

A Rancher's Rumbings, April 9, 2009
MAKING FOOLISHNESS REAL, PART 4

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As we commemorate Holy Week and celebrate Easter, the resurrection of the God/human, Jesus Christ, we come to the end of this series of *Rumbings* about "Making Foolishness Real."

Paul wrote, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." (*1 Corinthians 1:25*) (NIV)

The March 2009 issue of *Baptists Today* has a wonderful interview with Dr. Wayne Ward, the 87-year-old retired Theology professor from Southern Seminary. He was asked what he would preach about if he could preach one more sermon at Southern Seminary.

Dr. Ward said, "I'd start with a little bit of humility and the recognition that you don't have to have it all down in rigid, theologically dogmatic statements."

As I read that statement by Dr. Ward, I remembered a letter I received in March from a young Texas pastor, criticizing CBF, as well as the BGCT for any (informal) ties that it has to CBF, and two seminaries that receive a small amount of funding from CBF. He followed these criticisms by saying, "On Judgment Day, however, I do not want to have to give an account of how I was connected in any way, shape or form to heretical teachings and false teachers."

I was deeply saddened by his letter and thinking. The reality is that every single church, religious institution, and convention started by human beings is flawed. I guess each of us defines "heresy" in our own way. *Webster's* defines it as "adherence to a religious opinion contrary to church dogma." By that definition, to be a Baptist is to be a heretic, because Baptists are – by definition – led by the Holy Spirit, not by church dogma. If, on the other hand, we define heresy as a deviation from biblical truth, then again, we all stand convicted of heresy, because none of us is perfect when it comes to interpreting Scripture. Any pastor or teacher who claims to be infallible in that department is a liar.

So, by either of these definitions of heresy, all of us – including every single Texas Baptist pastor – have preached, taught, or spread heresy at some point. Jesus is perfect, and the Scriptures are authoritative truth, but we are fallible human beings imperfectly discerning the leadership of the Holy Spirit and imperfectly interpreting Scriptural truth.

The kind of thinking shown by this young pastor appears to me to focus on the wisdom of man and rigid certainty, while denying the "foolishness of the Gospel," which culminates in the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Paul wrote, "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." (*1 Corinthians 1:21b*) (NIV)

Friends, we do not "make foolishness real" by our doctrinal purity or our strong stands against sinful behavior. Most people realize they are sinners, whether or not they admit it. What they don't realize – or at least have trouble accepting – is that God loves them as they are.

We "make foolishness real" when we remember that the cross is God paying the price for every sin ever committed by every human being who will ever live. It is God's way of accepting every single one of us if we will only believe and accept His gift.

We humans confuse acceptance with approval. But acceptance and approval aren't the same thing – not even close! To *accept* someone (including ourselves) because they are people who God loves so much that He willingly watched His Son die for them does not mean to *approve* of their way of thinking or way of life.

God accepts us and loves us as we are, period: selfish, prideful, materialistic, lustful, and on and on. Christ died to save us despite our sinfulness. That does not mean that He approves of our every thought or every action; it does not mean that He approves of the way we live our lives. It just means that we don't have to earn His love – we already have it. Not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

So the Good News is that Easter is for everyone who believes, whoever they are, whatever they have done. It is foolishness to us, because it seems so unnatural for us to love and accept people despite their behavior, but that is exactly what God does.

One of the major sources of division in Baptist life these past 30 years has been a disagreement over the character and nature of God. Is God best described by words like mercy, grace, love, and acceptance, or is God really about anger, judgment, and condemnation?

I could be wrong but, for me, the answer is clear. The true foolishness of the Gospel is God's unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness, and we need to preach it and live it with all our heart, mind, and soul. The world beats people up enough; the Church should be about love and acceptance. I will celebrate that this Easter morning. How about you?