

March 7, 2021

"Perfect NonSense makes Sense"

1 Cor. 1:18-31

I would like you all to play make believe with me for a moment. Pretend that my name is Jose Samblanco and I have just arrived off the boat from Peru and I'm proclaiming to you the good news that a Peruvian peasant by the name Carlos Hernandez was electrocuted on the electric chair for your sins.

I've even written a hymn:

Carlos was there on that horrible chair. They tied him down with bolts and then zapped him with 40 000 volts It was for you that our savior fried and died, Despite the fact that his hair caught on fire, this one is God's Messiah. The wisdom of the world has been refuted because Carlos was electrocuted. He is my savior and my lamp, because he absorbed every deadly amp, Now I know that God does care, 'cause he sent Carlos Hernandez to the electric chair.

I've also written other hymns like, "In the chair of Carlos I Glory" and "When I cling to that old rugged electric chair". Now imagine if people caught on to this religion and they started wearing gold electric chairs on their necklace or if they put chairs on top of building.

What if the Red Cross changed their named to the Red Chair. Prior to a big race, athletes, instead of making the sign of the cross made the sign of the electric chair as a gesture of good luck.

Instead of hot cross buns you got hot chair buns. Now what would your response to that be. You'd probably say that was the most stupid religion anyone had ever invented. That is offensive to me.

And you know, that is the way many people look at the Cross of Jesus Christ today. In many churches today they have removed the cross.

Further, in messages on a Sunday morning, there is no mention of the cross. Ministers tell you that God loves you. They promise people prosperity, give them emotional experiences. Help them with life issues. That is the way to fill the pews today.

But it is not the way that God wants us to fill the pews. God says my way, seemingly stupid to many is the height of wisdom. In all of your messages,

make sure the cross of Christ is central. Yes, the cross is where we alone see that "Perfect Nonsense makes sense!"

I don't know about you, but we have a lot of clutter in our house. We have a dog who is constantly picking things up around the house, including my shoes, and carrying them to different locations. If you are not watching carefully, you could trip and fall over an item that is located in a place where it shouldn't be. You might say there are stumbling blocks around our house.

Likewise, the cross of Jesus Christ causes many people in our society to stumble, and get tripped up. First of all, let's take a look at the Jews. The Jews stumbled over it because Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah they wanted.

That's strange, because the Jews had been carefully picked by God. He had watched over & protected them down through the generations, & had prepared them to be the nation through whom the Messiah would come. But when He came, they crucified Him.

The Bible says that Jesus "...came to His own, & those who were His own did not receive Him." (John 1:11) Why? Why didn't they receive Him? Because the "Jews demand miraculous signs..." They were expecting a Messiah who would perform miracles on their behalf.

Now the amazing thing is that Jesus was doing exactly that. He was performing miracles - giving sight to the blind, straightening the legs of the lame, cleansing the lepers. He was ministering to them, reaching out to meet their needs.

But those weren't the kinds of miracles they wanted. They wanted signs of power & success. They wanted a Messiah who would overthrow the Romans & reestablish the Kingdom of David.

If He had marshalled an army, & led them into battle, & defeated the Romans - if He would have shown them that He was successful & victorious - they would have marched behind Him. But the cross got in the way.

You see, dying on the cross doesn't look like success or power. It doesn't look like victory. It looks like weakness. It looks like failure. It looks like defeat. So they kept stumbling over it. It kept getting in the way.

Not only did they have a false concept of the Messiah, they also had a false

concept of salvation. They thought that the way to salvation was through their own righteousness. So they were busy keeping the Law.

But they weren't keeping God's Law. They were just going through the motions, going to the synagogue at the appointed times, saying their prayers loudly so that all could hear, & giving their offerings in such a way that everybody was impressed with their generosity.

They appeared to be pious & prayerful & generous. And I'm afraid that there are people just like that in our world today, too. So in their own minds, they didn't need a Savior. They didn't need anybody to die on the cross for them. They thought the way to salvation was through their own righteousness which they carefully defined to their own liking.

As a result, they kept stumbling over the cross. Then Paul looked at the Greeks. Vs. 22 says that the "Greeks look for wisdom." They were the intelligentsia of the day.

The Greeks looked upon the cross of Christ as foolishness. They followed their human reason. Reason tells you that babies aren't born to virgin girls. Reason tells you that God doesn't become flesh. Reason tells you that almighty God will not allow puny men to nail Him to a cross. Reason tells you that when a man dies he cannot be resurrected back to life again.

One needs to look to scholars for the answers to life. Socrates said, "The secret to a successful society is education. If we can just give everybody a good education, then it must follow that the world will get better & better."

The Greeks believed that by training the mind and the body one could get rid of undesirable qualities and achieve a god-like status. Many people today still believe the Greeks were on to something.

In fact Rhonda Byrne recently wrote a book (now also a movie) called "The Secret" in which she suggests that if we only had positive thoughts about ourselves, good things would happen.

But that's like saying that a car with poor alignment would stay on the road if we only spoke kindly to it and had positive thoughts about its handling.

Think nice thoughts all you want, your car won't drive straight until you get the alignment fixed! And so we can try all we want to make ourselves into better people but we'll never achieve lasting happiness, because sin, ours and others', will always leave a mess in our lives, like the discarded chocolate bar will always lead to a mess in the living room should the dog

get hold of it.

Instead of ignoring sin, Paul says to lift high the cross and acknowledge it. Acknowledge that what put Jesus on that cross, that what made him suffer rejection by his heavenly Father was our rebelliousness.

What? Admit that we've done wrong? Go ahead and admit it, the world says, just don't take the blame for it. The reason you lied to your parents about where you were is because a friend asked you to cover for him.

The reason you were mean with your sister on the phone is because she never asks how you are doing. You wouldn't be so impatient if everyone was as efficient and responsible as you... No, you're not to blame for your sins. So don't harbor any negative thoughts about yourself.

Think only positive ones and you'll be happy. Just as the driver who ignores his poor alignment may, as a result, get himself into a serious accident, so those who fail to take responsibility for their sin will find themselves in a serious bind come Judgment Day.

Then we will no longer be able to ignore our poor alignment because God will make it public and ask why we didn't do anything about it? Actually what God will ask is why we didn't believe that he had fixed our alignment.

He has? Yes. He did when Jesus, his Son, was crucified. You see the message of Christ crucified is not so foolish because it does not sweep our problem of sin under the rug.

God exposed our sin and revealed his hatred for it when he punished his Son on the cross. But God also demonstrated his love for us there at the cross by punishing Jesus instead of us.

The cross proclaims that our sin has been neutralized, not minimized. The cross is like the scar from your last surgery. It testifies that the tumor, which would have killed you, has been cut out, not ignored in hopes that it would go away.

Still, the message of Christ crucified seems foolish because it's so simple. To hear that heaven is now mine because of everything Jesus did sounds a bit like those emails I get telling me that I have a large estate of 2,000,000 that someone in Africa has left me, if only I give my personal credit information.

There's a deceitful catch there. So there must be a catch in regard to the message of Christ crucified, right? No! There is no catch. All of our sins are

forgiven. Heaven is ours, period.

The Message of the cross to us who are being saved, is the Power of God. Jesus looks so weak hanging on that cross, not even able to move his arms.

But that's only a mirage. The cross isn't weakness: its power, great power. Even man, on his greatest and kindest intellectual days, has been unable to figure out solutions to man's greatest problems: sickness, death, and the afterlife.

We've made some impressive advances in medicine, nutrition, and science. We can get rid of some sicknesses, at least for a while, but we can't really stop that pesky death problem.

And cryogenics (freezing a dead body) is about the closest we have come to an afterlife, and yet it probably going to be a while until we see Ted Williams in the batting cage again, that is, if they can ever figure out a way to reattach his head to his body.

Where man's wisdom fails, the cross has answers. Sicknesses, death, the afterlife, these things were all solved at the cross. The cross is Power: where else do you find comfort and answers when you are sick and dying?

The cross is Power: where else can you go after a loved one passes out of this life? In the cross we also see the power of LOVE! What power it took Jesus to not only GO to that cross - even though He could have gone away - and to STAY on that cross - even though He could have gotten off!

When we look at the cross, it empowers us with a confidence to approach God at our death. It makes us feel sure that we are holy in His sight through faith - that's something no works of ours can do.

It fills us with a peace of knowing that all of God's anger over our sins was paid for. Nothing in the world can give us such confidence or power.

Only the power of the cross can do that. The cross makes us recognize that the worries of this world are nothing in comparison with knowing that we are on the way to heaven.

This is where the power and wisdom of God are found. Through the power of that cross, sins are forgiven, sinful habits can be overcome, negative attitudes can be reversed, strained relationships can be mended, talents can be sharpened, poor personality traits can be refined, and dangerous temptations can be resisted.

UNDERSTAND - there is an awesome power in the cross of Christ. IT - is at the cross that sinners are convicted; the arrogant are humbled; the hardened are broken, the skeptic convinced, the weak strengthened and the repentant are forgiven..

The cross rests on the time line of history like a compelling diamond. Its tragedy summons all sufferers. Its absurdity attracts all cynics. It's hope lures all searchers...

My what a piece of wood! History - has idolized it and despised it; gold plated it and burned it; worn it and trashed it. History has done everything to it but ignore it.

That's the one option that the cross does not offer. No one can ignore it! You can't ignore a piece of lumber that suspends the greatest claim in history.

A crucified carpenter claiming that he is God on earth? Divine? Eternal? The death-slayer? Yea! It may sound like Perfect nonsense. May the Holy Spirit lead us to see that this Perfect Nonsense truly makes sense! In Jesus' name. Amen.