

**The Foolishness of God**  
**I Corinthians 1:18-31**

**Timothy L. Carson**  
**April 1, 2018**

Enjoy it while you can – Easter won't fall again on April 1 until 2029. For today, just what kind of April Fools does Easter represent? The early church actually thought there was one. Some thought that Jesus' death and resurrection was the ultimate trick; though the world intended his death for evil, God had the last laugh!

The Apostle Paul believed that a deep paradox stands at the heart of the Gospel. And the two poles of that paradox are *foolishness* and *wisdom*. Beware of appearances, says Paul, because they can be deceiving. What seems to be wisdom is not wisdom and what seems to be foolishness is not foolishness. In fact, they have traded places.

The world defines wisdom in one kind of way, by what seems to be full of knowledge, success and power, but the Gospel defines it in an entirely different way – not by the standards of this world.

In fact, says Paul, none of the cultural definitions of what comprises power and wisdom will take you to God. All of that is actually hubris, pride.

On the other hand, what appears to be weak and foolish in the world's eyes – like a crucified messiah – is actually power and wisdom when it comes to God. We have it all backwards in this world of illusion.

First he names our desire for *proof*, physical displays of power. “Jews desire signs.” We want confirmation, some outward display of spiritual power. Like a miracle, for instance.

Second he names our desire for *knowledge*, the kind of intellectual worldly knowledge that makes logical sense. “Greeks desire wisdom.” Whereas that can help you understand the world and how it works, this kind of knowledge will not help you find God. In fact, that kind of mastery knowledge feeds into ego – control – which paradoxically keeps us from God.

Or as Paul put it, “In the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its own knowledge.”

What that means is that we have to give up what we *think* we know in order to receive *more* than we know. And that is precisely the April Fool’s joke: “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”(25)

A good place to begin is to ask some obvious questions: Why in the world would someone be attracted to a message like this? Why would someone in the scientific age be attracted to a message that says that however important our knowledge is it actually can block our journey to God because you can’t reason your way to the mystery? In an age that deifies power, mastery, domination, and winning who would ever be attracted to the message of the cross, that the seeming weakness of God is the very thing that can transform us?

I will tell you who: Those who have discovered their limits and just what knowledge and power can and cannot deliver.

Now don’t misunderstand me: Amassing power can provide lots of things – the connections, the position, the lifestyle, membership at the club, affluence, material things. Developing material knowledge can broker the world in astounding ways, including designing the next robot with artificial intelligence who will be your home butler.

But none of that can deliver you to the deepest places of God, the depths of the spirit, where God is at work. Those places often require just the opposite: Not a prosperity Gospel, not a Gospel of empire or domination, but instead humility and love. When our notions of power and knowledge breakdown then we become open to what has seemed before like sheer weakness and silliness.

For those of you who have been *House of Cards* fans, the narcissist/power-hungry politician Frank Underwood finds himself in a church and after

having a conversation with the priest who tells him that the ways of raw power and fear are not the answer, that the way Christ offers is the opposite, the way of love, Frank asks for some time alone.

**(Video Clip)**

As he stands near the altar he looks up at the representation of Jesus hanging on the cross. “Love,” he says to the Christ on the cross, “so that’s what you are selling. Well I’m not buying.” At that he spits in the face of the effigy. Embarrassed at the depths of his own behavior he takes a handkerchief and tries to wipe off the spittle. But as he does he destabilizes the statue and it careens to the ground, shattering to bits.

When you deify yourself, when you esteem your own judgment over all else, lust for power, then the peculiar ways of God seem to be foolishness, nothing you are willing to buy.

But when you witness the demise of all false gods of your worship, the false objects, attachments, and people, the false projects you have come to live for, that very disenchantment creates cracks in your life

and what previously seemed like God’s foolishness now becomes the way, the truth and the life. What seemed like God’s weakness – the cross – becomes stronger than your strength.

Some of you will know what I mean when I say: One of the best things that can ever happen to you is *falling apart*. And that is because all the false illusions of who you thought you were, what the world is and what it can give, fall to pieces so you can see what really matters, where the real wisdom and strength is.

In fact, I’ve rarely known a person who deeply understands the meaning of *Christ is Risen* who hasn’t fallen apart in important ways, passed through the meaning of crucifixion on the way to resurrection.

And that’s the April Fools of Easter:

April Fools! It’s not your own knowledge and power!  
April Fools! God comes to us not through external power and fear but rather suffering love!

April Fools! What the culture around you has taught you about the source of security, peace and happiness is a lie; the truth is exactly the opposite!

April Fools! You are not in charge, you just think you are calling the shots!

April fools! The kings and kingdoms of this world rise and fall like crops of corn!

April Fools! You just thought you could kill off God's presence in the world and keep it locked up in a tomb!

April Fools! The victory belongs to God and long after the last executioner has fallen into the dust God still lives on! April Fools!

What a blessing it is to have our idols toppled by God's interruptions, our expectations disrupted by God's exception to the rules, our presumptions to knowledge and power upended by God's foolishness and weakness. There it is – the tomb of death transformed into a portal of light, God's wisdom and God's power. Christ is Risen, thanks be to God. And the joke's on us.