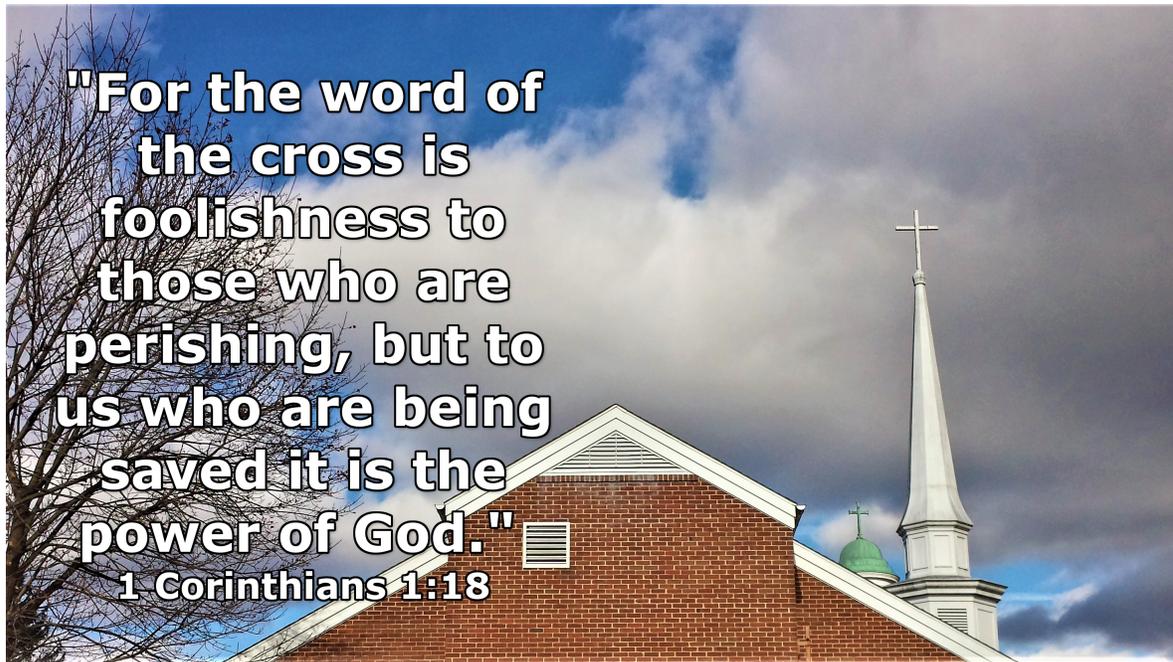


“The Word of the Cross – Foolishness or Power?”

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The Word of the Cross – 1 Corinthians 1:18 – Photo by Whitney V. Myers
(Church Steeples with Crosses – Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, USA)

"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

"Those who receive the gospel, and are enlightened by the Spirit of God, see more of God's wisdom and power in the doctrine of Christ crucified, than in all his other works." -- Matthew Henry (1662-1714) ([Ref. 1](#), [Ref. 2](#))

This lesson describes what the Apostle Paul meant by the phrase, "the word of the cross." God loves us so much that Jesus Christ died on the cross for us, and purchased the forgiveness of our sins. We will also study why for some people, the word of the cross is foolishness and for others, it is the power of God.

Consider. When the Apostle Paul wrote the phrase, "the word of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18), what did he mean? In your own words, how would you explain "the word of the cross" to someone else?

Definition of "word." The Greek word for *word* in 1 Corinthians 1:18 is *logos*. *Logos* means *something said, a message, reasoning expressed by words, and instruction* (Ref. 3). Acts 13:26 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 provide examples where *logos* is translated as *message*.

Definition of "cross." The Greek word for *cross* is *staurós*. *Staurós* has both a literal meaning and a figurative meaning. Christ was crucified on a literal Roman *cross* (Ref. 4). According to HELPS Word-Studies, "*Staurós* was the crosspiece of a Roman *cross*; the cross-beam was placed at the top of the vertical member to form a capital 'T' (Ref. 4). "This transverse beam was the one carried by the criminal" (Ref. 4, Matthew 27:31-32, John 19:17). In addition to the shape of a capital "T," researchers also discuss the cross in the shape of a cruciform ("†" or "✝") and as a vertical stake (Ref. 5). Most Christian denominations present the Christian cross in the shape of a cruciform (Ref. 5, Ref. 6).

Staurós also has a figurative meaning. Jesus spoke about the cross each believer bears to be his true follower (Ref. 4, Matthew 10:38, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23). Thayer's Greek Lexicon describes the figurative cross as an expression used by "those who, on behalf of God's cause, do not hesitate cheerfully and manfully [courageously] to bear persecutions, troubles, distresses — thus recalling the fate of Christ and the spirit in which he encountered it" (Ref. 4, brackets added).

What is meant by the expression, "the word of the cross"?

The word, or message, of the cross is that God loves us so much that his Son, Jesus Christ, was crucified and died on the cross for us. Through his sacrifice, Jesus Christ has purchased the forgiveness of our sins. Through Jesus Christ, those who believe in him receive salvation and eternal life. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Foolishness to those who are perishing

The Greek word for *foolishness* is *mória*. *Mória* means *folly, absurdity, foolishness* (Ref. 7). The Greek word for *perish* is *apollumi* which means *destroy utterly* (Ref. 8). HELPS Word-Studies further defines *apollumi* as "*to die, with the implication of ruin and destruction*" (Ref. 8).

Why would Paul write that the message of the cross "is foolishness to those who are perishing" in 1 Corinthians 1:18?

1. "To the Jews 'the cross' was the tree of shame and horror; and a crucified person was 'accursed of God' " (Ref. 9, Deuteronomy 21:23). To the Jews, the thought of "a crucified Messiah" seemed "a revolting folly" (Ref. 9).
2. To Paul's Greek audience, the cross was the punishment for slaves and murderers (Ref. 9). The cross meant shame and agony. To the Greeks, worshipping "a crucified malefactor" was superstitious (Ref. 9).
3. Paul explains, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The natural man, who is "not truly enlightened and renewed by the Word and Spirit of God, and therefore has no other way of obtaining knowledge but by his senses and natural understanding ... does not understand or apprehend the things of the Spirit of God" (Ref. 10).

To us who are being saved it is the power of God

The Greek word for *saved* is *sózó*, which means *rescued from destruction and brought into divine safety* (Ref. 11). The Greek word for *power* in 1 Corinthians 1:18 is *dunamis*. *Dunamis* means (*miraculous*) *power, might, strength* (Ref. 12).

The cross is much more than a decoration. "The cross is God's saving power" (Expositor's Greek Testament, Ref. 13). For us who are being saved, the cross is the means by which Jesus has forgiven our sins and rescued us

from the path of destruction. By the cross, God offers us the gift of eternal life when we believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son. When we share the "word of the cross" with others, we share not a fable but God's mighty plan for saving people.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Apply. God gives us only two choices. Either we are on the path of perishing or we are on the path of salvation. On which path are you? If you *do not* know Christ, put your faith in him today, and receive from him forgiveness of your sins and the gift of eternal life. If you *do* know Christ, thank him for his sacrificial death on the cross to forgive your sins, and for his power working in you each day.

References

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