

What does it mean to become a fool? – 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Pastor Colin Rieke – February 19, 2017

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. ¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." ²¹ So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

About two years ago I ran across a video on YouTube that I thought was incredibly fascinating. I'd play it for you here, but it's seven minutes long, and then you wouldn't remember the rest of my sermon, so instead, I'll describe it. It's called "The Backwards Brain Bicycle." Basically, someone developed a bicycle whose handles are reversed. When the handle turns right, the front wheel goes left, when the handle turns left, the front wheel goes right. Now, you might think that you would be able to ride a bike like this almost immediately, because riding a bike is supposed to be easy. But it's interesting to find out how difficult it is. Because you see, your brain is wired a certain way, and has learned to ride a normal bike, it would take some time to learn how to ride this backwards bike.

The author of the video, Destin Sandlin, speaks all over the world, using this backwards bike as an illustration for his talks. A few of the things that he says he learned from this experiment is that welders are smarter than engineers (he's an engineer by trade), knowledge does not equal understanding (just because you know something, doesn't mean your brain can understand it), and truth is truth no matter what he thinks (it's harder than it looks to ride this bike). I think two of those lessons actually give very good answers to what Paul is advocating for in 1 Corinthians this morning.

The Apostle Paul, as we've seen these last few weeks, has been encouraging the Corinthians back into God's Word. He has been sharing with them how foolish it is to be acting in this way. And here, in the final word that we will hear from the Apostle Paul in this short series from 1 Corinthians, he gives the ultimate reason for acting the fool. He tells the Corinthians to become fools. And what we want to look at this morning, is WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME A FOOL?

1. It takes effort
2. It yields eternity

The first lesson that Destin Sandlin learned was that welders can be smarter than engineers. But that doesn't relate to what Paul is talking about, so I'll jump to the next one, which is knowledge does not equal understanding. In the backwards bike experiment, it's one thing to know that when the handles go left the bike goes right, and vice versa, and it's a completely different thing to understand it, to apply it when riding said bike. The same can be said by Paul about the Christian life, about WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME A FOOL? You may know what to do, but understanding and applying it is different.

Specifically here, Paul is addressing the issue of different factions that developed from the different leaders the Corinthians had had over the years. In the verses just before our text for this morning, Paul mentions how **"he planted the seed, and Apollos watered it."** He repeats that in our verses for this morning, **"I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building upon it."** The Corinthians were using this as a way to divide the leaders and pick which one was the best. But Paul says that isn't fair, because each leader had certain God given gifts, and used them in service not of themselves but of God. To compare each leader is putting the focus on the wrong thing. This is why then Paul goes on to say, **"Each one should be careful how he builds."** Because he knew that if anything was built on a foundation other than Christ, that foundation would crumble.

And that's just what some of the Corinthian Christians were beginning to do. They were becoming enamored with philosophy and their culture, they were more and more following the pattern of the world around them, instead of the pattern that God had set for them. That's why Paul said, **"If anyone thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a fool."** But becoming a fool in this way, is completely different than in other ways people become fools. Usually, we think a fool is someone that doesn't think about what they are doing, a foolish person just does things, and that it doesn't take effort. But becoming a fool for God is the exact opposite. Becoming a fool for God is hard, it takes effort. And that's because knowledge does not equal understanding.

Knowledge does not equal understanding. Just because the Corinthians knew this, didn't mean that it would automatically translate into understanding. The same is true with the backwards bicycle, you may "know" how to ride it, but you don't "understand" how to ride it. For the Corinthians, simply knowing what Paul taught didn't automatically translate into living a Christian life. So, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME A FOOL? It takes effort. It is this effort that the Corinthians, and us for that matter, have a difficult time doing.

Maybe because sometimes we don't want to act like a fool. Acting like a fool is not something that you or your parents grow up wishing you could be. And in most cases, I would agree. Being a fool, being foolish, isn't a good thing. But being a fool for Christ, being a fool for God is. And it takes effort. The apostle Paul calls the message of the cross "foolishness" to the world. To think and believe that some guy 2,000 years ago would have willingly submitted himself to such horrific torture as being nailed to a cross because of something I have done, is not something that I want to believe. But that's what the Bible says happened. I don't like to think I need saving, I think I'm self-sufficient, but that's not what the Bible says. I don't like to be told that what I'm doing is wrong, but that's what the Bible describes sin as. I don't like to have others tell me what's best for me, but that's what the Bible does.

This is the essence of becoming a fool for Christ. It means giving up the wisdom of the world. Wisdom that, let's face it, we often abide by and like hearing and following. In fact, I think one of the biggest mistakes we make is thinking that we can hold onto both wisdoms, the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. We can have the best of both worlds. For instance, we can claim to be a Christian, but still promote free love – anyone can love anyone, and what happens in someone else's bedroom is none of your business. We might question some things in the Bible, but when a best-selling book comes out, we treat it as gospel truth. We say we're dedicated to Christ, until it becomes inconvenient in our schedule. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME A FOOL? It takes effort.

Just like it takes effort to train for a marathon, just like it takes effort to lose weight, just like it takes effort to make meals for those around you, it takes effort TO BECOME A FOOL. And it requires the strongest effort against yourself. God never said being a Christian was going to be easy. Being a Christian takes effort. This effort is not aimed at getting to heaven, but this effort is aimed at staying on the path to heaven. This much the Bible makes clear. For **“salvation is found in no one else, and there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** Jesus himself said, **“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** It takes effort to stay on this narrow path. It takes effort to look like a fool when everyone else is going another way. But those going the other way, will soon find out who is the real fool.

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Which is what leads to the next lesson from the backwards bike – truth is truth no matter what I think. This is how Paul describes the situation, **“The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight...The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”** Once again, he's talking to Corinthian Christians who begin to think the wisdom of the world is wise, they have been taken in by smooth talkers, they've been taken in to choosing who their favorite pastors are. So Paul says, **“So then, no more boasting about men!”** It doesn't matter what these men think, it doesn't even matter who the pastor at the Corinthian church was. All that matters is what God said, all that matters is what Christ said. Truth is truth no matter what I think.

Maybe put this in another way. When you come here to worship at Grace, you expect to hear a sermon from me as the pastor. You expect to hear a sermon on the Word of God and how it applies in your life. And you would be wise to expect that, you would be wise to listen to such a sermon. But if I start talking about how to fix your car, whether it be from the pulpit or in casual conversation, take my words with a grain of salt. Don't assume I know what I'm talking about. Likewise you wouldn't go to a doctor to ask about the laws of our country, and you wouldn't go to a lawyer to tell you about your diet.

What I'm trying to say is that there are many people who will have an opinion about religion, they'll have an opinion about Christianity, or the Bible or what comes afterwards. But never take their word that they know what they're talking about. Always take it back to the Bible, always take it back to what God says. Because truth is truth no matter what I think. Now, chances are much greater that with a pastor who knows about the Bible and has studied the Bible, and has been specifically trained to teach and preach on the Bible will help you understand the Bible, but always go back to the Bible. In fact, any good pastor will do that.

Here, the Bible clearly states that we are to become fools. Are you willing to become a fool – to become a fool so that you can become wise? It seems paradoxical to us, but understand what Paul is saying. When we abandon the “wisdom” of the world, we look like a fool to the world. But while we look like a fool to the world, we also become wise to God. Because wisdom is thinking ahead, about what is best in the long term. And in the long term, when we think about what’s best, the best thing is for us to end up in heaven. And when we become a fool for Christ, it yields eternity.

Let’s take it back to the backwards bike again. The author, Destin, practiced riding the backwards bike for 8 months, before “something in his brain clicked” and he was able to ride it. Destin did this as a challenge, to see if he could unlearn and then relearn how to ride this bike. As a Christian, we need to practice this backwards wisdom, it takes effort, this as a lifestyle choice.

As a Christian, we make an active effort to be different, to think in a different way than the world. This is like practicing to ride a backwards bike. People may think we’re weird that instead of sleeping in on a Sunday morning we come to church. People may think we’re foolish for giving so much time and money to what they view as a fruitless cause. People may think we’re dumb for giving up so many things that that the world enjoys. But Paul says when we “**become fools**” we are actually “**becoming wise.**” Because Paul is saying that while God’s way looks backwards, looks foolish, it actually is the other way around. Following God is the way of the wise, and following the world is the way of the fool. This is WHAT IT MEANS TO BECOME A FOOL. Amen.