

Victory of the Lamb // January 2, 2021 // Pastor Ben Sadler
Series: Foolproof // Sermon: Foolproof Followers

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 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.

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. ¹⁹ For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

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? 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 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. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Christianity is not cool. It never has been and it never will be. For example, there was some ancient graffiti that dates back to about the 2nd century called the [Alexamonos Graffito](#). It is a picture of a man worshipping a donkey on a cross. And underneath it reads, Ἀλεξάμενος σέβεται θεόν, which means "Alexamonos worships his God". In other words, whoever drew this graffiti was mocking someone name Alexamonos for worshipping a king who would die on a cross.

Christianity wasn't cool in the 2nd century. And it's not cool now. Just think about coming to church today. How many of your neighbors got up to go to church? Was it really the popular, culturally relevant thing to do? And how was the traffic on the way to church? Did you have trouble finding a parking spot or a seat? And how about at work? Will being a Christian give you any kind of economic advantage? No, Christianity isn't cool.

And it is not for the lack of trying. The Christian Church has tried to be cool and relevant and impact the culture for thousands of years. We have tried to gain power and influence through politics, going all the way back to Constantine, the first Christian Emperor. That didn't make Christianity cool. It just watered-down Christianity. And you can think of the more modern examples of people trying to get Christians

into leadership in the government. The thought being, if we could just get political power, then Christianity would be cool and mainstream.

We have tried to make Christianity cool through the arts. We have built large cathedrals throughout Europe and now they are empty museums. We have tried to be cool and relevant through Christian music. And some Christian music has stood the test of time. But most Christian music on Christian radio can come across as dated and cliché. We have tried to make Christian cool by going to Hollywood. But many Christian movies have B-list actors and the storylines seem trite. With all our effort and trying, Christianity still isn't cool. It still isn't culturally mainstream.

In fact, every time Christianity tries to be cool, it's like a dad who tries to be cool around his teenage kids. I know. That happened to me the other night. I was driving my son and oldest daughter and her friends to the WISCO basketball game. As I was listening to them talk, I finally said, I have no idea what you are saying. Give me a dictionary definition of the words that you are using. What is "Cap and no cap" "busting" "Vibe"? They told me what they mean. And they I tried to use the words. And they said, "Um Dad, you are not allowed to talk like that." Dad's are not allowed to try to be cool and relevant.

Today we are starting a new series **Foolproof** and, in this series, we are going through Paul's letter to the Corinthians. This series is all about how the Christian faith might seem to be foolish at first, but it actually is the wisdom of God. And today the question I want to answer is: **Why will Christianity never be cool?**

And to answer that question we are going to look at some selected verses from the opening four chapters of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. But first a little background. Corinthian was a city in a Roman Province of modern-day Greece. Paul loved these people. He was like a father to them. But they were like dysfunctional children. This congregation had lots of problems. They might have converted to Christianity, but they had a lot of room for spiritual growth.

Paul says, ¹⁰**I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.** Paul wanted them to agree with each other and get along. What was their problem?

¹¹**My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.** ¹²**What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas (Peter)"; still another, "I follow Christ."** So Paul heard from a woman named Chloe that there were this clicks and groups that were forming. As we read on in the letter, we get more details. But basically it seems like there was a group that said, "I'm part of the Paul party. He is our founding pastor. He is a master missionary who has started churches all over the world. I'm in his group." But then Apollos came after Paul to preach in Corinth. We know from other parts of Scripture that Apollos was known as a gifted orator. And so there formed a new click that was saying, "I'm glad we got rid of Paul. Apollos is an all-star preacher. He is going to bring in the crowds." But then there were other people who were saying, "I not with Paul or Apollos. I'm part of the Peter party. He was a real Apostle and followed Jesus. And he is more traditional. He still follows the Kosher traditions and the traditional festivals."

Doesn't this sound like a high school cafeteria? Someone says, "I'm part of the popular group." Then someone else says, "Well, I hang out with the basketball team". Then someone else says, "Well, I hang out with people on the honor role."

Paul hears this and he can't stand it so he says, **"Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)**

Current translation: "You guys are acting like spiritual two-year-olds. Grow up! You guys are so obsessed by looking powerful and wise and cool by the world that you are tearing each other apart. You are starting little clicks and groups. And you are puffed up with pride and jealousy. You are acting like the rest of the world."

So Paul explains why Christianity will never be powerful and wise and cool in the eyes of the world.:

¹⁸For 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. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Paul makes a blanket statement that has stood the test of time. The message of the cross is always going to be foolish to the world. There is nothing you can do about it. There is no cool, powerful group in the Christian church. It doesn't matter if you are a part of Paul's group or Apollos' group or Peter's group. If you are a member of Victory, some small country church, or some megachurch. Christianity is always going to sound like foolishness to the rest of the world.

But does that mean it is foolishness? Paul asks, 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?** The message of the cross might seem foolish, but has the so-called wisdom and power of the world stood the test of time? Think of all of the philosophers and leaders of Paul's day? They are all forgotten, but Jesus still stands. Think of the more modern-day philosophers and thinkers. People like Charles Darwin, so called the Father of Darwinian evolution and biology, who wrote the *Origin of the Species*. His scientific experiments on finches were supposed to explain the origin of life without God. But now that we know more about DNA and the archaeological record so many of his theories of the origin of life and evolution of animals has been disproven. Or Sigmund Freud the father of psychology. He supposed to solve all our mental illnesses without God. But so much of what he wrote has been disproven and found to be wrong or immoral. Or the philosophy of Nietzsche who believed we need to find a philosophy of life and meaning of life without God. He tried to live out his philosophy and he went crazy. So the so-called power and wisdom of the world has all come to nothing.

Instead of using worldly wisdom and power, God used simple preaching of the simple message of the cross to show his wisdom and power. 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.** In other words, God does not reveal himself through worldly wisdom and power and influence. But through simple things like a simple pastor preaching the word. And simple, foolish water of baptism. And the simple wafer and wine at the Lord's Supper. Through these seemingly simple and foolish things, God shows his power.

The way God works offends every culture. Paul explains, ²² **Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,** ²³ **but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...**

Throughout Jesus' ministry, the Jews were asking him to perform more and more miracles. And they said that they would not believe until he showed more and more miraculous power. When Paul preached to the Greeks in Corinth and Athens, they wanted more deep philosophy and deeper wisdom. And today in the US, when we preach the culture wants to see more success and more money. They want us to see that Christianity leads to happiness, health, and wealth.

But instead, Paul says, we preach Christ crucified. This is going to offend every culture. A guy dying on a cross doesn't look powerful to the Jews. A guy dying on a cross doesn't look wise, but foolish to the Greeks. A guy dying on a cross alone with no money and no followers, doesn't look successful, but he looks like a failure to Americans.

And so that helps us answer our opening question: **Why will Christianity never be cool?**

The cross of Christ offends every culture.

So don't try to make it relevant here or there or anywhere. By nature, nobody is naturally drawn to a leader who dies alone in excruciating pain.

And yet Paul goes on to say, ²⁴ **but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** ²⁵ **For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.**

Even though the cross seems foolish to every culture, it has stood the test of time. Paul says people from every culture, Jews, Greeks, even Americans have been called by God to believe. And when you believe this message of the cross you see it as the wisdom of God and the power of God. The message of Jesus' cross and empty tomb is a source of thousands of sermons. It is wisdom beyond understanding. It has power that can change your life like nothing else. That is why Paul tells the Corinthians, when I was among you, I resolved to know nothing but Christ and him crucified.

Think about it. Instead of destroying all the evil in the world, which would include us, he took evil into himself and let himself be destroyed. Instead of punishing us for our sins, he let himself be punished. Instead of trying to explain all the reasons why we suffer, he came into the world to show true compassion by suffering with us and along side of us. And he came out of that suffering and death on the other side, resurrected and alive.

So, what does Paul want us to do? ¹⁸ **Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise.** ¹⁹ **For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. (1 Corinthians 3:18-19)**

In other words, don't work so hard to be cool and relevant and powerful and wise according to the world. Instead, let yourself be seen as foolish by the world.

Embrace the foolish cross, so that you might become wise. Dive deep into the meaning and purpose and power and wisdom of the cross. Let the cross and empty tomb be your salvation, your philosophy of life, your power and your wisdom. Let it be your everything!

How do you do that? Well, starting tomorrow, January 3rd, we will begin our Bible reading plan. Every year we have a Bible reading plan through the YouVersion Bible app. The past two years we have read through the whole Bible. Many of you have done that. This year I wanted to do something different. Instead of reading the whole Bible, we are going to take a year to read through the New Testament and the Psalms. There are videos that will help you understand the reading. And I will make comments daily to help guide you through. We already have over 100 people signed up. If you want to join, go to **Votl.life/Bible**. As we read through the Bible together, we will see the deep wisdom and power of God on every page. His plan to be with us and save us and to turn our weakness into strength.

Christianity is never going to be cool in any culture. The cross is always countercultural. Just like parents are never going to be cool to their teenagers. But do you know what? Our teenagers don't need us to be cool. Teenagers need their parents to be present, loving, mature, and wise. And that's what our culture needs from the church. They don't need Christians to be cool. They need us to be present, loving, mature, and wise. Embrace the foolish cross. It's the wisest thing you will ever do. Amen.