust Him”].

CONCLUSION:

—Some call the Gospel *foolishness*, because they've never experienced it. Their argument is, “*I've never felt God's power!*” [Spurgeon wrote: “a blind man is no judge of colors, a deaf man is no judge of sound, and a man who has never been quickened into spiritual life can have no judgment as to spiritual things.”]

—Others say, “*I prayed, there were no flashing lights, and God didn't give me what I wanted!*” These people need to face some questions: “*What are you looking for? Your will or God's will? Your plans or His plan? What are you really after? A thrilling experience with special effects? Or do you want to receive God's transforming power?*” (God doesn't offer *spiritually peaceful feelings*: He usually disrupts our lives! He doesn't promise *supernatural fireworks*: His Gospel changes hearts! Through the Cross of Christ, God has invested His personal power for one great purpose: **to transform sinners into saints.**