

1 Corinthians 1:18 The Power of the Cross

8/26/18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

(Pastor prays)

In 1955 the good people of Prichard Memorial Baptist Church saw the need to plant a church in the Hickory Grove community. So, with hard work and vision, the gallant group of believers started meeting in a barn and, despite the inauspicious meeting place, rapidly grew.

Before that decade was out, in the late 1950's, they built what is now our chapel. It looks a lot like it always has, and our first symbol was a bell tower in the courtyard that played hymns. You would see the bell tower on our bulletin and church directory. The church continued to grow and needed a temporary sanctuary that is now the Event Center.

And then (came) Doctor Sanderson, a long-tenured pastor, and the church started making plans for a new building. In 1984 Joe Brown became the pastor and the growth momentum escalated.

In June 1988, we moved into the main sanctuary, and that building has become our defining mark. It is an imposing building. But we know that the church is not a *building*. In 1995 everything changed. Through clear vision and a generous gift, our North campus was started. Now, certainly, a building couldn't be our outward symbol.

So, somewhere in the late 1990s or early 2000s we designed the cross and globe symbol. We put our name, vision and mission all in one symbol. It was very abstract and dated before the ink dried on the design. (Some say it looks like a tomato or others say it looks like the end of a hot dog.)

2008 was a tumultuous year and our symbol was modified a bit.

Now, with our pastoral transition, we have focused our energies and thoughts and work on church health.

In 2013, our symbol went to just block letters.

As in restoring a great car, first you get the engine in shape and then turn to the paint job. We are internally strong, so in developing a church logo we wanted an enduring symbol, something that reaches past 1955 and is not specific to us. We want to reach back into Christian history and come forward.

There are enduring Christian symbols. The ichthus (or fish), Noah's Ark, the shepherd's crook, and one of the earliest symbols is the Greek cross.

Unlike the Latin cross on which the vertical member is longer than the horizontal, our new symbol is the Greek cross. There are two primary reasons behind this specific cross: the Gospel and the Mission.

From the very beginning, Hickory Grove Baptist Church has been identified with the cross of Jesus Christ. The penal, substitutionary atonement symbolizes what we hold dear. It is the centrality of our message. It is the driver of our worship.

Paul said in first Corinthians 2:2: "for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." That is the Gospel.

Now Mission. You notice that the cross is open-ended. It points in the four directions of the compass. This cross reflects our missionary impulse. You see that we commission teams all the time, but in a real sense, we gather each Sunday around the cross and leave here with the mission of Christ.

Centrality of the cross and the call to mission. It is intentional, clean, versatile, simple, meaningful and historical. It doesn't trace back 60 years but 1800 years. It reflects who we are and who we aspire to be. Why? Because in 1 Corinthians 1:18 the Bible says, *because 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.*

There is plenty that could be said about our text today, but let's focus on how it defines all humanity. Martin Luther used the old Latin phrase "*Crux Probat Omnia.*" The cross is the test for everything. There are three things to see in this passage.

The Word of the Cross

Logos of the cross. Word of the cross. The doctrine of the cross. The message of the cross. The word of the cross is the totality of the truth contained in and revealed through the cross. There is no Christianity without the cross. The word of the cross is not good

advice or a good example, or a means of prosperity. The word of the cross is that there, at the cross, the justice of God is satisfied and the Son of God is glorified.

The word of the cross is mercy to the worst of us and grace for all of us. The word of the cross is sinners reconciled and prodigal children restored. The word of the cross is love unthinkable, hope unstoppable and joy un-dreamable.

The word of the cross is that the God of the Bible is a holy, just and loving creator. Man was created in His image, disfigured by sin and separated from God. Jesus Christ lived perfectly and died on the cross as a substitution. And for the cross to mean anything to you, you must turn from your sin and trust. That's the word of the cross.

The Danger of the Cross

Let's go back to the verses. The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. There are several things to consider about this phrase. First the word *folly* is “moria.” That's where we get the word “moron.” It means absurdity and seems silly at best and derailing at worst. It doesn't fit well into the modern mind. For Jews it was offensive, because anyone hanged on a tree was cursed; and for Romans it was just disgusting.

Most people today don't have much reaction to the cross at all and that's what is so dangerous. Indifference must be the worst offense of all. When we just don't think about it. Let's finish the phrase in verse 18, *the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Perishing*. It's in the present tense. It's not just that they will one day die and go to Hell. It's happening *now*. The gangrene is already in the soul. The rot has already begun. *Perishing*. Bound up in that word is the idea of utter ruin. If you are indifferent to the cross, you are rotting. It's the entire failure to be who God created you to be. If Salvation is the cure of sickness, then perishing is the fatal end of an unchecked disease. *Perishing*. That is God fully and eternally withdrawing all that is good in life, whether it is holiness or happiness. Perishing is the gradual but imminent sinking into utter, eternal and irredeemable ruin. Ephesians 2 says that without Christ we are children of wrath. And if you are a child of wrath, the more you grow, the more wrath is being stored up for you. And that's the real and terribly present danger. It's the word of the cross. It's the danger of the cross.

The Power of the Cross

Let's go back to the verse. *For the word of the cross is folly to those that are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* Us *being* saved. That is the present tense...A right now reality of being saved. It's a position and a process. Justified before God and sanctified on earth. It's done and ongoing.

To those of us being saved, the message of the cross is the power of God. The power to make God known, to accomplish salvation, to transform lives, to heal broken souls, and to stop the rot of sin. The power of God to defeat evil and the power to save sinners. Al Mohler said there are no powerful creatures *of* the cross; the power is *in* the cross. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is centered in and surrounded by one great fact and one driving message: and that is the cross of Jesus Christ where God's mercy meets God's justice and produces God's grace, so that when we are saved we are saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

It's what Paul said in Romans 1:16, *I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation.* And it's fitting and right that in this cross-centered day, we should celebrate The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is what the church does to collectively and solemnly remember the cross of Jesus. *Because 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.*

(Pastor explains The Lord's Supper and prays)