

“Foolishness”

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

I have mentioned on numerous occasions in sermons and Bible classes that we have principles of Biblical interpretation (called hermeneutics), that is, the guidelines that we use to interpret the Bible in order to keep us away from the foolishness and stumbling blocks of which St. Paul warns. One such rule is: we do not allow people’s opinions or any outside evidence to stand in judgment of God’s Word. Therefore a person would not be allowed to say, “I don’t care what the Bible says, this is what I think” or “Aristotle says, or my teacher says, or I read somewhere, ‘this’ therefore I don’t believe what the Bible says.”

For example, there is ample evidence which supports the Biblical story as history and shows that these were real people and real events in history. We talked about this in Bible class last week – how the so-called “scholars” over the past 200-300 years or so have called into question the Bible as an historical document using the opinions of critics (the worst of whom came out of the 1800’s).

I mentioned how 100 years ago, among the academics, the consensus was that King David and King Solomon were not actual people – even though archaeological evidence, especially in recent years, has yielded concrete evidence of David’s and Solomon’s reign. But keeping to our rules of interpretation, even the best archaeological evidence is not allowed to sit in judgment of the Word of God, and the reality is that the evidence will often be interpreted in very different ways depending on the interpreter’s agenda. And there are those, still today, who are willfully

ignorant and reject the Davidic Kingdom as history – willful foolishness.

Even among Christian people who all read the same Bible, there can be widely differing views of what the Bible says – hence the need for rules on interpreting. One of our hermeneutical principles, and one that I find particularly important is, “How did the original audience understand these words?” If the apostles believed and taught a certain way, then the church established by the apostles should teach the same way. It stands to reason. Putting this into practice will help to keep you away from foolishness.

If the earliest Christians universally believed and practiced a certain teaching and had no debate, we must assume this is what Christ taught the apostles and what they taught the people. Therefore, this is what we must teach, as we are the heirs of the truth which Christ taught His apostles.

For example, the early church universally practiced infant Baptism, without debate, and universally understood that sins were washed away in the water and the Word. Likewise, all of the churches established by the apostles confessed that the body and blood of Christ given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins were truly present in the Sacrament. Again, there was really no debate about this.

Starting in the 16th Century, there are certain church leaders who begin to say there is no forgiveness of sins offered in Baptism, and it is just an initiation ritual, and some of them reject infant Baptism. And these same fellows say that Christ is only symbolically present in the Sacrament of the Altar.

In order to believe this, the person must believe that ALL of Jesus’ disciples misunderstood Him and taught and practiced Baptism and Holy Communion incorrectly. Then, one must believe that God allowed His church to wallow in these false teachings for 1500 years until the Rationalist philosophy in the Age of Enlightenment finally allowed them to discover the truth of what Jesus was really teaching. Such an argument is outrageous. Talk about foolishness.

Speaking of outrageous foolish arguments, last Sunday night, I had some Mormon missionaries come to my door. I talked to them for about an hour. I won't share with you all the things we talked about, but one thing I learned was their claim that the golden tablets which comprise the Book of Mormon were supposedly written in two parts – the first part around 600 BC (at the time of the exile to Babylon), and the second part about 400 years after Christ – then buried in upstate New York. Then it was revealed to Joseph Smith – the first of his “visions” happening in 1820. The Book of Mormon was published in 1831.

According to them, the Christian church established by the apostles became corrupt, almost immediately – all of it, obviously with no true believers fighting for truth since there was no debate. Essentially, there were no people on earth for 1400 years that truly knew and worshiped God rightly. That's not how He operates. He does not allow the children of Adam to remain mired in ignorance and spiritual darkness for 1400 years before He sends a prophet.

And just like radical reformers in Luther's day who applied strange and new ideas to the sacramental teachings of Jesus, so also the century of the 1800's is littered with outlandish, unsubstantiated claims about the things of God. We had an amazingly enjoyable conversation. I enjoyed talking to these two young men. We had a very respectful conversation, and it seemed like they were engaged and really listening.

Those Mormon missionaries who came to my door began their presentation with the claim that they were Christian and believed in Jesus Christ for their salvation. Upon further review; upon further questioning, and through what I would call verbal gymnastics on their part to avoid answering, they did ultimately (reluctantly) admit that they believe that Jesus is not God. It took some time. After the dispelling of their programmed talking points, then we could have a real conversation. Again, it took an hour.

What kept going through my mind was our Gospel from last week

when Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?” The crowds outside of the one holy apostolic church will always get the answer wrong.

What frightens me is that there is a growing consensus within the greater Christian community which says “every single point of God’s Word isn’t all that important as long as you get the big stuff right. As long as you believe in Jesus, then you are OK.” But what do we believe about Jesus? “Who do you say that I am?” He continues to ask each of us.

Not knowing who Jesus truly is would be a major stumbling block to your eternal wellbeing. The problem is that it seems like foolishness to talk about three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) being One God. But it was precisely on that point that the Mormon’s programmed talking points fell apart. They claim to be Christian, yet they reject the Trinity. That is foolishness.

Questions must be asked, and questions must be answered. Is Jesus “of one substance of the Father?” Is the Son equal to the Father? Is the Father God? Is Jesus God? Is there more than one God? Is the Holy Spirit God?

We learn these things in Confirmation class and confess these things each week for a reason. The wisdom found in God’s Word seems like foolishness to the world. The signs, the evidence that God has provided in His Word allows us to know what we know. We don’t get to know everything that we want to know, but the aspects of His nature which God has graciously allowed us to know become very important the moment Jesus says, “Who do you say that I am?”

In answer to this, we don’t rely upon our opinion, we don’t rely upon opinions of the philosophers or the debaters of this age. We hold fast to the Word of the cross for our salvation which St. Paul says is the wisdom and power of God. Amen.