

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

### **Fools for Christ**

Paul knew firsthand about being a fool for Christ.

He wrote that the message of the cross is foolishness  
to those who are perishing but  
to those of us who are being saved  
the message of the cross is the power of God unleashed  
and the wisdom of God revealed.

Paul was a Roman citizen and he enjoyed special privileges  
and protection under Roman law.  
He studied with the finest religious scholars and was on an  
upward career track; respected in the community.

Then one day Paul had an encounter with the living Christ.  
He accepted his commission from the Lord  
to be an ambassador of the gospel.  
He kept his vow until the day he died.  
Paul lived as a fool for Christ and according to tradition  
breathed his last dying breath on a cross, as Christ did.

In between his call and his death, Paul became a fool for Christ.

He describes, in part, his experience like this:

“Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one.  
Three times I was beaten with rods.  
Once I received a stoning.  
Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day adrift at sea;  
on frequent journeys, in danger from bandits,  
danger from my own people; danger from Gentiles;  
danger in the city; danger in the wilderness, danger at sea,  
danger from false brothers and sisters;  
in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night,  
hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.  
I am daily under pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.”

But, he had no regrets for being foolish for Christ.  
He goes on to say:

“I *have* been a fool!  
So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses,  
so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.  
Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships,  
persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ;  
for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

A few years ago an Episcopal church in NYC held a  
“Fools for Christ” Sunday.

The clergy, the lay people serving at the altar,  
and many people in the congregation dressed up  
in clown outfits with painted faces.

The pictures of their worship service on the Internet  
did not speak to me of the  
obedience of Christ to His Father’s will even to the point of death,  
or the power of the cross over the evil,  
or the sacrificial love of God for a world that knew him not.

The pictures to me looked like a cross  
between Mardi Gras in New Orleans and  
a bad dream I once had after eating too much spicy food  
before bedtime.

There *is* such a thing as being a fool for Christ when we proclaim  
the Good News of Christ crucified and his resurrection  
through word and deed.  
And then there is simply acting like a fool.

Clowns costumes are a good means to cheer people up in a nursing home  
or to entertain kids at a parish picnic  
or a circus.

But that has nothing to do with being a fool for Christ.

Paul *did not* plan dangerous journeys to prove his faith or  
go on a hunger strike or  
sit on a flagpole for 40 days or  
dress up in a clown suit and lead worship services  
in the cities of Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Philippi or Rome  
to draw attention to himself or to his 'cause' or  
to get people to come to his churches or  
to pretend by doing so he would be representing Christ.

He *did* teach and preach and live the message of the gospel he received.  
In the process he became obedient to Christ  
as Christ was obedient to His Father in heaven.  
He became more like Christ in his life,  
preaching a gospel for the repentance and forgiveness of sins,  
caring for the poor,  
eternal life through the sharing in the resurrection of Christ.

Paul knew that his obedience would be seen as foolishness by the world.

To the world, he had lost everything with nothing to show for his efforts.  
To Paul, he had gained more than the combined riches of the world  
and gladly sacrificed everything for the grace he had received.

He knew in his heart of hearts that his sufferings were as much a sharing  
in the life of Christ as was  
the peace, joy and love of Christ.  
To the world this is utter foolishness.  
To the believer it is the wisdom of God  
known by those who know Christ.

Christian author Max Lucado tells this story  
in the form of a letter he wrote to a man who was a fool for Christ  
and in the process helped change Lucado's life:

"Dear friend,

I'm writing to say 'thanks'. I wish I could thank you personally, but I  
don't know where you are. Your face is fuzzy in my memory but I'll  
never forget what you did.

You were an engineer of some sort leaning up against your pickup in a West Texas oil field; you were a supervisor wearing khakis and a clean shirt that set you apart from us roustabouts.

You read the blueprints. We dug the ditches.  
You inspected the pipe. We laid it.

I was a high school boy earning good money laying pipe but my co-workers were mostly illegal immigrants and drifters with sweaty, greasy faces. Our lunch breaks were filled with coarse jokes, foul language and gambling. In the middle of a card game you approached us and we groaned when we saw you coming. We could tell you were nervous and way out of your comfort zone.

“Uh, fellows”, you started, “I, uh, I just wanted uh, to invite...I just wanted to tell you that, uh, our church is having a service tonight and uh, I wanted to invite any of you to come along.”

There was a deafening silence. Some guys started at the dirt. Other guys shot glances at each other and tried to muffle their snickers. After you turned and left, the laughter broke out in full force, and you became the butt of the jokes for the rest of the day. I’m sure you knew that and went back to your truck knowing that you had made a fool out of yourself.

You chose faith over logic. That’s the reason for this letter. I’m writing to let you know that at least one of the seeds you planted fell into a fertile crevice. So, I’m writing to say thanks for the example. Thanks for the courage. God did something with it.”

Being a fool for Christ involves personal risk.  
We might very well look and feel like a fool according to worldly standards.

Being a fool for Christ is risk-free.  
We know that God will honor our foolishness for being a fool in his Name.

There are a lot of ways to be a fool for Christ:

Forgive someone who does not deserve to be forgiven.  
Jesus did that on the cross for you and me.

Discern God's will, follow, and trust that God's will, will be done.  
Jesus did that with Judas.

Bow your head and pray before a meal in a public restaurant.  
Jesus did that when he fed the people.

Don't engage in mean spirited talk or gossip even if people take  
offense or make fun of you.  
Jesus was silent before his accusers.

Be generous when the world tells you to take care of #1.  
You will be richer for the giving.

Walk the narrow path when the world tells you the detours are better.  
They're not.

Keep your heart open to love fully when the world tells you to  
build a fortress around it. You will end up living alone.

Be a fool for Christ.  
You don't have to put on a clown suit and paint your face.  
Just live the Gospel.