

“Divine Foolishness”

Scripture: **Exodus 4:10-17; Corinthians 1:18-31**

Rev. Lewis Galloway

September 27, 2026



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If true wisdom were to tap us on the shoulder, would we recognize it? I remember thinking as a teenager how incredibly dumb my parents' advice was. I was sure that if I followed their advice, I wouldn't have any friends or any fun. A college education is a valuable thing. When you go home after graduating from college, it is amazing how much your parents have learned in four years. Emerson wrote, "One person's wisdom [is] another's folly" (*Essays*, No.10, "*Circles*").

When we contrast human wisdom with the wisdom of God, the gap is far wider than the gap between youth and maturity. It is far wider than anyone can bridge. The wisdom of God is a different kind of wisdom than what we find in Poor Richard's Almanac. In Corinthians, Paul plays on the antithesis between God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For

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since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.” (1 Corinthians 1:20–21)

There may be some things that we can know about God and the nature of life through observation and reason, but our human understanding of God is always partial, corrupt, and incomplete. Human wisdom can tell us a great deal about science, nature, culture, and mathematics. It can teach us principles for thoughtful living. Human wisdom cannot teach us the ways of God. In his book, *Quest*, Diogenes Allen writes:

Our sciences and other ways of gaining knowledge reveal a great deal about the order and structure of the physical universe, the movement of history, the organization of societies, and the workings of the individual psyche. But none of these wonderful ventures of the human spirit is concerned with our significance. None of them can remove a

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moral failure that deeply injures another and destroys the joy of our life.

None of them can inspire a life of concern and service to others. None

of them can ease the cry of the heart at the death of a loved one nor

comfort those who are afflicted. The greatness of Jesus is that he does

speak to our deep human concerns. (*Quest*, p. XV)

The wisdom of God is incarnate in Jesus Christ. Because of sin, we cannot see God clearly or understand God's ways through our darkened minds and hearts. It is only as God comes to us and makes divine wisdom known in the Scriptures and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that we can perceive and embrace the wisdom of God. In the cross of Christ, heaven and earth are reconciled. Our sin is forgiven; death is overcome. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In Jesus we find our life, health, salvation, and peace.

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Paul is writing to a community that takes pride in its wisdom. To the intellectually sophisticated Greeks of Corinth, God’s wisdom sounds like so much foolishness. The message of the cross contradicts Greek philosophical notions about God. To the Greeks, God is beyond this world of time and change. The goal of life is to escape this temporal and physical world of suffering and pain. The goal is to dwell in the invisible realm of ideal truth and beauty. To the Greeks, it is absurd to think of God, the ultimate reality of the cosmos, entering human form and experiencing human suffering and death. To the Greeks, God is the eternal, unchanging, unmoved spirit who dwells beyond the material world.

To the Hebrews, the message of the cross is a stumbling block because the expected Messiah comes not to suffer and die, but to triumph over the enemies of God and restore Israel to its former glory. To the Jews, the Messiah comes not to manifest the weakness of God, but the power of God

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as human power. The cross is an abomination: a symbol of defeat, weakness, and foolishness. In the resurrection, God transforms the defeat of the cross into victory, strength, and wisdom.

It is a simple truth. So simple, in fact, that we have a hard time grasping it. In her novel, *Spence and Lila*, Bobbie Ann Mason tells of the everyday life of a couple who have been together over forty years. The novel is a celebration of the endurance of love. On a starlit night, Spence looks over the farm and says, “There it is...all there is to know in the world. ...and yet everywhere people are knocking themselves out trying to find something different, something better. The facts of life are so simple, they are almost impossible to grasp.” (Quoted in *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 9/5/88, p. 2)

Paul says that the word of the cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. What we proclaim is not a word about Jesus but Jesus himself. The invitation is to live a life together in Jesus and in the power of

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the Holy Spirit. We will not water down the gospel; we will not rob it of its power; we will not make it conform to the wisdom of this world; we will not reduce it to little more than “a stitch in time saves nine” or “the early bird catches the worm.”

Do not let anyone fool you into thinking that the Gospel is about something that it is not. It is not about rules for living a happier life; it is not about learning how to be successful; it is not about being entertained; it is not about amassing wealth; it is not about pulling the “God string” to get what you want. There is a difference between the Gospel and what is sometimes called Gospel-lite (l-i-t-e).

Some time ago, I saw an advertisement for a new church. The colorful brochure invited the community to the service on Sunday where there would be “great entertainment for the kids, upbeat music, hilarious drama, and lots of people just like you.” It was hard to find anything about God, Jesus,

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and the Holy Spirit in the brochure. I assume they read the Bible, pray together, care for one another, and go out to serve others. I assume that folks there, just like here, want to love Jesus and follow him. Yet, it seems misguided to me to lure people into church as if it were a trip to Disney World.

No, the Gospel is the power of God for living in community together as followers of Jesus Christ. It is about taking up our cross and following him. Some years ago, I met Dr. Atef Gendy, who was at that time the President of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo. The seminary trains ministers of the Gospel in a nation that has undergone great political and religious turmoil. On a visit to the United States, Dr. Gendy said that “the problems in Egypt are problems that the Gospel answers. If you want to follow Jesus, you must expect and accept and carry the Cross. Authentic Christianity does not exist apart from the Cross” (*The Layman*, 1/19, 2012). Only the wisdom of God

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is strong enough to prevail in a hostile world. We are called to be a community that lives in the power of the Gospel: sharing our faith with others, taking risks that call for sacrifice, forgiving those who have hurt us, practicing hospitality to strangers, and welcoming all in the name of Jesus. The wisdom of the world won't prepare us to do these things. Only the foolishness of God is wise enough to carry us.

One Sunday morning many years ago at a Presbyterian Church in a small farming community in the rural South, a Spanish speaking migrant laborer came to the door of the church and asked in halting English if he could have a Bible. The elder at the door rummaged around the church to find a sufficiently worn Bible to give to the man. As the man left the church with the Bible in his hand, the elder called after him, "Don't forget to bring it back." A schoolteacher in the church saw what happened and knew the time for change had come. Using stories from the Bible, she began to teach

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English classes at the migrant camp and invited her students to start coming with her to church. Her efforts made foolish the wisdom of the world that had built walls between people: migrant laborer versus farm owner, rich versus poor, Latino versus Anglo.

A long time ago, God chose tongue tied, stammering Moses to use his voice to liberate the people. Moses didn't want to go. He was wise in the ways of the world. His people were slaves and nothing was going to change that. He looked at Pharoah's power, wealth, and military might and knew it was downright foolish to go up against that. He knew his right from his left; he knew about power and submission; he knew that sometimes it was better to stick with the status quo than "to take arms against a sea of troubles." For every argument Moses threw at God, God had an answer. God said that he had given Moses a mouth to speak. If he had any fear about getting the words out, his eloquent brother Aaron would speak for him.

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Moses learned that in doing the Lord's will what looked like weakness would become a great strength. Against all the might of Pharaoh, a fearful Moses would lead a rag-tag group of slaves to freedom.

For all of our failings, shortcomings and inadequacies, God chooses us to tell the world about the wisdom of God manifest in the folly of the cross. God chooses you and me to tell others about the power of the cross. Thank God there are people in our lives who look beyond the judgmental, mean-spirited powers of this world and bear witness to the wisdom and power of God.

Some years ago, a young man began visiting my former congregation. He seemed to be a very happy young adult with a deep faith, lots of friends, and job he enjoyed. Over lunch one day, I commented on his positive outlook and asked him to tell me a little bit about himself. He told me that he wasn't always so happy. In fact, he was miserable in middle school. He felt

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awkward; he had no real friends; he didn't seem to fit in anywhere. He was bullied by the other kids. He was afraid, anxious, and depressed. He felt beaten down by the powers of this world. He said that the only thing that kept him going was what his youth leader said. She said that no matter who you are or what you are going through, Jesus is with you. He loves you and takes your pain into the very heart of God. Her wise words may have sounded like foolish nonsense to a group of arrogant bullies, but to this young man it was the wisdom of God. Her words kept him going until he began to be able to love himself as he knew Jesus loved him. She told him what he came to know to be true about Jesus.

We are called to step out in faith and share the divine foolishness of God that confounds, confronts, and challenges the wisdom of the world. What is holding us back? Moses muscled up his courage and learned to speak; Paul shouted it from the rooftops; a youth leader spoke the truth to a

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bullied teenager. Even if it only begins as a whisper, we are called to go share the gospel truth. I heard a minister say one time that you can't even spell the word "gospel" without the word "go" So, let's get going and share the good news. Wisdom has tapped us on the shoulder. What may sound like folly and weakness to the world is for us the salvation of God. God chooses you and me to tell our neighbors that Jesus is "the power of God and the wisdom of God."