

# Staring into the foolishness of God

1 Cor. 1:18-25, Php. 2:5-8, Mt. 5:39-42

*David C. Dixon*

**Introduction:** Did you ever do anything foolish? That's probably a foolish question! Of course, we all have at one point or another. But I mean, *really* foolish! And I'm not asking you to confess publicly here, but just to think about the subject with me for a moment. When I was a teenager, the foolish thing to do was to climb the local water tower – and it was tall (nearly 60 meters!) – it was a group thing peer pressure, manhood test. Or how about running with the bulls in Spain?! I just thought it was what all young tourists in Spain were supposed to do – another kind of macho test you had to pass, and I was all about proving what a macho I was at that point in life. Oh boy, did that one ever come back to haunt me! I could have at least kept it quiet – but no, I had to let it be known, like a soldier bragging about his war exploits, and what did all three of my sons insist on doing later in their youthful pride?

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about wisdom and foolishness, doesn't it? Foolishness is refusing to listen to wisdom, in the first place, so a fool is someone who refuses to learn wisdom and discipline. Especially fools fail to fear God, and despite their incompetence, they are **"wise in their own eyes"** and hence, unteachable: rather than learning from their mistakes, they just do the same foolish things over and over. Did you ever hear the modern definition of insanity? Doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results! Much like a dog that returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly (Pr. 26:11). In fact, Proverbs 26 is wholly dedicated to instructing us on how to identify and handle the person who is foolish: **"Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them"** (Pr. 26:27). That's simply the law of sowing and reaping. The most foolish thing we ever do is to reject God's authority over our lives – yet we've ALL done that at some point or another (and it's not necessarily some big outward mutiny against God, but just little quiet things where we do not submit our hearts to His truth). So our problem is not just a matter of changing our mind and deciding to correct our course. When we reject God's authority, we fall into a deep dark pit that only God can rescue us from (that's the biblical doctrine of sin): we've all fallen short of the glory of God; i.e., we've fallen into foolishness and become trapped in our own dreams and schemes (and that's a "double whammy," because we're both guilty and trapped!). Yet God's way of rescuing us is as bizarre as anything we could never imagine! We might even refer to it as the "foolishness" of God (in no way comparable to ours, of course!).

So maybe God took too big a "risk" when He decided to pour His image into matter (Gen. 2: He **"breathed"** into us the breath of life). By the way, science has never been able to duplicate that! Dr. Francis Crick, British molecular biologist and biophysicist, famous Nobel prize winner for his groundwork in discovering the double helix structure of DNA, spent much of the rest of his life trying to understand how molecules make the transition from non-living to living. But he never found it; he was never able to reproduce this in a laboratory, because inert matter simply will not come to life on its own. It depends on the action of God! Yet with all Crick's great learning, focusing his life on the

information encoded in DNA that cells need to make proteins, he believed that information had NO AUTHOR but random chance! In what other area of human knowledge do we assume that complex information carefully arranged and executed is the result of random chance?! Yet Crick considered that *“religious answers are highly likely to be nonsense, [since] they spring from man’s ignorance and his enormous capacity for self-deception.”* This was his evaluation of the Gospel, which agrees totally with what the apostle Paul taught: the world could not know God through its own wisdom, but only through the foolishness of what we preach (Jesus said God had hidden such truth from the wise and learned of this age and revealed it to children, Mt. 11:25).

So part of the risk God took was in giving a man like Crick such brilliant intelligence that he thought he knew more than God. This “matter” into which God pours His image can sometimes be very volatile, meaning it doesn’t remain in one state, but rapidly transitions to another (especially vapor), depending on temperature, pressure etc. Does our “matter” change states? Is your matter volatile? Maybe not in the strict scientific sense, but we are made of dust, aren’t we? How volatile are dust particles when you try to get rid of them on *your* furniture? And part of the “matter” with our dust is that it’s constantly aging and suffering the effects of wear and tear! And it’s even riskier when you think of how our matter has been given a will of its own! Our matter (= our flesh) needs to be subdued and disciplined, doesn’t it? Of course, that’s the whole purpose of God’s Word! Our matter was endowed with God’s image (His breath, Gen. 2:7); this implies a serious likeness to Him, a capacity for relationship, for representing Him in this world, for governing, supervising, and caring for creation. This breath humanized and personalized us! It’s what gives our lives their value and meaning, it’s where God’s glory can shine through us! So was *this* the “foolishness” of God? His “weakness” perhaps? To risk His breath in us?! And then wasn’t it even more foolish of Him to leave His celestial glory in order to dress Himself in such transient earthly glory as our dust, like the grass, like a flower? The Creator becoming a creature was thus dignifying our lowly estate, redeeming us from the cosmic garbage dump of the universe!

Yet this priceless gift – this personal visit from our Creator in creaturely form – should have been treated with royal favor and privilege, says our human logic. There should have been a lot of fanfare and excitement over this entrance of the Maker of the universe onto the human scene! Well, in fact, there *was*: centuries of prophetic witness preceded it, an angelic chorus announced it, homage from shepherds and magi from the Orient accompanied it, and later His own personal herald would proclaim His grand entrance. So what wisdom could there be in this Son of Man later being handed over to sinners, these rebellious earthlings? (Mk. 14:41.) You may remember Jonathan Edwards’ sermon about “sinners in the hands of an angry God”; but this was about God in the hands of angry sinners! But why should He be put into their violent hands?! What sense did it make for Him to try to rescue these inhuman creatures of dust who supposedly bore His image, but stubbornly refused to respect that image in others?! (Remember His words: “whatever you do to others [even the least], you’ve done it to me!”) And these creatures of dust would actually have the power to reject, humiliate, torture and murder the King of the universe! Were they really worth risking His life for them? Wasn’t He setting Himself up for a lot of pain and sorrow?! So maybe *this* was His “weakness”! Actually loving these lost children so much that He was willing to risk their fury over not getting their own way in the world, risking their outrage at not being in charge, just to provide them a way back home in case they changed their fickle minds!

One more objection: Isn’t it foolish for someone righteous to bow to the criteria of someone unrighteous? In effect, doesn’t it seem foolish for the righteous Creator to submit Himself to the unrighteous judgment of His subjects? After all, they rebelled against Him, the rightful Ruler of the universe, so wouldn’t the “just thing” to do be simply to annihilate them? [From the biblical viewpoint, would that be justice? Or would greater justice be served by rescuing the defenseless from the one who stole them away from their rightful owner?] Anyway, it was surely obvious that they were going to rip Him apart if He came down on their level. Yet when push came to shove, and God incarnate was actually faced with our ungodly aggression, He would choose to turn the other cheek and die! Mt.

5:38-39: ***"You've heard it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil."*** The meaning of this non-resistance becomes apparent in the following verses: ***"If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone would sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you"*** (Mt. 40-42). The parallelism is clear among these terms: other cheek, your coat, the extra mile, giving to the one who begs or would borrow. A quick Greek lesson is in order: the term "resist" translates *antistēnai* (> *anthistēmi*), meaning resist or oppose. So what are the implications of this in the real world? Surely Jesus didn't mean for us to practice simple passivity in the face of evil or injustice! Yet if we meet violence with more violence, injustice with more injustice, as Gandhi said, ***"An eye for an eye, yes, making the whole world blind."*** So that can't be the answer. Another Greek lesson from Eph. 6 will help us clarify: Paul says we're to put on the whole armor of God so that we can *antistēnai* in the evil day (resist, withstand), and after working everything out, be able to *stēnai* (remain standing). Martin L. King was a famous follower of Jesus who got it when it came to combining a concern for social justice with a firm commitment to nonviolence and forgiveness. So *do we get it* when we see what our Creator did as He was surrendered into the hands of sinners? (That's you and me!) The Creator in the hands of His creatures, the Judge being sentenced by the guilty, the Advocate being murdered by the very ones He came to defend! **What kind of God is this?** Do you ever ask yourself this question? A God who acts in such a bizarre way, because His foolishness and weakness become totally exposed here in the incarnation, as He stoops down to join our race and teach us His love, and He gets captured and brutally murdered! Yes, He saw this coming, He was not taken by surprise; but **He did not resist the evil ones** who were slapping, beating, and torturing Him, who were literally taking His clothes away, requiring Him to carry their burdens more than a mile, committing such violence against Him! He didn't resist them, but this was not passivity, for He was "standing His ground in the evil day" and "doing everything necessary to stand firm" against the evil one who had us in his grip, not submitting to Him for one moment, but reigning in all His splendor on that wretched cross.

Scripture affirms that this "foolishness" of His is wiser than the highest wisdom of all humanity, far outdistancing our most advanced technology, outsmarting our best A.I.; and His weakness, stronger than our greatest might, our most deadly weapons, exceeding all that we can think or even imagine! What can save you from foolishness in this life? What can save you even from the wisdom of this world?! It's a matter of discovering the purpose for which God created you! And where will you find that? On the Internet, in the fashion world, online gaming, reality TV, in your job or in movies? Maybe in your feelings? No, you'll find it only in the foolishness of God – this is where you discover your true worth, your real passion and purpose: to know the love of this God who after creating the vast galaxies of the universe, reduced Himself to just your size, and then took all your frustration and egotism in His face and still continued loving and forgiving you! You'll find nothing of any greater worth or love or power than knowing this God who put Himself in *our* hands so that we could be rescued and renewed and transformed by His! What will your life look like when you 'get' this?