

LESSON 2 — FOOLISHNESS TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING

[BEGIN]

OSCAR WILDE:

“We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.”

1. OPENING THOUGHT: PERSPECTIVE MATTERS

- Humanity shares the same fallen condition
- The difference lies in where we are looking

2. SETTING THE STAGE: CORINTH AND HUMAN WISDOM

- Corinth prided itself in wisdom and knowledge
- Strong **Greek philosophical influence**
- Think:
 - Socrates
 - Plato
 - The Sophists
- **The Sophists:**
 - Skilled speakers
 - Highly persuasive
 - Often intentionally boastful
- The 1st Century Corinthian culture valued intellect, rhetoric, and **outward** brilliance

3. OVERVIEW: PAUL’S CENTRAL CONTRAST

- **Passage focus: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31**
- Paul contrasts:
 - Human wisdom
 - The message of the cross
- The word “foolishness”:
 - **Greek: moria**
 - Meaning: intellectually worthless, nonsensical
- To the natural mind, the gospel appears irrational

4. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

- **1 Corinthians 1:18–19 (KJV)**
- Two responses to the same message:
 - To those who perish: foolishness
 - To those who are saved: the power of God
- Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14:
 - God will destroy worldly wisdom

5. TWO RESPONSES, ONE MESSAGE

- Same gospel, different perception
- One group says: "This is foolish"
- Another says: "This is power"
- Principle:
 - *The issue is not the message—it is the mindset*

6. PERSPECTIVE: LOOKING DOWN VS LOOKING UP

- When a person is focused only on present condition ("the gutter"):
 - The idea of salvation seems unrealistic
- When a person looks upward:
 - Hope becomes visible
- Those who are perishing:
 - Have stopped looking up
- **RESULTING MINDSET:**
 - "I'm too far gone"
 - "This doesn't fit my understanding"
- **Insight:**
 - When you stop looking up, even salvation sounds foolish

7. THE LIMITS OF HUMAN WISDOM

- 1 Corinthians 1:20
- "Where is the wise?... the disputer of this world?"
- Paul challenges intellectual pride
- Principle:
 - Human wisdom has limits
 - God exposes those limits
- Historical reminder:
 - Even great thinkers have overestimated human knowledge

8. THE CROSS DEFIES EXPECTATIONS

- **1 Corinthians 1:23**
- "We preach Christ crucified"
- **To the Jews:**
 - A stumbling block
 - Expectation: a conquering Messiah
- **To the Greeks:**
 - Foolishness
 - Expectation: a powerful, untouchable deity
- **Conclusion:**
 - The cross does not align with human expectations

9. THE REAL ISSUE: MISJUDGING GOD

- 1 Corinthians 1:25
- "The foolishness of God is wiser than men"
- Even what appears weak or foolish from God:
 - Surpasses human wisdom and strength
- **Warning:**
 - We often reverse this in practice
 - Treating God's wisdom as foolish is pride and spiritually dangerous

10. THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

- **1 Corinthians 1:26**
- Not many "wise," "mighty," or "noble" are called
- The gospel is not designed to impress intellect
- The gospel is designed to:
 - Save
 - Transform
- **The cross:**
 - Appears weak
 - Appears foolish
 - Is actually the power of God at work

11. FINAL APPEAL

- Both Jews and Greeks sought freedom and fulfillment
- But they sought it according to their own expectations
- Key question:
 - Are we rejecting salvation or breakthrough because it does not fit our expectations?
- **FINAL LINE:**
 - When you stop looking up... even salvation sounds foolish