

Foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

April 1, 2018



1 Corinthians 1:18-25 says, “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. For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For **the foolishness of God** is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

That last verse, 1 Corinthians 1:25, ended with,

The foolishness of God. It’s interesting that the Bible uses this phrase. That seems like an odd thing to say about God. In fact, it seems rather rude and disrespectful. And yet, from certain points of view, I suppose God does appear foolish. Even 2,000 years ago, when the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the people living in the city of Corinth, there were doubters and scoffers. The message about Jesus being crucified on the cross was foolish to them. Even the very idea that God exists seems foolish to many people. The real problem is that we humans have an independent, stubborn streak in us. We cling to our own human wisdom and our human strength. We just won’t admit how small we are.

Stephen Hawking is considered one of the greatest scientists of all time. He passed away last month, on March 14, at the age of 76. In 2010, CNN interviewed¹ Mr. Hawking regarding the creation of the universe. He was asked how science can explain the existence of the universe w/o the need for a Creator, Mr. Hawking replied, “Gravity and quantum theory caused universes to be created spontaneously out of nothing.” The Bible says in Hebrews 11:3, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”² So we can agree with Mr. Hawking that the universe was created spontaneously out of nothing, but we would differ significantly with him on what or who caused this creation.³ Mr. Hawking was also asked, “do you believe in God?”, he replied: “God may exist but science can explain the universe without the need for a Creator.” Mr. Hawking went on to claim that, “The scientific account is complete, theology is unnecessary.”⁴ Well, for some pastors, “them’s fightin’ words.” I don’t mean to be rude or unkind, but I sincerely wonder how Mr. Hawking might answer these questions differently today?

Human wisdom and intelligence have been resisting God for thousands of years.⁵ It’s in our human nature to rebel against God and to think that we can live life on our own terms.⁶ Somehow, we’ve grown so arrogant as to think that we are wiser and more intelligent than the God of the universe. Humankind has grown so foolish as to think that we can do just fine in this great big world without God.

¹ 2010 interview at <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/14/health/stephen-hawking-dead/index.html>

² God created all things for His glory. He Himself is not created and nothing else exists except that which He has created. God created everything out of nothing – ex nihilo (Genesis 1:1, 27, 31; Jn. 1:3; Hebrews 2:10, 3:4, 11:3; Revelation 4:11). Most important in the creation and evolution debate is one’s belief that God did indeed create us and He is the source and sustainer of all things. This is foundational to human worth and purpose. All things on heaven and earth are subject to Him, and He alone is worthy of our worship and devotion (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:15).

³ In this interview, Hawking was then asked how this law of gravity came into existence? He replied, “Gravity is a consequence of M-theory, which is the only possible unified theory...”

⁴ Hawking also said, “Science is increasingly answering questions that used to be the province of religion.” To an extent, he is right about this.

⁵ Read Psalm 2.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:19 says, “For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Today, we are reading this verse from 1 Corinthians, written 2,000 years ago. But, 1 Corinthians is actually quoting it from an even older book from the Old Testament, the book of Isaiah, written yet another 700 years earlier than that. (See Isaiah 29:13-16)

1 Corinthians 1:20 asks, “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

The “wisdom” of the world. Science and religion often struggle to get along. And yet, in the past 10 years or so, I’ve personally come to see how powerfully science points to God. You see, way back in the 70s and 80s, when I was in elementary school and even into high school, science was pretty simple. You had matter and you had energy and a Big Bang. We were taught that this was pretty much all that we needed to make the universe as we know it today. Of course, that was before the Human Genome Project officially started in 1990.⁷ The study of our DNA⁸ has led to amazing breakthroughs in the areas of health and science. What today’s youth are learning about DNA still blows my mind, because I was taught that all we needed was matter and energy and then just give them enough time to organize themselves. But now, we’ve discovered these teeny tiny blue prints for how to build all this stuff. And we begin to wonder, where did those come from?

Here’s a question even beyond DNA though. I’ve been pondering something lately: how do we explain human self-consciousness? How can science and evolution account for the fact that people are self-aware, that we even think to question our own existence? Put more bluntly, how do we go from matter and energy and DNA to then becoming sentient beings who think and feel, and have a sense of morality within us, that considers what’s right and wrong?⁹ Even atheist Michael Ruse asks, “Why should a bunch of atoms have thinking ability?”¹⁰ Good question! Actually, most of us in this room have pondered the question of self-consciousness, many times actually. It may have happened without you realizing it though. It happened for many of us when we were just chilling out. When we were watching one of the many movies with a premise something like this: Computers will one day grow smart enough to become self-aware and then... they’ll take over the planet! Maybe you’ve watched movies like *iRobot* (2004), *Eagle Eye* (2008), or more recently, *The Winter Soldier* (2014).¹¹ All of these movies beg the question, could artificial intelligence ever actually evolve and become self-conscious?

Now, if you’re not a big movie buff, then you may have considered the question of self-consciousness another way. It’s through a new friend of yours you call Siri or Cortana or Alexa. Now, we know these are just computer programs. But, at times, they seem almost human. They are intelligent digital assistants who keep us company and offer us ideas and advice. They even tell us jokes; what could be more human than that?¹² Conspiracy theorists may be quick to ask, “Should we really be letting Alexa have control of locking/unlocking the front door of our homes?” “How long will it be until they control more than my GPS and start trying to control my car? Not long actually, according to Uber. At least, until recently, when very sadly, their computerized “self-driving” car did not have enough moral reasoning to avoid running over and killing a pedestrian in Arizona. We continue to probe the seemingly limitless options for how far computers can progress. At what point, then, do you think, that computers may actually be able to think for themselves; to achieve consciousness? Will they become “thinking enough” to have religious opinions or even faith? Can a computer program of codes and data actually become self-aware?



These questions about computers becoming self-aware prompt us to wonder: how do we explain the origin of our own human self-consciousness? My curiosity about self-consciousness led me to consider two theories:

1. Darwinian evolution. Evolution would say that humans became self-conscious over a period of time. According to Darwinists, “At some point, the human brain evolved, with its raw processing power increasing over the eons. When the brain reached a certain level of structure and complexity,

⁷ “The Human Genome Project officially started in 1990, with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) publishing a plan for the first five years of the anticipated 15-year project.” <https://www.dna-worldwide.com/resource/160/history-dna-timeline>

⁸ DNA = deoxyribonucleic acid

⁹ Rene Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am.” (“Cogito ergo sum”)

¹⁰ Quoted on p. 247 of Lee Strobel’s, *The Case for a Creator*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004.

¹¹ Consider also *War Games*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), the *Tron* movies, *Superman III* (1983), *The Terminator* (’84-’09), or *The Matrix* trilogy (’99-’03).

¹² How long before pastors will just walk up to the pulpit and say, “Hey Siri, preach my sermon for me.” 😊

people became “conscious” – that is, they suddenly developed subjectivity, feelings, hopes, a point of view, self-awareness...”¹³

A more recent theory on self-consciousness is called...

2. Panpsychism. Its premise is that all matter has a certain level of consciousness. “Consciousness permeates reality. Rather than being just a unique feature of human subjective experience, it’s the foundation of the universe, present in every particle and all physical matter.”¹⁴ I learned about this in an article, written on January 27, 2018, titled, “Rock Consciousness.” The idea being that even rocks, at some level, are conscious of their own existence. So perhaps you’ve heard someone described as “dumb as a rock.” Well, according to this recent study, rocks may not be as dumb as we thought, so it may no longer be accurate to dis someone that way. According to this article, “The idea that everything from spoons to stones are conscious is gaining academic credibility.”¹⁵ Therefore, the approach here is to explain the existence of self-consciousness, by accepting that it’s just always been there.¹⁶

So, how far away are computers, from becoming on par with humans? According to evolution, they just need to reach a higher level of thinking and structure. According to Panpsychism, computers, like rocks and everything else, already have an intrinsic level of consciousness. If we follow the science of this, we might conclude then, that there really isn’t anything very special about people. Our development is just a few years ahead of everything else in the world.”¹⁷ Here’s what God’s Word, the Bible, says about that: Gen. 1:27 teaches us, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” In a world gone a little crazy over science and computers, it is theology that grounds us back to who we really are, what we were created for, and why we have a very special significance in the cosmos.

As I think through the 2 theories I just briefly explained, what they establish for me is an even deeper conviction that there is something special about human beings. We are uniquely and beautifully designed; somehow, by some One. That some One is the God of the universe. Even the most intelligent people among us, can often miss the most important truth in our universe: human beings were created to be in relationship with the God of the universe.¹⁸

Knowing our Creator. 1 Corinthians 1:21 goes on to say, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” To know Him and to be known by Him. This world’s wisdom and way of thinking is not how we find our way to God. Rather, it’s through the “foolishness of what was preached.” Mankind is saved by believing the message about Jesus.¹⁹ Is the Good News about Jesus foolish? Perhaps it is, from one point of view. But, from God’s point of view, it is His master plan to rescue those who will put their trust in Jesus Christ. Despite how much this might frustrate the wisdom/intelligence of some, God is pleased to save those who will simply... believe.

A man named Lee Strobel believed that the message of the cross was just a bunch of nonsense. In fact, when his wife came to faith in Jesus, it made him so angry, that he went out on a personal vendetta to disprove the historical veracity of Jesus’ resurrection. Click here to watch a 1 minute movie trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v16Alm20K0o> Our church has purchased the copyright to show this movie, “A Case for Christ” here at our church on Sunday, April 8.²⁰ Everyone is invited to come. There’s no charge. We’ll provide the popcorn and beverages. You can bring a snack to share if you’d like. Lee Strobel has written several books, some of which we have available at the church.

¹³ Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, p. 248.

¹⁴ <https://qz.com/1184574/the-idea-that-everything-from-spoons-to-stones-are-conscious-is-gaining-academic-credibility/>

¹⁵ <https://qz.com/1184574/the-idea-that-everything-from-spoons-to-stones-are-conscious-is-gaining-academic-credibility/>

¹⁶ David Chalmers, a philosophy of mind professor at New York University, is quoted as explaining, “It’s very hard to get consciousness out of non-consciousness.” (Even if we accept their theory, that all particles in the universe have consciousness, the article ends by admitting that this still doesn’t answer the question of how these tiny fragments can come together to form each person’s individual human consciousness.)

¹⁷ In fact, a guy from MIT named Marvin Minsky describes a human as “a computer made of meat.” Mentioned in Lee Strobel’s *The Case for a Creator*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, p. 250.

¹⁸ Consider John 1:10-11.

¹⁹ The message of the cross will be one of two things for us: either foolishness or the wisdom/power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:24)

²⁰ See movie trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v16Alm20K0o>

As foolish as some people may think Christianity is, it's easily just as plausible as some of the scientific theories I've presented here this morning. Perhaps computers will one day become self-aware. Perhaps rocks aren't as dumb as I thought. But I'll admit, I'm skeptical. These theories seem to be grasping at straws a little. They seem to be desperate efforts to explain reality apart from God. The fact is, we need theology in order to explain many of the things that science simply cannot. Things like our own self-consciousness.²¹ Personally, I'm no great scientist, but when I study the beauty and complexities of science, I marvel at how powerfully they reveal an amazing Creator behind it all. A Creator who has fashioned this whole big universe in such a way that we find ourselves enjoying food/friendship/family and sunrises/sunsets/Golden Retriever puppies. What an amazing world we live in!

However, my intellectual understanding of the universe is not the only reason why I believe in Jesus. I believe in Jesus because I've come to realize that my personal sin is a really BIG problem. And, without Jesus, I'd have no hope of overcoming that sin. Without Jesus, I would be trapped in sin and enslaved to it. The simplicity of the gospel is foolish to some. How is a guy hanging on a piece of wood, supposed to save all of mankind from sin? Some would say, "you'd have to be a fool to believe in God." Others would say, "you'd have to be a fool not to." Because God so loved the world, He sent Jesus to hang on the cross as payment for our sins. He did this to remove our sin problem and to provide a way for us to be in a relationship with Him, as our Creator. If you have not yet experienced this forgiveness and the hope of eternal life, you need to know that it's available to you today. You could simply pray something like this:

"Dear God, our Creator, thank You for showing your love by sending Jesus to die on the cross for my sin. I admit that I have sinned, I haven't lived the way that You want me to, and I need Your help. I believe that Jesus died to pay the price for my sins. He has made a way for me to get right with You. I choose to turn away from my sin and to begin following Jesus as my Lord. Please forgive my sin and give me the resurrection hope of eternal life. Amen."

"CHRIST IS RISEN!" Therefore, dear friend, let us set aside foolishness. Let's go forth in the wisdom of God, knowing and believing that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is risen indeed! Amen.

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on April 1, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

²¹ Also consider the existence of our own morality. There are still significant questions as to why we have such a sense of eternity about us and why the idea of the human soul resonates so strongly with our self-understanding.