

# *The Foolishness of Preaching*

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

*Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

Are you puzzled by these words and by the title of this message? The foolishness of preaching? Why has the apostle Paul coined this expression “foolishness of preaching”? To try and understand that, may God’s Holy Spirit guide us as it impressed him, by reading the context. He commences with what is foolishness to humanity:

## **Foolishness?**

**1 Corinthians 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where [is] the wise? where [is] the scribe? where [is] the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.**

Can you see something here? Can you discern that the apostle Paul is articulating the contrast between man’s wisdom and the wisdom of God? He is saying that man’s wisdom is foolishness. And as man’s wisdom is being exercised as he listens to the preacher, he thinks, Nonsense! The preaching of the cross is foolishness; because the preaching of the cross, to them that perish, is foolishness. And it is in addressing and articulating this concept that Paul says and expresses, in a sort of slightly cynical way towards the human being: “After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” The world’s wisdom cannot know God. To them, the effect of the preaching is, “What for? That’s foolishness.” It doesn’t lend itself to the wisdom of those who perish, to the wisdom of man’s glory. So the apostle is contrasting and using the language of those who perish as the foolishness of preaching. This is what he is saying.

As he says in other scriptures, this is what he understood in his own experience, because he himself was regarding the apostles’ preaching of Jesus as foolishness, and he went along and wanted to kill all the fools. But he then realised that he was in a negative state towards God.

**1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.**

Full of vanity, full of pride. So the conflict in the mind of a natural man is, I don’t see any value in what I am hearing this preacher preaching. And we all suffer under our natural man.

## Suffering Under the Natural Man

**1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.**

There it is. The natural man, who is wise in his own estimation, looks upon the things of the Spirit of God as foolishness. The things of God he cannot know, because the wisdom of God is way above the wisdom of men. And as we hear the preaching of the wisdom of God, the natural man says, Pffoa, what I am hearing is ridiculous. Because he can't discern the spirituality that is in the message.

**1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.**

He is talking to the believers here. The preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not preaching the wisdom that comes from the natural man; and as we are listening to the preacher, who is speaking *not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual*, the natural man listening to that is looking upon it as comical, maybe—foolish. He thinks, I'd rather see it from my perspective, thank you. That's the natural man speaking. So in the eyes of the natural man in us, to be saved by preaching is foolishness. But that's what it said, wasn't it? That by the foolishness of preaching we are to be saved. The wisdom of God and the pleasure of God by the foolishness of preaching, is for those that are going to be saved. So there is something that I have to do with my natural man as I hear. I need to come under the Spirit's influence to hear aright.

## Sitting in Judgment on the Preaching

The following statement pictures what happens to the natural man after he hears the sermon, the preaching of the gospel:

**But the word of the Lord is not to be judged by a human standard. It will be seen that those whose minds have the mold of earthliness, those who have a limited Christian experience and know but little of the things of God, are the ones who have the least respect for God's servants and the least reverence for the message He bids them bear. They listen to a searching discourse and go to their homes prepared to sit in judgment on it, and the impression disappears from their minds like the morning dew before the sun. {5T 301.1}**

Meditate on what this is saying. Are you struggling with the natural man inside of you? And you fall into the trap of going home and contemplating what you have heard, and you think, Hmm, the delivery wasn't perfect; it was a bit long...”, etc., and off you go, and the next minute, the impression that the sermon was meant to give is just gone like dew and I've forgotten about it. That is because of the natural man; this is how he does it. This is the description.

For us to benefit from the preaching, we need the Holy Spirit; we need spiritual discernment. We need to be spiritually-minded. So in this hour, as we sit at the feet of Jesus, let us open our mind to the Spirit and find from Him the benefit of preaching.

## Faith?

Do you have a strong faith? Is your faith strong? Did you understand the words of this hymn? Do you see the desire expressed here?

*O for a faith that will not shrink, Though pressed by many a foe;*

As you are pressed by the foe—by your flesh, by the world, by the devil—do you shrink?

*And that will not tremble at the brink of poverty or woe;*

If poverty comes across your path, do you tremble? Or if woe comes across you, do you start trembling? Where is your faith, according to this?

*That will not murmur or complain Beneath the chastening rod,*

As you are going through the grief and the pain of the chastening that the Lord permits to happen to you, do you murmur and complain? Do I have faith? Because faith will not murmur or complain.

*But in the hour of grief or pain can lean upon its God.*

Can you do that? Do you have that kind of faith?

*A faith that shines more bright and clear When tempests rage without;  
That when in danger knows no fear, In darkness feels no doubt.*

When I sing this hymn, I think, Oh oh, that's not me. I fear in darkness; I doubt in darkness. O Lord, do I need a faith

*That bears unmoved the world's dread frown, Nor heeds its scornful smile;  
That sin's wild ocean cannot drown, Nor its soft arts beguile.*

Are you overwhelmed with the waves of sin that drown you? Have you fallen for a few little soft arts? Faith conquers all that. So I am asking you the question, How do you feel after singing that hymn? Do you need faith? I need this faith. And how am I going to get it? Because we sung it there, Lord, give me such a faith as this. Now He is going to give it to you right now. Are you waiting for something special to happen? for the Lord just suddenly to touch you with faith? How are you going to get it? To have such a faith... How are you going to procure it?

## How Will You Get Faith?

**Romans 10:17 So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

Faith comes by preaching, as you hear the preaching and you hear the word of God.

**Through His holy Word, through His providences, and through messages sent to you by His servants, Jesus is daily saying to you, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."**

{SD 238.4}

As I am hearing the word of God by the servants of God, Jesus is knocking, Jesus is there. As we sung in the hymn: *Sitting at the feet of Jesus*, in the sermon, in the preaching. So as this scripture says, *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*—by the word of God, by providence, and by the preaching of the word.

**Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**

This is the background of "faith cometh by hearing". That's a wonderful promise, isn't it? But follow carefully:

**Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? 17 So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

You see, we've been preaching; but they regard the preaching as foolishness. Who has responded to this? he asks. So Apostle Paul is saying plainly here that the people who cry out for faith, the people who want to be saved, need to hear the preacher. So for the Lord to give me faith, and for me to be perfected, is to hear the preaching. This is what is written.

But I hear someone say, We don't need a preacher; I can obtain it myself by my own Bible study. Have you heard that? I've heard it many times. That's the natural man speaking. Let us hear what the Holy Spirit says:

## Activity of the Preacher

**Ecclesiastes 12:10 The preacher sought to find out acceptable words:**

How am I going to preach? he says; I need acceptable words.

**Ecclesiastes 12:10 ...and [that which was] written [was] upright, [even] words of truth. 11 The words of the wise [are] as goads, and as nails fastened [by] the masters of assemblies, [which] are given from one shepherd.**

What is this saying? The preacher was looking for acceptable words. Where did he find them? In that which was written. That which is written in the Scriptures are the words of the wise; those who have been moved upon by the Holy Spirit have written the Scriptures. And now, what does the preacher do? He is identified here as the master of assemblies. As the people are assembled to hear the word, he is looking for the right words, and he takes it from what has been written beforehand. The words of the wise, as they are written there, are as nails and goads fastened by whom? By the preacher—*by the masters of assemblies*. And these are all given from one Shepherd, Jesus.

So according to this scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what is the answer here? The preacher is to place the written words of the Bible in a right place. We often hear the expression, That was just like a nail in the right place. He is to take the words of God and put them in the right place. This is what the preacher does. Many times, people who study the Bible for themselves without the preacher, put their own interpretation on it to suit their own personal opinion. This is

how we often read the Bible. But the preacher is meant to present and to place the nail in the right place from God's word.

Apostle Paul is speaking to the preacher here; he is writing to Timothy, who is an ordained minister, and he says:

**2 Timothy 2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**

What is the preacher to do? To preach so that he is approved of God, *a workman that needeth not to be ashamed* because he is doing what with the word? *Rightly dividing the word of truth*—putting the nail in the right place. This is what God calls upon the preacher to do. We read the Bible alone for our own wellbeing, to suit our own way of living, and the preacher is put aside, and we think we have the truth. And this is what the problem is in today's society of Christianity. There are so many individual preachers who preach according to what suits the people. But the true preacher that God approves of, puts the word together in the right way—rightly dividing the word.

## Pastors According to God's Heart

Indeed, we are living in these times in which there are so many saying, Here is the Lord, here is the truth, here is what the Lord wants you to hear. We are living in such a time where we are confused by what we are hearing. This is what is happening; so many people have said it to me. "You say this, and they say that, and these say this..." We are living in dreadful times. But in these dreadful times, God provides something. In these terrible times in which Christianity has been so twisted and turned, God is looking upon them and saying, Oh, you have really spoiled yourself here.

**Jeremiah 3:14 Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: 15 And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.**

What has God promised in this terrible confusing time, in which the natural man will look upon the preaching of the pure word and say, That's foolishness; I've got a better message to preach? This is the harsh reality of our time. But God says, Turn to me, and I am going to give you pastors who are approved of God, and who rightly divide the word of truth. This is what He promises to those few, "one of a city, and two of a family". Here you get that little, little flock, so small, scattered in different places. God says, I am going to give you pastors *according to Mine heart*, who will rightly divide the word and will put it in a secure place in your mind, a nail in the right place.

Let us now turn to the Spirit of Prophecy to illuminate our mind as to the importance of this kind of preaching that God approves of.

## The Sermon: God's Appointed Means of Grace

**We are never to forget that Christ teaches through His servants. There may be conversions without the instrumentality of a sermon. {5T 300.3}**

There may be. That's what people say, Oh, I don't need the sermon; God can help me without the sermon.

**There may be conversions without the instrumentality of a sermon. Where persons are so situated that they are deprived of every means of grace, they are wrought upon by the Spirit of God and convinced of the truth through reading the word; but God's appointed means of saving souls is through "the foolishness of preaching." {Ibid.}**

What is God's appointed means? The foolishness of preaching. If there are people who are going to be saved who cannot have access to that preaching, then the Holy Spirit and the angels step in to help that individual. But if there is a preacher according to God's approval, of which He spoke when He said He would give pastors according to His heart, then those people who refuse to listen to the preacher that God sends, are not going to be helped by the Holy Spirit. This is what we are reading here.

**Where persons are so situated that they are deprived of every means of grace, {Ibid.}**

This is one of the means of grace, the preacher.

**...they are wrought upon by the Spirit of God and convinced of the truth through reading the word; but God's appointed means of saving souls is through "the foolishness of preaching." {Ibid.}**

Now comes the continuation:

**Though human, and compassed with the frailties of humanity, men are God's messengers; and the dear Saviour is grieved when so little is effected by their labors. {Ibid.}**

God's appointed way of labouring for us is through the preachers; and Jesus *is grieved* that so little is achieved by that. Amazing, isn't it? He is grieved.

**Every minister who goes out into the great harvest field should magnify his office. He should not only seek to bring men to the knowledge of the truth, {Ibid.}**

What else is he to do, after he has brought the truth to them and people accept the truth through his ministry?

**...but he should labor, as did Paul, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom," that he may "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." {Ibid.}**

That's the work of the preacher. As Sister White writes, After you have preached the sermon, your work has only just begun, because now you are to continue to labour for the souls that are under your care. Maybe I need to confess here that I have not been perfect in that. I used to do this work very astutely, but now in the time in which we are living, my labour for souls, to present them perfect in Christ Jesus, is being judged as "you are leaning on John Thiel"; and I have sort of pulled back a little bit, in an attempt to stop them from saying that. So I preach from the pulpit, and then it's up to the individuals. But according to what I have just read here, the minister is to continue to work on after he has given the preaching, *that he may "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus,"* through the proclamation of the word. So there we have the Testimony of Jesus on the subject, the Spirit of Prophecy illuminating the importance of this.

## Looking Beyond the Instrument

As we read, *God's appointed means of saving souls is through "the foolishness of preaching"*. Although you are looking at an instrument, and you are looking and listening to a human being, *though human, and compassed with the frailties of humanity, men are God's messengers*. Look beyond the human frailty, because the person is speaking as a mouthpiece from the Lord—*God's appointed means*.

Here we read about this appointed means of God:

**The apostle Paul tells us, "After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). This was the carrying out of God's plan for the conviction and conversion of men, who are constantly tempted to magnify their own powers. {2SM 371.2}**

This is the natural man; he is struggling with his own assessment of what the preacher is preaching, and he regards his preaching as foolishness. But this was the carrying out of *God's plan*. O to pick up what is written here. It is for us to be saved by means of grace that God has placed into position the foolishness of preaching.

**I have stated before them that, from what was shown me, but a small number of those now professing to believe the truth would eventually be saved--not because they could not be saved, but because they would not be saved in God's own appointed way. {2T 445.2}**

All of us can be saved. Not a single person needs to be lost. But why are so few people saved? Because they regard the preaching as foolishness. But the preaching of the truth in these last days is God's appointed way; it is the means of grace.

**God might write the messages of truth upon the firmament of the heavens as easily as he placed the stars in their position. He might proclaim the truth and let it shine to the world through angel visitors, but this is not the way he ordained. He delegated power to his disciples to carry the light which he would communicate to them, to all parts of the world. Through his ambassadors God graciously infuses light to the understanding and warmth to the souls of those who acknowledge the message he sends, bearing light to those in darkness. {ST, January 8, 1880 par. 5}**

He bears light to those in darkness.

## You Have Issues with Fallen Man Preaching?

**God does not select angels who have never fallen, but fallen man... {ST, January 8, 1880 par. 7}**

Have you ever had problems accepting the preaching because you know the man has fallen? But

**God does not select angels who have never fallen, but fallen man who has felt the redeeming power of the grace of Christ sanctifying his own life, and the bright beams of truth warming his own heart. As they have been in peril themselves, they are acquainted with the dangers and difficulties of others, and the way to reach others in like peril. {Ibid.}**

I know this to be the truth in my own experience; because as I meet my brothers and sisters and friends, and I see their struggles, I can identify, because I have suffered under the same. So as God

has given me the answers, I am then able to give the answers to those who are struggling, because I have struggled and I have gained the victory through His mercy and grace that I have gained from His word, because I have listened. I have listened to other preachers, and I have discerned, Here is the true preacher, and here is one in error; this is why I believe the pioneers, because I listen to them.

Sister White writes: "Every minister who goes out into the great harvest field should magnify his office." It's the *office*, not the man. God has given the office; the man is only an instrument. But he should magnify that office. And this is what I am sharing with you here.

## Humanity Touching Humanity

God has chosen to work through humanity to reach humanity. To understand that properly, remember that statement that I often quote:

**The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. {Ev 190.1}**

To understand it, we also read the following words of Jesus; He was speaking to the disciples after the resurrection:

**John 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace [be] unto you: as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you.**

Jesus was sent from heaven as a man, the man Christ Jesus. And now He says, I have been sent as a man among humanity; and now I am sending you, men, to do the work that I was sent to do. Let us examine this powerful communication. Now Jesus sends human being who have received Jesus, so that they might impart to others, so that these might in turn receive, by the foolishness of preaching.

**As the Father had sent Him into the world, so, He declares, "have I also sent them into the world." John 17:18. As Christ is the channel for the revelation of the Father, so we are to be the channel for the revelation of Christ. While our Saviour is the great source of illumination, forget not, O Christian, that He is revealed through humanity. God's blessings are bestowed through human instrumentality. Christ Himself came to the world as the Son of man. Humanity, united to the divine nature, must touch humanity. {MB 40.2}**

Humanity, Jesus, combined with the divine nature, will help us. He actually went through an experience like ours. Humanity touching my humanity. This is God's sending of Jesus to help us.

**Christ Himself came to the world as the Son of man. Humanity, united to the divine nature, must touch humanity. The church of Christ, every individual disciple of the Master, is heaven's appointed channel for the revelation of God to men. {Ibid.}**

There is the story of Jesus that makes this whole thing meaningful.

## *God's Helping Hand*

In God's great plan for the redemption of a lost race, He has placed Himself under the necessity of using human agencies as His helping hand. He must have a helping hand, in order to reach humanity. {4BC 1151.4}

God needs humanity to help humanity. A helping hand.

**He must have the cooperation of those who will be active, quick to see opportunities, quick to discern what must be done for their fellow men (NL No. 23, p. 1). {Ibid.}**

The more I read the more the scales fall from my eyes, and I hope it is happening to you too.

**When Jesus had ended His instruction to the disciples, He gathered the little band close about Him, and kneeling in the midst of them, and laying His hands upon their heads, He offered a prayer dedicating them to His sacred work. Thus the Lord's disciples were ordained to the gospel ministry. {DA 296.3}**

**As His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. {DA 296.4}**

This is why we have the story of Peter; he forsook his Lord. He had a passion that caused him to fail.

**Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity. Divinity needed humanity; for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. {Ibid.}**

To bring salvation, by the foolishness of preaching. There it is.

**Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man. So with the servants and messengers of Christ. Man needs a power outside of and beyond himself, to restore him to the likeness of God, and enable him to do the work of God; but this does not make the human agency unessential. Humanity lays hold upon divine power, Christ dwells in the heart by faith; and through co-operation with the divine, the power of man becomes efficient for good. {Ibid.}**

It's all spelled out for us here. We have no reason to let our natural man come and spoil the appointed method by which God wants to reach us and, not only lead us to the truth, but present us perfect through the foolishness of preaching.

## **Honouring God's Appointed Method to Save**

So it is my prayer that God would keep us tuned to His design, and so that we may honour His method of preaching to bring us along to that final condition which is expressed here:

**"It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The servants of Christ are not only to be instruments through the preaching of Jesus to lead men to repentance, but they are to continue their watchcare and interest by keeping before the people, by precept and example, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They are to sanctify themselves that their hearers also may be sanctified. Thus all will grow in godliness, going on from grace to grace,**

**until the ambassador for God can present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Then the ministerial office will be seen in its true, sacred character. {TM 152.1}**

When will it be seen in its true, sacred character? If we continue to remain under the foolishness of preaching in which the servants of Christ are not only to bring us to the truth, but then, by continuing watchcare and interest, keeping before the people, by precept and example, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It's an ongoing work of the foolishness of preaching.

May God help us to take this onboard, so that as He is giving us pastors according to *His* choice, we will not be in a continued state of backsliding, but will go forward under the ministry that God has appointed.

Amen