

You may have noticed that various churches have different styles of ecclesiastical garb: Some ministers wear a dressing gown to church; Some have a white clerical collar; Some wear a stole (or a scarf); Some wear a Bishop's Mitre; Some will be dressed in black from head to toe; Some will wear a very neat and proper suit and tie...

And I was thinking that maybe we at Bush Disciples might need to have a suitable ecclesiastical outfit for our preachers... And I came up with this.

I reckon a 'jester's hat will immediately fit the image that most people hold, of Christians....

And fair dinkum:

- a large percentage of our population, reckon that anyone who gives up their Sunday morning to go to church – well, they're just "utterly foolish";
- Why would anyone pray to unseen God? And more crazy still – why would they ever expect some kind of answer – they must be truly delusional; and
- Of course (in their eyes) anyone who makes important life decisions, based on 'some perceived guidance of God' – well, that's crazy
- And to believe in life-after-death – to believe in the resurrection of Jesus and the miracles – and the thought of a coming day of judgment, when we all have to stand

before this almighty God – to them, it’s all fairy-tale nonsense.

I hate to break it to you, but if you can’t handle being thought of as “a fool”, then you can’t handle being a Christian in Australia today. – At least not if you’re going to mix with anyone who the world would consider as “wise”.

Because, in the eyes of most in the world, this is exactly how they see us. You don’t have to wear a Jester’s hat to be thought of as a fool... All you have to do, is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to set your heart on eternity. All you have to do is count **this** life as ‘worthless’, compared to the eternal glory we wait for, and to deny yourself, and you’ll immediately be thought of as a fool.

the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power of God**.

*You know, that got me thinking... “I don’t know why someone like **me** would ever become a believer.” The way **my** mind works, I’m a very logical thinker... The subjects I excelled in, were science and maths... **And** I’m a naturally sceptical person: While others fork out their hard-earned money for the latest version of ‘snake-oil’ to cure all their ills, or to fix all their farming problems, or to help them to get rich quick, I just want to see some scientific or mathematical evidence to support the claims... While charlatans get rich by deceiving*

*the gullible (and it might surprise you sometimes, who the gullible are), I shake my head in disbelief, “How can you believe such nonsense?”*

***And yet I do firmly believe in the Lord God almighty. I firmly believe, in the message of the cross – that God determined to save all those who would believe in Him, by having His own son, mocked; scourged; and nailed to a cross...***

***I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ,  
his only Son, our Lord.***

***He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.***

***On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again, to judge the living and the dead.***

***I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen.***

Truly – I believe this – with all of my heart, and with all of my mind. **Nothing** is more important to me, than this ...

But why should anyone like **me**, ever begin to believe...

Those who are wise in the world's eyes, would brand me as being "gullible" – they'd say I've been deceived. Or maybe they'd say, "Well you're a preacher and a bible teacher – You're the one who **does** the deceiving. – You're deceiving those who have weak minds."

the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

We seem to have reached an age, where prominent academics make a name for themselves, and rake in the mega-bucks – they even gain 'celebrity status', by standing on their platform of "Anyone who believes in God is an idiot.", and "The world would be a better place without religion". They go beyond "atheism" (which means they don't believe in God), to "anti-theism" (they are **against** God, and against anyone who **does** believe in God). And that's a term that they choose for themselves (by the way).<sup>i</sup>

*Richard Dawkins tells the world what to think of Christians in his best-selling books, with titles like:*

- *The God Delusion; and*
- *The Blind Watchmaker*

*Christopher Hitchens is another prominent god-mocker (at least he was until he died [I wouldn't want to be in his shoes*

*right now], but he wrote the book, “God is **not** Great”, and is well-known for his debates against Christians...*

So, this is where my mind goes when I read this passage, because it's telling us, that the educated elite of this world will see Christianity as “foolish” – and they do, today. The wise man – the philosopher ... (By the way, do you know what PhD stands for? – it's a doctorate of philosophy) ... The debater of this age..., in our society, they are against Christianity, because they're against the very existence of God...

But that wasn't the case in Paul's day. In Paul's day, and particularly in Corinth, the debater – the philosopher, wasn't against the idea of there **being** a god – in fact, they had a plethora of gods of their own... There was nothing they enjoyed more, than to get together with more clever and influential philosophers and debaters, to discuss **their** ideas of **their** gods...

No. It was something particular to Christianity, that they saw as being “foolish”... When they considered the Gospel, there were two particular aspects of the Gospel that they **outright rejected**:

The first thing they rejected, was the **foolishness** of the message of the cross... They could not understand that a God could ever be put to death by a human. Why would a God ever want to become a human in the first place? And why would a god endure pain and suffering to pay for the sins of mere mortals??? – that's just a nonsense. The whole message

of the cross (to them), was utterly foolish... It wasn't the concept that "there was a god" – the arch folly, is the message of the cross itself. V23 says: <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles

And the **second** foolishness of the Gospel, was the insignificance – the unimpressive nature – the **weakness**, of those who God called to believe... They weren't the academics; they weren't the philosophers; they weren't the clever debaters... In the eyes of the world, they were "ignorant"; "foolish"; "weak"..... Inconsequential - nobodies....

Paul said:

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

In the eyes of the world, the church was weak – it was made up of "nobodies"... Let me rephrase that – the church is weak. The church is made up of nobodies... And this is by God's design.... Why?.... <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Wouldn't the church be so very different if it was only those of high IQ, or high status, who could be saved??? You see, only the humble and the broken – Only the contrite of heart can be saved. None of us can stand with a proud heart and boast in the presence of God, because God calls “nobodies”, and that's exactly who we are. ...

It's not those who are clever; It's not those who are influential; It's not those who have the gift-of-the-gab and can argue convincingly, who are going to be saved – it's those who believe. It's those who come to Christ, with a child-like faith. And this is the great barrier to faith (even today).

The Jews demanded signs. The Greeks wanted wisdom. And it's the same today. Many people will tell you, “I'm not going to believe, unless you can prove it to me.” **Prove** it to me with signs and wonders – **Prove** it to me with a miracle, and I'll believe... But do you know what Jesus said when they asked **Him** for a sign???

Matthew 12:39 ...., “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

The only sign that Jesus was going to give them, was his own death and resurrection, and that ended up being the very stumbling block that prevented the Jews from believing that He was the Messiah at all.

Prove it to me. Just show me a sign, and I'll believe, Or, “Show me the logic of it.” **Convince** me from history.

**Convince** me from science. **Convince** me from philosophy.  
**Convince** me, and then I'll believe...

But that's not the way it works. I can't make you believe by convincing you...

We believe first. It's a people of **faith**, who God saves. You believe first, and then you've got all the proof you need.

And this is something which is very difficult to explain to somebody who's not a believer, but if you're a Christian, you know **exactly** what I'm talking about. It begins with faith. **You believe**. You're not sure why you believe, but you believe. And when you believe, you experience the power of God. The power of God to transform a life; The power of God to answer prayer; The power of God to do the miraculous; The power of God to save ... We believe, and then we've got all the proof we need.

Our faith begins with "I'm not even sure why I believe, but there's this inner urging – that I've got to believe." Do you know what that inner urging is? That's the Holy Spirit – God giving us the ability to believe...

And then once we believe, how can we ever not believe ever again? When you've truly had an experience of God, then you've got all the proof you need... The world will think you're weird – they'll think of you as a fool, but no Sir-ey – you know... **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

So,,, why's Paul telling this to the Corinthian church? Well, as we discovered last week, there were divisions in the Corinthian Church. And it **seems**, that the ways of the world, and the philosophies of the world (that is, the world's way of thinking), were beginning to infiltrate the church. And the church was divided.

Unfortunately, we're seeing this again, in the church of today. And that shouldn't be a great surprise to us – In 2 Timothy 3, we're warned that in the last days, there will be those who have <sup>2 Timothy 3:5.....</sup> **the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.**

Within churches today, there is a small, but vocal and growing group, who discount the Gospel as we've known it, as “foolish” and they view their **own** theology as something wise and sensible... and they'll look down on you and I, and they will pity us, because in their eyes, we're fools to believe what we believe – We're believing a fairy-tale...

They call it “progressive Christianity”, or “progressive theology”... The arrogance of the name itself, should give it up for what it is....

*I had a conversation with somebody once. And sadly, it's not a unique conversation – I've had several of these conversations over the last 10 years... It was a conversation with a man (who at the time, was probably in his late 50's /*

*early 60's), and he was a leader in a church), and he was asking me, "What do you mean about hearing from God?"*

*And I explained to him about how we hear from God in various ways, and he didn't 'get it'. And so I explained it again, a bit simpler, with more examples, and he still didn't 'get it'. And as we talked for a while, we just couldn't connect on a Spiritual level – he just couldn't comprehend "spiritual truths about how God relates to us".*

*And I couldn't work it out, until finally he said to me, "Michael, you have to understand that my faith is very different now, to what it was when I was a child. I don't believe in the God I was taught about in Sunday School any more – I've moved on from that" ....*

*And then he told me all about his God – a god who doesn't intervene into the world, and doesn't communicate to us. And the God he described, wasn't the Spiritual, relational god who reveals Himself in the Scriptures – he reduced god to him being at peace with himself, doing a few good deeds, and a few sacred ceremonies...*

*And once he told me this, I knew somebody had introduced him to this so-called "progressive theology".*

- They don't believe that Jesus is the only way to God;
- They don't believe that we should believe what the Bible teaches (because it's just a product of its day, and the way an ancient people saw things, because they didn't know better);
- They don't believe that Jesus was born of a virgin.
- They don't believe He was raised from the dead.

- They don't believe in supernatural power, because "they're not that naïve" (only fools believe that stuff)
- They don't believe that Jesus died for our sins, because in their view, that just makes God some kind of cosmic child-abuser.
- In fact, they don't believe that we have to repent of sin,
- Because in their eyes, there probably isn't a heaven, and there definitely isn't a hell.
- And the key virtue to be aimed for, is "tolerance", so we can all just get on with one another.

The thing is, most people I've met who follow along with "progressive theology", **view** themselves as being enlightened, loving, accepting, tolerant, and they tell you how **freeing** it was for them to leave behind the old Christian teachings they used to be told that they had to believe...

But in my experience, they are anything but tolerant – they're tolerant of everyone, except for those who disagree with them. And they are so condescending... They feel they've been enlightened, and "You poor person – you're still believing a fairy-tale..." And they'll do their best to "enlighten" us, with their message of unbelief.

What a sad, sad regression... It's not **progressive** at all – it's **regressive**.

Do you know what they're saying? The Gospel (as we've been taught) – the Gospel, as revealed in the Scriptures, is foolish... "We've got a better way."...

And usually they'll tell us, that in our 'enlightened' age, **nobody** should be asked to believe what the ancients used to believe 2000 years ago... **This** is the way of the future. It's an acceptable message. It's a believable message. "We hold on to some of the teachings of Jesus (the ones **we** decide by the way), and we don't ask people to believe all the nonsense that they shouldn't have to..." "Progressive theology, is what will make the church relevant for today...."

And yet, at the same time, I've seen churches who allow this so-called "progressive theology" to be taught, shrink. They get smaller and smaller, and older and older, and deader and deader,,,, while those churches who continue to preach the cross and Christ crucified, are the churches who are young; vibrant; alive; and growing.

Why does this same old foolishness Gospel, continue to be life for those who believe??? Because it's the power of God...

Those who see themselves as "wise", and the Gospel as "foolishness", are in a pretty bad predicament. They are perishing. That means they're heading for Hell. God says:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will  
thwart."

.....

The wisdom of the world says, “All that Christianity stuff is nonsense – it’s foolishness.” .... But really, it’s no joke.

<sup>25</sup> .... the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

To those we who believe:

- Christ has become wisdom. That means we don’t mind being thought of as foolish, because we know God’s plan is wise, and we are **in** his plan.
- Christ has become our righteousness. That means that all of our wrong is taken away, and He makes us right.
- Christ has become our sanctification. That means He is transforming us – preparing us for Glory – making us a changed people – tuning us for righteous living; and
- Christ has become our redemption. That means He bought us back... He loved us so much, that He died for us on the cross, to pay the penalty of our sin.

There’s nothing new here, but in Christ, we are willing to be fools in the eyes of the world, because we believe.

There’s an old hymn that says:

*Tell me the old, old story,  
Of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and His glory,*

*Of Jesus and His love;  
Tell me the story simply,  
As to a little child,  
For I am weak and weary,  
And helpless and defiled.*

*Tell me the story slowly,  
That I may take it in—  
That wonderful redemption,  
God's remedy for sin;  
Tell me the story often,  
For I forget so soon,  
The "early dew" of morning  
Has passed away at noon.*

*Tell me the story softly,  
With earnest tones and grave;  
Remember I'm the sinner  
Whom Jesus came to save;  
Tell me the story always,  
If you would really be,  
In any time of trouble,  
A comforter to me.*

*Tell me the same old story,  
When you have cause to fear  
That this world's empty glory  
Is costing me too dear;  
And when the Lord's bright glory  
Is dawning on my soul,  
Tell me the old, old story:  
"Christ Jesus makes thee whole."*

## 1 Corinthians 1:17–31 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will  
thwart.”

<sup>20</sup> 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? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is

wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

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<sup>i</sup> Hitchens was an antitheist, and said that a person "could be an atheist and wish that belief in God were correct," but that "an antitheist, a term I'm trying to get into circulation, is someone who is relieved that there's no evidence for such an assertion." (*Mayer, Andre (14 May 2007). "Nothing sacred – Journalist and provocateur Christopher Hitchens picks a fight with God". Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Archived from the original on 16 May 2007. Retrieved 2 May 2014.*) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher\\_Hitchens#cite\\_note-83](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Hitchens#cite_note-83)