

## “THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING”

It's apparent from reading the Bible that God has a more favorable view of preachers than many people today have. In fact, preaching and preachers have fallen into a bit of disrepute in our post-millennial and modern age. Many preachers have become laughing stocks or objects of hatred and scorn in our modern American society. I suppose there are a number of reasons for that, and some of them are self-inflicted. Some preachers haven't behaved very well and others haven't given a very serious and credible defense of the gospel. This has taken its toll on the image of preachers, in general. But it shouldn't be that way, because God thinks very highly of genuine preachers. Now, they don't have a special relationship with God because they're preachers, but God does have a special purpose and work for the preacher, and God holds that work in very high esteem. The lives and experiences of Noah, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, Peter, Stephen, Paul and others, should show us just how much God values and emphasizes the work of preachers. We're going to notice a few verses from Paul that will give us some insight into just how important preachers have been, and are to God's purposes.

**I Corinthians 1:18-21 “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 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? 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.”**

Paul uses an interesting phrase here. Why does he call it “*the foolishness of preaching?*” Is it foolish to preach? Is the gospel a foolish message to preach? Well, some would say so, and I doubt that I have to tell you that. But that's NOT what Paul is saying. When he says, “*it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,*” was he calling preaching a foolish thing to do? Was he calling the gospel that is being preached a foolish message? Well, if he was, that doesn't make a whole lot of sense, because first, he said that “*it pleased God*” and secondly, he said that “*save(s) them that believe.*” So, I don't think Paul is telling us that preaching is foolish, nor is the gospel foolish. Paul, in fact, is stating the exact opposite.

Now, the reason that he refers to preaching as “*foolishness*” is because that's how many in the city of Corinth viewed it. They were the ones who were calling preaching ‘foolish’ and the message of eternal salvation by the cross of Christ ‘a bunch of rubbish.’ You see, Corinth was a cosmopolitan city in Paul's day. It was the seat of human philosophy. It was thought that great knowledge and wisdom was to be found in this bustling and advanced city. It was also a very wicked city. Bible scholar and preacher Bro. J.W. McGarvey called it “the vanity fair of the Roman Empire” and he called it a “hotbed of vice.” Julius Caesar rebuilt the city of Corinth, and he dedicated it to the pagan goddess, Venus. The temple of Venus was essentially a house of harlotry. Every kind of sexual immorality and promiscuity, every type of pagan practice and worship was celebrated there, in Corinth. It really wasn't that much different from some of our modern cities around the world. The people in Corinth were, generally, arrogant, egotistical and

puffed up by their learning and their keeping up with the latest and greatest philosophies of that age, and the wisdom of that day. So, they looked at the simple gospel of Jesus Christ with disdain. The fact is, that Paul was as learned as any of them, but when they heard what he preached, they called it 'foolishness.' It wasn't so much the ACT of preaching that was foolish; they loved good oratory and profound speech. It was the message of the cross, the simplicity of the gospel, the appeal of salvation by the blood to the common person that made them wrinkle up their noses and say, "well, that's foolishness!" You remember when Paul preached before the Roman governor Festus, and King Agrippa over in **Acts 26**? He told them that Jesus died, and was raised up to life again, and the Bible says that Festus raised his voice and said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." (**Acts 26:24**) In other words, he was saying, "Paul, this is foolishness! To suggest that one rose from the dead, and THAT'S the answer to the problems of the world?!" And when Paul walked among the idols on Mars Hill, and he pointed to the veracity of God's message by citing the resurrection of Jesus, the Bible tells us that they mocked, or made fun of Paul (**Acts 17:32**).

Do you know what all of that comes down to? Fools will be fools. The fool may claim to be wise, and he generally does, but the fact is, he is still a fool, BECAUSE God has made the wisdom of this world foolishness. And by the very things that the world calls foolish, God has brought about the redemption and eternal salvation of human beings! There's nothing more lofty and profound than that!

Now, the cross does what nothing and nobody else could do, that is, make peace between man and God, and it gives the believer the hope of eternal life. So, men can boast of their worldly knowledge. They can revel in their speculative science and their pretentious philosophies. The fact is, they're fools in the eyes of God.

### **Romans 1:22 "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools..."**

God has used those things that they consider foolish, to make known His great wisdom. That's what Paul is saying in these verses, to the church in the cosmopolitan, pagan city of Corinth. You see, the gospel is anything but foolish, and there's nothing foolish about preaching. God appointed preaching to be the very means by which the sin-darkened hearts of men are illuminated with the truth. Preaching is the means by which God transmitted His truth to the world. Now, God could've chosen to speak directly to each human heart, I suppose. He could've chosen to convert men to faith in Christ through miracles, visions, feelings or intuitions. But, no. The scripture says that it pleased God by the foolishness of the message preached to men, to save those who would accept it in obedient faith.

So, the preaching of the gospel is not foolish, but the question today is: Is there such a thing as foolish preaching? Is it possible for preaching to be foolishness in the eyes of God? I want to use the same phrase that Paul used in the text passage, in that sense. There IS a type of preaching that you really could call 'foolish.' The gospel message, when it is preached, that is NOT foolish. And the means of making the gospel known through preaching is NOT foolishness. That's how God has chosen to declare His wisdom. But the fact is, some preaching IS foolishness. I want to suggest three things that render some preaching as foolishness. One of the reasons that preaching is considered foolish by people on our day is that some preachers have been very foolish in what, how and why they preach. Not all

preaching is of God. Not everybody who claims the role and title of ‘preacher’ is doing so to the pleasure and glory of the Lord. Instead, many bring dishonor and shame to something that God deems to be one of the most important things in this world, and that is the preaching of the gospel.

## **I. THE WRONG PREACHER**

There are people who, frankly, should not be preaching. For example, a man who isn’t trying to live what he preaches. Instead of helping the gospel, he’s doing a disservice to the gospel that he claims to preach.

**I Timothy 4:11-12 “These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”**

A preacher who doesn’t behave himself and demonstrate a holy life has no business trying to preach. Now, that doesn’t mean that the preacher is perfect, or doesn’t have his own spiritual battles. He is just a man, just like everybody else. But he cannot be a hypocrite. He can’t purport to be one thing, and not be striving to live the life that he preaches that others should live.

Secondly, a man who doesn’t equip himself and dedicate himself to preparing to preach is not a person who should preach. A man shouldn’t preach simply because he doesn’t think he can do anything else. He shouldn’t preach because he thinks he received some midnight epiphany. He should preach because he has been fit for that work by study of the Word of God, and preparation of life. Now, a man may have the gift of gab or the ability to deliver a great speech or charm an audience. But unless he can effectively declare the sublime truths of the gospel and skillfully defend the faith, he is not the right person to preach.

Thirdly, a person who doesn’t fit the Bible description of a preacher is not the right person to preach. Did you know, for example, that women are forbidden by the Word of God to be preachers or public teachers of God’s Word? I certainly don’t mean anything disparaging by this at all, but simply want to point us to what God’s Word says about the matter.

**I Corinthians 14:34 “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And it they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”**

Now, let’s set the record straight. That’s not because she’s not as smart or capable as a man, because she is every bit as intelligent and capable as any man to do the job. That’s not the issue. It’s not because she is any less of a Christian, or has any lesser relationship with God. When it comes to our standing with God, the Bible says there is neither male nor female (**Galatians 3:28**). That means that a woman enjoys the same relationship with God through Jesus Christ as any man does. In fact, in **I Corinthians 11:3-16**, Paul even says that a woman’s long hair allows her, while in subjection to the man in the role that God gave her, to enjoy the SAME—not inferior—the SAME access to the throne of God and the same

spiritual privileges as a man enjoys through Christ. She can pray just like the man. She doesn't pray through a man: no man serves as her "priest" or "mediator." She is her own priest before God. So, friends, it is not a matter of intelligence, talent, worth or ability—not at all! It's a matter of creation and purpose. Paul said the following to Timothy, speaking of public discourse or teaching:

**I Timothy 2:12 "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."**

Why?

**I Timothy 2:13-14 "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."**

So, because of the order of creation, and the respective roles for which God created the man and the woman, AND because of the events that transpired in the Garden of Eden in **Genesis 3**, the woman is forbidden, by the Word of God, from being a preacher. Now, I know that is a very unpopular thing to say, but when you see women on your television commanding an audience and preaching the Word of God, you just remember that according to the very Word of God which she claims to preach, she is doing something that God forbade her from doing.

## **II. THE WRONG THING**

What is it that we are supposed to preach? What makes preaching such a powerful and important thing? It's not the act of preaching itself. It's the thing that is being preached.

**I Corinthians 2:1-5 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."**

Again, if anything impressed the people who lived in the ancient city of Corinth, it was a flowery oration that extolled a novel philosophy of the day. I can think of some so-called preachers of today, some big Dr. Somebody's, if you please, who have made quite a name for themselves, who would've gotten by all right in Corinth. They probably wouldn't have gotten the reaction that the apostle Paul got a long time ago. They might've been pretty popular. You don't hear these preachers talking about the cross. You don't hear them say much of anything about the blood. They don't spend much time quoting scripture or upholding the Bible as the infallible Word of God. They're not telling people how to be saved from sin—they're not even talking about sin. They'll tell you some pretty novel things about how to save and invest your money. They'll give you some good advice on how to have a good marriage. They can give you a wonderful pep talk and help you enjoy "your best life now" but they're not talking much about Jesus, salvation from sin or the blood. They're not talking about sanctification, holiness, righteousness,

self-denial or regeneration, because those aren't the things that draw a crowd. The world will generally say those things are foolish, and a preacher who spends much time on those subjects isn't going to meet with quite as much approval from the world as some of the popular preachers of our day.

Paul said he didn't come with excellency of speech or of wisdom. He came with one message, and one message only, that is, salvation through, and by, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said he didn't come impressing them with a great show of worldly learning, rather in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Now, if you have a man preaching something other than one way, one plan, one means of salvation through Jesus our Lord, remember this: he is wasting your time AND his. If he comes preaching a manmade discipline, catechism, creed or confession of some denomination, that is NOT worth your time. If he is preaching politics, he's wasting your time. If he's trying to be your psychologist or self-help guru, he is really wasting your time. If he is preaching speculative opinions, ideas and theories and he is not giving you book, chapter and verse for what he preaches, he is wasting your time and his, and his preaching amounts to nothing more than foolishness.

### **III. THE WRONG MOTIVE**

Why did Paul preach? Did you ever think about that? What drove Paul to preach? Was it because it was a lucrative career? Is that why he changed his life there on the Damascus road and decided after that to follow Jesus and preach the gospel? Oh, no.

**II Corinthians 11:24-28 "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."**

That doesn't sound much like Paul lived in a ten-bedroom mansion or flew around on a private jet or drove a Mercedes. In all seriousness, the Bible teaches that a man who preaches the gospel has every right to expect to be paid for his work.

**I Corinthians 9:14 "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."**

**I Corinthians 9:9 "For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn."**

So, it is not only *right* that a preacher make his living by preaching, but also that the church should support him fairly and adequately. There is nothing in the Bible that says a preacher should have to scrape to get by, or should be destitute. But the scripture also speaks of those who would use the gospel as a cloke of covetousness (**I Thessalonians 2:5**). That is not talking about how much money the church

supports him. Rather, about his motive for preaching. When you see prominent preachers of our day who make their millions and use their preaching platforms as a means to peddle themselves and amass a fortune, you can know that is NOT God's idea of a preacher. That is God's idea of a charlatan and a false prophet. My, what a terrible name of reproach some men have brought upon the profession of preaching today, and they've made it appear to be a very foolish thing.

Another spurious motive for preaching is the promotion and the self-glorification of the preacher, a man who views his preaching as achieving the status of fame. Let me give you a good guide: when you hear a preacher, and all you see is *him*, and you don't see Jesus through his preaching, something is wrong with that.

**I Thessalonians 2:3-6 "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ."**

Paul says his motive was not to bring glory to himself, but to God. Paul saw the gospel as a sacred trust, and if more people today saw the gospel and the preaching of it as a sacred trust from God, preachers might have a better reputation among more people than they do. Paul also said in that passage, "**not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.**" His motive wasn't to please men, but to please the Lord. You see, preachers weren't meant to be politicians, and the man who preaches won't be liked by everybody. In fact, he won't be liked by a lot of people. Not because of the example he sets, or his attitude, or how he preaches: that should *all* be above reproach. But he'll be disliked because of *what* he preaches. He preaches what God wants him to preach, and not what men want to hear.

**II Timothy 4:2-4 "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."**

The Bible plainly shows us again and again that gospel preaching will make people angry. Not because the preacher is rude, arrogant or unloving. No preacher has the right to be those things, and shame on the ones who are. But preaching God's truth isn't going to make you Time magazine's *Person of the Year*. Oh, no. John told Herod that God didn't approve of his marriage, and his head was cut off. Elijah had to hide for three years in a cave because he had the courage to tell the angry King Ahab about his wickedness and the coming drought. The Roman enemies of Paul put him in prison and eventually beheaded him. Stephen convicted his own Abrahamic brethren of their sin and wickedness and what did they do? They picked up rocks and stoned him to death. Those men weren't preaching to please men; they preached to please God. And that kind of preaching is not foolishness. It is God's means to save those who have a heart to hear and obey.

