

Arsy Varsy

Reclaiming The Gospel
in First Corinthians

Phillip A. Ross



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*For Barack Obama
in honor of his election as the
44th President of the
United States of America
and for the people who have called for
change they can believe in*

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INTRODUCTION

What kind of title is *Arsy Varsy*? It's an old Puritan word similar to *vice versa*. Where *visa versa* means conversely or a change in order, *arsy varsy* (pronounced *ahr-see-vahr-see*) means 1. (adj.) wrong end foremost, i.e., completely backward, an arsy varsy way of doing things; and 2. (adv.) in a backward or thoroughly mixed-up fashion, i.e., the papers are all filed arsy varsy. Today we might use the expression *ass backward*, which suggests that something is happening the wrong way, with the rear coming first. It indicates the complete reversal of the correct order.

Why would a book like this be dedicated to a President? There is a long tradition among Christian writers to provide theological insight where it is needed, where its application can get the most bang for the buck, so to speak. Senator Obama campaigned for President on the platform of bringing needed change to America, and that is exactly what this book is about.

I will put forth the audacity to hope that all Americans want what is best for America, and that the President—any President—is called to provide what he can toward that goal. Granted that my concern is theological and not political, though the two things are intimately related. The old adage is that so goes the (Christian) church, so goes the nation. This is true because politics are the outworking of beliefs and beliefs are the product of theology. Theology is simply the expression of our beliefs about God. And everyone has a theology, even atheists. They *believe* that God doesn't exist.

The theological position espoused herein is neither Left nor Right, neither Liberal nor Conservative because it is both Left and Right, Liberal and Conservative. The traditional Left/Right, Liberal/Conservative dichotomy is inadequate to the reality of life. It is a false dichotomy built upon a false and shallow understanding of reality. And it is our understanding of the reality in which we live that is the subject of this book.

Paul's intent in writing to the Corinthians was to correct a false understanding of success that had captured and perverted the gospel of Jesus

Christ into its service. My intent is to reiterate Paul's message in a way that is orthodox and makes sense to me—and God-willing, to my contemporaries. This is no more than all Christians are called to do.

The thesis of this book is that Paul thought, wrote, and taught that some of the leaders of the Corinthian church had things *arsy varsy* or ass backwards. And the reason that First Corinthians has been valued over the centuries is that many Christians and churches have found Paul's insights and teachings to be valuable. It's a common problem that has plagued Christianity since the time of the Corinthian church, and before that back into the history of the Old Testament to the Fall of Adam. Being a sinner means getting things wrong. Paul was trying to help the Corinthians get things right, and their getting things right meant that they first come to understand that they had things wrong.

Expositional preaching provides the best exposure to a truly biblical perspective of Scripture. By simply preaching through a book of the Bible we cannot avoid those particular Scriptures or ideas that we don't like. And if we are honest, we will admit that there is much in God's Word that we don't like. If we were God, we'd do things quite differently. Thank God we aren't! God has given us His Word (Scripture) in the order, and with the terminology and the emphasis He wants it to have. Let us endeavor to receive it as He has given it to us, and to pass it forward as we have received it.

The contemporary American churches in the dawning of the twenty-first century are in a situation that is remarkably similar to that of the ancient Corinthian church. So, I decided to preach my way through Corinthians with the hope that Paul's work with the Corinthians will have some pertinent analysis of and application to our own contemporary situation. My approach has not been to read everything I could find about Corinthians in the hope of adding something new to the historic dialog. Rather, my intention is less grand. I hope to see and reveal the trouble the Corinthians had gotten into as a church as clearly as possible in order to understand what Paul was saying to them in the hope of shining some light on our own problem because their problem is our problem. It's a recurring problem because it is a problem of gospel reception and transmission.

“Corinth was a city of wealth and culture, seated at the crossroads of the Roman Empire, where all the trade and commerce of the empire passed through. It was a city of beauty, a resort city, located in a very beautiful

area, but it was also a city of prostitution and of passion. It was devoted to trade and commerce, but also to the worship of the goddess of sex”¹

Many of the people in the Corinthian church didn’t understand why Paul was so troubled with them. After all, they were a large, successful church. They were growing by leaps and bounds. Membership and attendance statistics were solid. They thought they were doing great.

But Paul was troubled by what they were doing and he made every effort to tell them so. His trouble with the Corinthians is our trouble because his trouble with them would be his trouble with us. Unfortunately, the popular Evangelical approach to Christianity today has left too many people thinking that the pinnacle of Christianity comes at conversion, when we first give our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ. The initial change of heart and mind that captures new Christians is so stark a contrast to life before regeneration that it is described as going from death to life, from darkness to light. And it is exactly that!

But for far too many Christians the emotional high that accompanied their initial conversion and the wonderful feelings associated with the release from the burden of sin establishes a kind of emotional “high water mark” in their lives. It is a “mountain top experience” and tends to fade as people return to the daily drudgery of ordinary life. The release from sin releases a stream of endorphins into the blood stream. This, of course, is not a bad thing, but a good thing because it associates good feelings with God. However, being awash in an endorphin high is not the state of heart and mind that God wants His people to live in day in and day out. Nor does God want His people to get stuck in an emotional rut, forever pinning for and pursuing the pleasures of emotional indulgence.

Too many Christians today are like converted hippies of a former time, whose motto could be. “I used to get high on drugs, but now I get high on Jesus!” Too much Christianity today is patterned after an endorphin rush. Please understand me. There is nothing wrong with feeling good, but our own good feelings are not the heart of Christianity.

Rather, God wants His people to grow—emotionally, intellectually, relationally, in every way. We are to grow “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful

1 Steadman, Ray. *Expository Studies in 1 Corinthians, The Deep Things of God*, chapter: The Corinthian Crisis, <http://www.raystedman.org/1corinthians/3571.html>.

schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:13-16). And more often than not growth—real growth—is hard work.

It is amazing how much application Paul’s words to the Corinthians have to the contemporary churches at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century. It is amazing how Paul’s analysis of their problem fits the contemporary situation. And of course it is true that Paul was writing to them in their time about some very specific problems. So, understanding Paul’s words from their perspective, from the perspective of that first century Corinthian church is very important to the study of Corinthians today. However, if we only understand Paul from a first century perspective, as applying only to the Corinthian church, we will only have a history lesson. As important as it is to understand what Paul was saying to those who first received his letter, to place our primary focus there will blunt the sharp edge of Paul’s analysis and prescription, and quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) who is also speaking to us today.

Of course Paul was writing directly to those first century Christians. I’m not disputing that. And it is important to understand what he was saying to them. But we must understand that Paul was not writing *merely* to them. Paul was quite aware of his own position as an apostle of Jesus Christ, of the importance of his words, and of their place in history should God be willing to preserve them. And He did preserve Paul’s words for us. God preserved Paul’s words for us because they were not just for those first century Christians at Corinth, but they were intended by God and by Paul for us who would come later (1 Corinthians 10:11). Consequently, our task is to understand, not merely what Paul was saying to the Corinthians, but also what he is saying to us today.

It is in this sense that the Scriptures are living documents. They are alive, just as Christ Himself is alive, and they speak the words of Christ to us through Paul across two millennia. This is the sense in which I have approached this series on Corinthians. And I pray that the Lord will bless these meager efforts to help make Paul’s words come alive in the minds and hearts of His people in our day. It is a difficult task because, like the Corinthians, many contemporary churches are caught up in their own apparent success. Their numbers are good, people are coming, they’re growing. So, what’s the problem? Well, that is the subject of this book.

I pray that you will see and hear Paul's words—God's Word—through my feeble and fallible efforts. Whatever success toward this end that may accrue to this work belongs to our Triune God who lives in the words of Paul, the words of Scripture, the Word of God. Where my words fail to communicate God's message accurately the fault is my own. I am a weak reed. But our God is truly great! And I pray that He will intercede between writer and reader to communicate and bless you as you engage these words, that He may show you His purpose in Paul's words and their application to your life and to His churches today.

THANKS

I want to thank several people who helped improve this book. Paul Williams, a neighbor and confidant, also proofread the text. While Paul and I have many theological disagreements along the classical divides of the sixteenth century, we are sufficiently committed to the unity of the church and interested in the deeper things that we have become good friends. I never satisfy all of Paul's concerns, and he keeps me sharp.

Other friends have provided me with a lot of meat to chew on regarding various features of this work. Many good questions have helped to clarify various arguments, though I have not satisfied some of their most basic concerns. Three things stand out as the source of the discomfort of some people regarding this treatment of First Corinthians. First, my presuppositional approach is different from an evidential approach to biblical study. Second, the integration of Trinitarian categories regarding human nature as a genuine reflection of God's nature result in additional subtleties and complexities found in the biblical text. And third, the application of the above presuppositionalism and Trinitarianism to Paul's treatment of spiritual gifts yields richer explanations, more diverse applications and a more foundational position for spiritual gifts regarding both the lives of individual Christians and the structure of the church. These interactions have given me a greater appreciation of the importance of epistemology and its impact on theology.

My wife, Stephanie, continues to be a blessing to me as I have grown over the years. No one knows the extent of my growth like she does. We have gone through many twists and turns together, and weathered many storms. My work would not be possible apart from her continuing love and support.

My children, Adam, Austin, and Justin, provide the teleological impetus for my efforts, and for them I am thankful. I have appreciated them all of their lives—and increasingly so as they have become young men.

They are familiar with the material here and I expect—hope, really—that they will take it and run with it in the years to come. I am not pressing for their agreement, but for their serious engagement.

Underneath and above all of this runs my thankfulness to God for Jesus Christ, apart from whom nothing would matter, and in the light of Whom everything matters so dearly.

Phillip A. Ross
Marietta, Ohio
November 2008

I. LOOKIN' GOOD!

Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called out with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God given you in Jesus Christ, that in everything you are enriched by Him, in all speech and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that you come behind in no gift, waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He shall also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called to the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. But I exhort you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. But I say this, that every one of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name. And I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides these, I do not know if I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

— 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Paul called attention to the fact that he was “called by the will of God” (1:1). He was called to be an apostle, to fulfill a specific role in the early church. We need to take care that we don’t dismiss the nature and reality that all Christians are called into the church for particular reasons, and that every Christian has a particular role to play in the church. It is true that all Christians are not called to be apostles, all are not called to be deacons or elders, but all Christians are called to be something.

I am referring to the doctrine of vocation. Martin Luther is credited with reasserting the doctrine of vocation as a foundation stone in the Reformation of the church.

“Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood, indeed, I advise everyone against it—unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone” (Luther, Martin. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 1520).

All Christians are called by God Himself to play a particular role, fill a particular office, and/or accomplish a particular task, job, or function within the body of Christ. However, it also needs to be noted that the body of Christ is not coterminous with any particular denomination or 501(c)(3) manifestation of a local church organization. Rather, the body of Christ includes what has been traditionally known as the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. The church of Jesus Christ is in time and beyond time at the same time.

Just as we are members of the church on Sundays when we gather for worship, we are still members of the church during the week when we are scattered for service. We gather for encouragement, instruction, fellowship, and worship. Then we scatter throughout society for service in the name of Jesus Christ. The church is not a static institution, but a living being, with a complex and dynamic identity—a Trinitarian identity because Christians are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26).

What is commonly understood as the *church* in contemporary society is a mere husk when compared with the church in Scripture. The church of the New Testament was a vibrant fellowship of people from diverse backgrounds, traditions, and ethnicities who celebrated, not merely their human diversity, but their unity in Christ. They shared a common vision and purpose, communicated by Paul and the other apostles—not perfectly or without struggle, of course. But the power of their common vision and purpose overcame their differences.

We note several things of importance in this first verse. God calls all Christians to faithfulness where they are, in the midst of their current job, family, and neighborhood. And at the same time all Christians are called out of worldliness and into godliness. We are called to abandon the immorality of the world and to practice the morality of the Kingdom, and to

do it right where we are—in our current job, family, and neighborhood. We are not called to create a Christian ghetto or to remove ourselves from our current obligations. Rather, we are called to be transformed people right where we are. We are not to run from the world, we are to be transformed in the midst of it.

Paul recognized the Christians in Corinth, those who were the immediate recipients of his letter, as people who were “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (v. 2). All Christians are called by the will of God to be saints. The Greek word translated as *saint* is *hagios*. The word means sacred, physically pure, morally blameless or religious.

Hagios is used throughout the New Testament to refer to God’s holiness. Christ is the Holy One of God. Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Father, holy Scriptures, holy angels, holy brethren, and so on. The secular and pagan use of the word pictured a person separated and dedicated to the idolatrous pagan gods and carried no sense of moral or spiritual purity. The pagan Greek gods were as sinful, deranged, and immoral as the people who worshiped them. There was no sense of morality or righteousness associated with pagan worship. The worshiper of the pagan gods celebrated and mimicked the character of the pagan gods and the immoral religious ceremonies connected with its worship. We know that the Greek temple at Corinth housed and employed a large number of harlots who were connected with the worship of the Greek gods. Thus, the character of the Greek worshiper was licentious, depraved, and abandoned to the celebration of raw emotion.

Paul’s use of the word *hagios* (saint) represented something filthy that had been washed and set apart for a completely new purpose, different from its original purpose. The traditional idea of a saint provides a picture of salvation. Those who were filthy with sin had been washed in the blood of Christ, and set apart from sin to serve God’s purposes. The common understanding down the ages has been that saints practice a superior morality, that being a Christian or being called by God resulted in moral growth or refinement. That common understanding is not wrong, but more often than not it is misunderstood.

NOT PERFECT

Christians are not perfect and never will be, apart from the fullness of the Kingdom of God in glory. Yet, it is common that non-Christians accuse Christians of thinking that they (the Christians) are better than everyone else. And Christians are too often infected with the pride of thinking the same thing—sometimes blatantly, sometimes subtly.

There is a sense in which this idea of moral superiority is true, and a sense in which it isn't. Christians do in fact grow and mature in morality, so they do enjoy a kind of moral upgrade. Moral improvement is one of the benefits of Christianity.

At the same time it is a supreme folly and sin for Christians to think that they have been saved *because* they are morally superior to anyone else. Too often the reverse is actually true. Many heathens are in fact morally superior to many Christians. The point is not that Christians are morally superior to heathens in general, because some are and some aren't. Rather, the point is that Christians grow in moral purity. A Christian should always be more moral, more honest, more righteous than he or she used to be. We are not to compare ourselves with others (2 Corinthians 10:12)—Christian or heathen, but with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ alone is our model.¹

Nor are Christians saved *by* their moral superiority to other people. No one can practice moral improvement in order to become a Christian. It doesn't work like that. No matter how hard we try, we cannot measure up to the moral requirements established by God in the Bible. It cannot be done, and the fact that it cannot be done is one of the central lessons that the Bible teaches. Israel failed to be what God called her to be. The faithful Jews in Israel were very righteous, very moral by any human standard, including our own—but not by God's standard.

While moral improvement is a result of salvation, it is not in any sense a cause or foundation of salvation. Rather, salvation is in Christ alone. Augustus Toplady was correct when he wrote:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

At the same time, there is no salvation apart from moral improvement. Christians are "called to be saints" (v. 2, Romans 1:7) who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (v. 2). Christians grow in grace, grow in obedience, grow in faithfulness, grow in righteousness, grow in moral im-

1 Comparison to others is not the same as imitation. See the chapter on "Imitation," p. 59.

provement. Christians are not necessarily better than anyone else, but they are necessarily better than they used to be.

And Christians cannot claim any personal credit (or glory) for their moral improvement. We are what we are, not because we have worked hard to become good Christians, but solely because Jesus Christ died on the cross and dispatched His Holy Spirit to us while we were still awash in sin and disobedience. The Holy Spirit grabbed us by the scruff of the neck and hauled us aboard the life raft known as Jesus Christ. We had nothing to do with it until we found ourselves in Christ. Good thing, too! Because we, like Israel before us, are completely unable in our own strength and ability to be what God has called all people to be. Nor are we now—yet—what God has called us to be. But Christ has satisfied God's demands, deflected God's wrath, and provided a way for us to grow in godliness.

Paul proclaims, it is the “Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end” (vs. 7-8). Here is a clear expression of the doctrine of assurance. Our salvation is assured, not because of anything that we can do, but solely because of what Christ has done. Christ's grip on us is much stronger than our grip on Him. Our assurance of faith rests in His grip on us, not in our grip on Him.

DIVISIONS

Paul goes on to address divisions in the church. Why does he talk about divisions in the church? Shouldn't he be talking about love and unity among the brethren? Paul was committed to the truth. He believed Jesus when He said that “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The truth was that there were divisions in the church. There are divisions in every church, always have been.

Paul not only acknowledged this truth, but went on to provide the cure for church divisions, “be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (v. 10). He was talking about doctrinal unity, about everyone being on the same page doctrinally. That's a pretty tall order. It was then and it still is today. Why? Partly because of the contemporary cultural emphasis on diversity, but also partly because we are all unique individuals with different perspectives, different thoughts ideas and analysis.

For instance, no longer is America considered to be a “melting pot” where immigrants shed their cultural background in order to become Americans. Now Americans are taught to celebrate and maintain their cultural and ethnic perspectives and customs and to resist accommodation into American culture.

To keep us from getting confused about what Paul said, we need to note that there are two kinds of diversity—ethnic diversity and doctrinal (or philosophical/theological) diversity. We know as a fact that Jesus gave the church incredible ethnic diversity. Simeon prophesied that Jesus would be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32). Jesus commanded His people to go and “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Paul said that the gospel was “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Later he reminded the Galatians that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). When the Holy Spirit poured out upon the saints gathered in the Upper Room there were “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) dwelling in Jerusalem among the Jews.

“And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:6).

There can be no doubt that Christianity is for people of all ethnic backgrounds.

But the essence of Christianity is not doctrinal diversity, nor is it intended to be. Like a flower, Christianity is simple to behold, but complex to analyze. Flowers are composed of petals, pistils, stems, stalks, and roots—no two of which are exactly the same. Like God’s Word, Christianity is a unified whole, a unified whole, that is simple to behold, but complex to analyze. In addition, people understand things differently, from different perspectives. That’s to be expected. But those differences in understanding are a function of our sin. They are not to be normative. Doctrinal diversity is not the ideal or the goal. Doctrinal unity is the goal. Paul says, “be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (v. 10), the same mind, the same opinion, the same purpose. This is no fluke verse or idea. Jesus prayed,

“I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:11).

Paul wrote to the Philippians,

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you

are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

And later in that same letter,

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Philippians 2:1-2).

Ethnic diversity is the goal of the church, not ethnic unity or purity. On the other hand, doctrinal unity is the goal of the church, not doctrinal diversity or division. Jesus wants all kinds of different people to believe the same thing. He doesn't want all the people who are in the church to believe different things.

God created people as unique individuals and has allowed for some variation in perspectives and explanations regarding the complexity of Christian analysis. We should find overwhelming agreement in the simplicities even while we find striking differences in the complexities. Sometimes the differences are divisive, and therein lies the rub. Knowing when our differences contribute to Christian unity and when they result in division (as opposed to diversity) is the primary subject of Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

PEACE AND PURITY

All Christians need to seek the peace and purity of the church. This is no small task because sin has set peace and purity at odds with one another. Those who seek doctrinal unity or purity, those for whom truth is the primary category of faithfulness, are often charged with disturbing the peace of the church because they meet with opposition when they teach or assert various unpopular doctrines. And those who seek peace, those for whom fellowship is the primary category of faithfulness, are often charged with disturbing the purity of the church because they want to maintain fellowship and camaraderie at the expense of truth. The one trumps fellowship with truth, and the other trumps truth with fellowship.

Scripture, however, insists on both peace (or fellowship among the saints) and purity (or doctrinal unity among the saints). Paul addresses this issue in its fullness in his letters to the Corinthians.

Note Paul's first defense of the gospel here in chapter one. His first attempt at telling the saints what they need in order to manifest both purity and peace in the church is very interesting. He spoke of baptism because that was the issue of presentation. People had been dividing

themselves into groups based upon their baptisms. They separated themselves based upon who baptized them, upon whom they were baptized into. It makes a kind of sense. Baptism is a mark of entry into the church. It is a common belief that how a person got into the church suggests his or her position in the church.

The Reformed camp certainly understands this. They argue that people are brought into the church by the power of the Holy Spirit through regeneration, and not under their own power or by their own decisions to join or to be baptized. That's why they baptize infants as well as confessing adults. In other words, if you haven't been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit—which is a function of baptism broadly defined and not tied to the time of baptism, you are not really a church member, no matter what you or anyone else may think.

Yet, as much as people hold fast to this understanding of church membership, Paul brushes the issue of baptism aside, suggesting that the act of baptism is not in and of itself a sufficient indicator of church membership. Baptism is not a magic action that opens the doors of heaven. Rather, it is a symbolic ceremony. The symbolism is important, but not so important that it should disturb the peace and purity of the church.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel” (v. 17).

So, Paul's first defense of the gospel is not baptism. Paul will go on to say that the gospel is sufficient to defend itself, “for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Paul tells us that worldly wisdom is not sufficient to make any judgments about the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is saying that those who are wise in the eyes of the world are not able to think correctly about the gospel. And who are the wise in the eyes of the world? Professors, intellectuals, scientists, think-tank scholars, university scholars, news anchors, etc. There's nothing wrong with being a professor or an intellectual or a scientist or a scholar or a news anchor, and there is great need for Christians to occupy these fields of endeavor. The problem is that the tools of these professions, inasmuch as they are committed to the wisdom of the world—that is to say wisdom without God, or wisdom apart from the light of Scripture—will always fail to understand even the most basic things about God or Jesus Christ. They will always and consistently get it wrong. Oh, they may stumble over a true thing now and then, but they will themselves fail to understand the fullness of any truth they come upon apart from Jesus Christ. Paul said it better,

“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” (v. 18).

He meant that Christianity will always look stupid to the world, to those who do not begin their thinking with the reality of God. How could it be otherwise? Those who acknowledge God and those who deny God have completely different understandings of the facts.

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