

INTRODUCTION

After a break for "Go for the Gold" we're back in our series from 2 Corinthians called "Hope for Cracked Pots." The key for this study is found in 2 Corinthians 4:7 which says, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." The treasure we hold is the precious life of Jesus in us. It's only by God's amazing grace that He has chosen to live in imperfect, cracked pots like us!

Today's message asks the question: What kind of FOOL am I? You may recognize that as the title of a song from the 1960s made famous by Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr. The lyrics are rather depressing. They say: "What kind of fool am I? Who never fell in love; It seems that I'm the only one; that I have been thinking of. What kind of man is this? An empty shell- A lonely cell in which an empty heart must dwell." (Words by Leslie Bricusse)

What kind of fool ARE you? This is our topic because Paul uses the word "fool" to describe himself five times in five short verses. The word "fool" appears in the Bible 183 different times.

There are all kinds of quotations that try to define a fool. Mark Twain wrote: "It's better to keep your mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open it and leave no doubt." An ancient Chinese proverb says, "He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes. He who never asks a question is a fool forever." A Hindu proverb says, "The fool who thinks he is wise is just a fool; the fool who knows he is a fool is wise indeed." But my favorite quote comes from that great theologian, Mr. T who said, "I pity the fool!"

As we read this passage of scripture, you might scratch your head and wonder how Paul could write such boastful words. He just spent the first part of chapter 11 saying he DIDN'T boast about his accomplishments like the false prophets did. Before we read it, it's important to understand Paul is employing sarcasm. The great Bible teacher, Ray Stedman explained this sarcastic passage by writing: "Boasting was personally repugnant to Paul, and in this passage he did it strictly for the spiritually immature who were only impressed by outward performances, flamboyant actions, and unusual abilities." Many Christians today feel no one will listen to their testimony because they have never been in prison, on drugs, or murdered their mother. Paul's boasting is the only thing that will impress them and win them back to a hearing of the truth of the gospel. So, reluctantly and with evident sarcasm, Paul begins to talk about his accomplishments for Christ.

With that explanation, now let's read 2 Corinthians 11:16-23 and notice how many times Paul uses the word "fool."

"I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to

boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again."

In the following verses Paul continues to list all the suffering he endured for the cause of Christ, which we'll examine in the next message.

The point of my message is that everyone is a fool; it's just a matter of what *kind* of fool you are. Before you get upset and ask, "Are you calling me a fool?" let me assure you I'm not qualified to call anyone a fool—it's above my pay grade. It's a dangerous thing to call someone a fool. Jesus said, "Anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca' [an Aramaic word that meant empty-head—we'd call them an airhead] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Matthew 5:22). So, it's a serious accusation to call someone a fool, so I'm not going to call you a fool. I'm just going to point out who God calls a fool. Let me share with you three different kinds of fools mentioned in God's Word.

1. ARE YOU AN UNBELIEVING FOOL?

The first fool we meet is described in Psalm 14:1 where we read, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." The Bible says anyone who doesn't believe in God is a fool.

I heard about an atheist who was complaining to his Christian friend. He said, "You Christians have all these special holidays like Thanksgiving, Easter, and Christmas. We atheists are discriminated against because we don't have a single holiday for atheists." His Christian friend said, "oh yes you do, you have your own special holiday." The atheist said, "What is it?" The Christian said, "April 1st!"

About seven percent of Americans claim to be atheists, but I suspect the percentage is much higher. Some consider themselves to be "intellectual atheists." But I think the phrase "intellectual atheist" is an oxymoron like "jumbo shrimp" or "crispy cream." Of the 93 percent of Americans who claim to believe in God, a large portion of them are practical atheists. They seldom pray, or worship, or serve the God they claim to believe in. Church rolls are full of practical atheists who claim to believe in God but never show up, serve God, or give a penny to God's work.

This passage in Psalms 14 isn't about intellectual atheists. It doesn't say "The fool has said in his mind" it says, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." Atheism isn't as much an intellectual issue as it is a moral issue. The rest of the verse says, "They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." Those are moral evaluations.

The Hebrew grammar makes this clear. This fool is not someone who says, "God doesn't exist." It literally says, "The fool says, 'No God for me.'" It's like if you had finished eating a delicious meal and someone offers you dessert and you say, "No thank you, no dessert." You're not claiming the dessert doesn't exist, only that you don't want any. The Bible says a fool is

someone who says, "No God for me, thank you very much."

Whenever someone asks me to help them talk to an atheist, I suggest they start by asking the person claiming to be an atheist if they're an "honest atheist" or a "dishonest atheist." There are honest atheists who say they don't believe in God, but they are open to the truth and they are searching for evidence that God exists. A dishonest atheist is one who has made up their mind and they aren't open to any evidence. A dishonest atheist doesn't believe in God because of intellectual issues, but because they don't want God horning in on their wicked lifestyle.

William O'Hair is the son of the famous Atheist Madelyn Murray O'Hair. He is now an evangelical Christian who is passionate about sharing Christ. He quotes his famous mother as saying, "I'm an atheist, not because I've searched behind every star and looked under every rock to prove there's no God. I'm an atheist because I want to live my life as if there's no God." Billy Graham used to say an atheist can't find God for the same reason a criminal can't find a policeman: They aren't looking very hard!

Anyone has a right to be an unbelieving fool, but I am disturbed when a tiny percentage of aggressive atheists work with evangelistic zeal to try to remove every mention of God from our public life. They have sued to have "One nation under God" removed from our pledge; they have sued to have "In God we Trust" removed from our currency. I read just yesterday that a couple of atheists had sued the city of Las Cruces, N.M. to have the crosses removed from the city logo. Las Cruces means "the Crosses" and fortunately a higher court threw out their lawsuit. God who created us, loves us so much that He gives us the ability to choose to believe in Him. Life is full of so much sin that suffering that people often look around and ask, "How can there be a God?" But they must remember most of the suffering we endure is created by the sinfulness of humanity. President Abraham Lincoln once wrote: "I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God."

I often say nobody is really an "unbeliever" only a "pre-believer." Because the Bible says one day, in heaven, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. There will be no atheists twenty seconds after death. Dr. Dave Kennedy writes about O.W. Saunders who was a newspaper journalist and atheist who lived over 100 years ago in North Carolina. Toward the end of his life Saunders wrote these honest words: "I would love to introduce you to the most lonesome individual on earth. I'm talking about the man who doesn't believe in God. I can introduce you to such a man because I'm that man. You'll be surprised that the atheist envies your faith in God, your subtle belief of heaven after life. He's jealous of your blessed assurance that you will meet your loved ones in the after life with no sadness or pain. He would give anything to be able to embrace that faith and be comforted by it. For him, there's only two things, the grave and the persistence of matter. The atheist may face life with a smile and a heroic attitude, but he's not happy. He stands in awe and reverence before the vastness and majesty of the universe, not knowing where he came from or why. For him this earth is but a tricky raft, adrift in the unfathomable waters of eternity with no horizon in site. His heart aches for every precious life upon the raft because he's always drifting, always drifting, always drifting, where he goes he does not know." If there are any Mr. Saunders listening to me today, I want to tell you I believe with all my soul that there is a God who made you and who

loves you. He cares about you so much that He sent His only Son to die on the cross. If you'll seek Him, you will find Him and your drifting days can be over! Now, to meet the second kind of fool God identifies, let me ask you:

2. ARE YOU AN UNPREPARED FOOL?

In Luke 12 Jesus told the story about a rich man who had more money and possessions than he could spend. The economic system of Jesus' day was based on agriculture, so the richest people were the farmers who had huge tracts of land resulting in massive harvests. Jesus' character in this story had such a rich harvest that he had to tear down his old barns and build bigger barns. When he filled up all his barns, he decided to relax and take life easy. Let's pick up the story in Luke 12:19, "...I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! [There's that word again] This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." Remember, it's a serious matter to call someone a fool, and God calls this man a fool because he was unprepared to die. He was a fool because he equated material abundance with happiness and success. He has millions of ancestors in America today who work their fingers to the bone to gain more and more material abundance thinking it will give them happiness, security, or a sense of success. I'm not a financial expert, and I'm not glued to the television when the stock market goes on a roller coaster like it has this past week. But I am a student of the Bible and a student of human nature, and I agree with Columnist Cal Thomas that the underlying reason for the shaky financial market can be summarized in one word: GREED.

In his syndicated column he writes, "Modern Western culture has been built on the success ethic, which says the acquisition of material wealth produces happiness and contentment and that the value of a life is to be measured not by one's character, but the size of his bank account, the square footage of his home, the cost of his clothes and the cars in his garage. The Puritan Thomas Watson addressed this notion when he said, 'Blessedness ... does not lie in the acquisition of worldly things. Happiness cannot by an art of chemistry be extracted here...' Throughout Scripture, people are warned that money is a false god that leads to destruction. Wealth is best used when it becomes a river, not a reservoir; when it blesses and encourages others and does not solely feed one's personal empire."

Our financial problems go far deeper than Wall Street. I think it starts right here in Tyler because of the problem of excessive, enslaving debt. I had already planned on doing a special series in 6 weeks when I finish 2 Corinthians entitled, "A Matter of Life or Debt." I'm going to challenge every family in our church to get out of debt and stay out of debt, and I'm going to tell you *how* to do it.

This fool in Luke 19 made a serious miscalculation about the length of his life. Did you notice he said, "I have plenty of good things laid up for MANY years!" A fool is someone who spends their lives accumulating a lot of stuff, but when it comes time to die, they are unprepared.

Let's slip into the office of the foolish farmer on the night Jesus mentioned and give it a 21st Century setting. Can you picture him? He's a good, hard working man. He didn't cheat, steal, or

lie to earn his riches. He earned it by the sweat of his brow. He's thrilled, so he stays up late one night drawing plans for his bigger buildings. There's a knock at the door and he says, "Who is it?" The answer comes, "I am death. I've come for you. Ten, nine, eight..." The man says, "Go away, I'm not ready for you! Nobody warned me you were coming!" Suddenly death is in the room and says, "Oh yes, I warned you. Do you remember your brother who died of cancer? What about that teenager who drowned in the lake? I was warning you. Seven, six, five..." The man cries, "Wait, I'll give you half of my money—just go away!" "Four, three, two..." "Okay, I'll give you ALL my money!" "One, zero." God says, "This very night your life is demanded from you." The next morning, his wife discovers him slumped across his expansion blueprints. At his funeral, his friends and neighbors eulogize him as a wonderful man, a community leader, a fine, successful businessman. They bury him in an expensive casket with his name engraved on a polished tombstone. But God sends an angel into the cemetery that night who writes four letters on the tombstone: FOOL.

He was a fool and he didn't know it. Are you a fool because you are unprepared to meet God? Don't be an unbelieving fool who says there is no God. Don't be an unprepared fool, but there is a fool that I recommend you consider being. Let me ask you:

3. ARE YOU AN UNASHAMED FOOL FOR CHRIST?

Paul used the word "fool" five times in our text to describe himself, and in his first letter to the Corinthians he also wrote it this way, "We are fools for Christ ..." (1 Corinthians 4:10) You may want to claim you're nobody's fool, but I think everyone is some kind of fool, so, like Paul, if I'm going to be a fool, then I want to be a fool for Christ. We'll spell the word FOOL to see how you can be a fool for Christ:

Faithfully share the gospel and leave the results to God

Everywhere Paul went, he talked to people about Jesus. He wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." (Romans 1:16). Do you find it easy and natural to talk about your faith, or do you hide it as if you're ashamed of it? You may be timid because you don't think you have the training or skills to share your faith. But the best message you can share is how Jesus has changed your life. I love the old story about D.L. Moody who was an uneducated, unordained preacher in the late 1880s. He slaughtered the English language. Once he was speaking to a British private school whose students were the most educated and articulate in London. He started his message by saying, "Don't never think that God don't love you, for He do!" After he spoke an enraged teacher came up to him and said, "Mr. Moody, if I spoke like you, I would be ashamed of myself!" Mr. Moody humbly replied, "Madam, I AM ashamed of myself, but I am NOT ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Many called him a fool, but he shook two continents for Christ.

Obey God when it's not popular or easy

Once you make up your mind that you're going to obey God no matter what the consequences, then you will qualify as a fool for Christ. After the resurrection of Jesus, Peter and John were

boldly preaching the gospel in the streets of Jerusalem. The religious leaders were amazed because they were "unlearned and ignorant fishermen." That meant they were country bumpkins, but their messages were filled with power and effectiveness. It says although they were unlearned and ignorant, they noticed they had spent time with Jesus. The authorities told Peter and John they had to stop preaching about Jesus. They replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20) When you make it your goal to obey God, then you'll be labeled a fool for Christ. Another word for a fool for Christ is a Jesus Freak. When I was in the Jesus Movement of the 1970s we were called Jesus Freak as a term of derision, but later, it became a term of acceptance. DC Talk recorded a song and album named Jesus Freak in which they sang, "What will people think; When they hear that I'm a Jesus freak? What will people do when they find out it's true? I don't really care if they label me a Jesus' freak; There ain't no disguising the truth!"

Overlook ridicule and persecution

You won't have to get a t-shirt or bumper sticker to claim that you're a fool for Christ, because plenty of people will label you a fool. They'll call you a religious fanatic, a religious nut, or even worse. But that's okay because Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven." (Matthew 5:11)

Billy Sunday was another famous preacher who led crusades in America during the 1920s and 1930s. He was a former professional baseball player who employed acrobatic antics in his preaching style. People constantly called him a fool—even "respectable Christians." Once as he was preaching, an usher brought a folded note to the platform. Thinking it was an emergency message, Mr. Sunday paused and opened it. It had only one word written on it, "FOOL!" But Mr. Sunday handled it well. He read it and said, "I've often received notes where the writer forgot to sign their name, but this is the only note I've received where the writer signed his name and forgot to write a message!"

Lose your life for the cause of Christ

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:34-35) This is one of the paradoxes of Jesus. If you spend your life trying to promote and protect only your precious self, you'll actually end up a loser. But if you lose your life for a cause greater than yourself—the cause of Christ, in that process you'll be redeeming or saving your life. It doesn't make sense until you try it. Are you living for your self, your desires, your ambitions, your pleasures? Have you discovered the exciting life of giving yourself away to others in the name of Jesus? When you do that, you'll be called a fool, but you'll be a fool for Christ!

CONCLUSION

One of my heroes of the faith is Jim Elliot, the missionary to Ecuador who first took the gospel

to a primitive tribe called the Auca Indians. Jim and the others had spent further months making contact with a tribe of violent natives known as the Huaorani. The missionaries had landed their small airplane on a sand bar on the river and had set up a base camp. On Sunday afternoon, January 8, 1956, the men radioed their families that a party of natives were approaching their camp. They were excited about sharing God's love with them. But before the afternoon was over, all five missionaries were murdered by the Indians. Jim Elliot's mutilated body was later found downstream by searchers. Many people would consider Jim Elliot a fool to risk his life in such an endeavor. Some would say all he did was go down there and lose his life. But they would be wrong, because Jim Elliot had already lost his life for the sake of Christ. The world would call him a fool. He was a fool, a fool for Christ—but not a fool as the world understands the word. In fact, when he was student at Wheaton College, he had written these words in his personal journal: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." The world called Paul a fool. It calls Jim Elliot a fool. So ask yourself, "What kind of fool am I?" As for me, I don't want to be an Unbelieving Fool. I don't want to be an Unprepared fool. If I'm going to be fool, just call me a Fool for Christ.

OUTLINE

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"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." *Psalms 14:1*

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"...I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! [There's that word again] This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." *Luke 12:19*

3. ARE YOU AN UNASHAMED FOOL FOR CHRIST?

"We are fools for Christ ..." *1 Corinthians 4:10*

HOW TO BE A FOOL FOR CHRIST

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"I am not ashamed of the gospel." *Romans 1:16*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes