

## The Fool on the Hill

by David Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/the-fool-on-the-hill/>

In 1967 the Beatles released a Lennon-McCartney song called *The Fool on the Hill*.

I'm showing my vintage here, but it struck me as a genuinely prophetic statement then, and still does.

The lyrics go:

*Day after day, alone on a hill, the man with a  
foolish grin is perfectly still  
But nobody wants to know him, they can see  
that he's just a fool as he never gives an answer  
But the fool on the hill sees the sun going down  
And the eyes in his head see the world  
spinning round,  
Well on the way, head in a cloud, the man of a  
thousand voices talking perfectly loud  
But nobody ever hears him or the sound he  
appears to make and he never seems to notice  
But the fool on the hill sees the sun going down  
And the eyes in his head see the world  
spinning round  
And nobody seems to like him they can tell what  
he wants to do  
And he never shows his feelings but the  
Fool on the hill  
Sees the sun going down and the eyes in his  
head see the world spinning round.  
He never listens to them He knows that they're  
the fools  
They don't like him  
The fool on the Hill sees the sun going down  
And the eyes in his head see the world  
spinning round.*

Emerging from the revolutionary atmosphere of the era, the song exposes the futility of human activity—and, particularly, the *status quo*.

While the majority are blindly accepting, there is one that is not. He has found a hill from where he “*sees the sun going down And the eyes in his head see the world spinning round*”. This ‘seer’ knows that all the ceaseless activity of the world is ultimately meaningless — it is only “*spinning round*”. He also sees the sun going down — there is a finite point and time is short.

So, in response, he speaks out: “*the man of a thousand voices talking perfectly loud - But nobody ever hears him or the sound he appears to make*”. The world refuses to listen. In fact, they don’t “*want to know him*”, and worse, “*nobody seems to like him—they can tell what he wants to do*”. They are wilfully deaf in defence of the *status quo*. Their comfort zones must not be

disturbed. And so, he is dismissed as a “fool”.

***The fool on the hill – the man of the spirit***

This brings me to my message. Just replace “*the world spinning round*” with “*church spinning round*”.

Hosea cried out that, “*the prophet is considered a fool, the man of the spirit insane*” (Hos 9:7). Well, there's not much new is there? The age-old response, “If you don't like the message shoot the messenger”, is still alive. It can even be recognised by popular songwriters! The prophetic person – the man or woman of the spirit – is dismissed as merely a “*fool on the hill*”.

But what is happening here? Why is the *man of the spirit* considered a fool? The people of God in Hosea's time were so spiritually void that when the genuine man of the Spirit appeared they could not recognise him. The ways of God had been so subverted by the ways of man that spiritual discernment had died. And being spiritually blinded, persecuting these “*insane*” people was viewed as an act of devotion to God.

Isaiah declared:

Hear the word of the LORD you who tremble at his word: “Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy’; but it is they who shall be put to shame.

Isaiah 66:5 ESV

And Jesus warned:

They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

John 16:2 ESV

Now, we who consider ourselves serious Christians would never do that!

Can you be so sure? When Jesus confronted the religious system of his day, like us, they were honouring the memory of the greats of history. They said, “*If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets*” (Mtt 23:30). They gladly identified with Abraham and Moses. As students of history they knew how God had moved through previous generations. And yet, they were conspiring to lead the very one who had sent the Patriarchs to the death of the cross.

So, what had happened? And how can we be sure that we will not persecute the *man of the spirit* in our generation, but rather become one?

**The problem of *flesh* in the church**

To find answers we need to look to Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church. This church was the ‘revival’ church of the day, excelling in the gifts and ministries of the Spirit. Despite this reputation, Paul surprisingly taught them about the things of the Spirit!

But surely they were already experts! Yes, like Israel they had seen the *acts of God*, but unlike Moses did not know the *ways of God* (Ps 103:7). They had experienced the supernatural, all manner of utterances, and revelations, boasting of so-called *super-*

*apostles*, but were, by Paul's estimation, not yet *spiritual*:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men [pneumatikos], but as to men of flesh [sarkinos], as to infants in Christ

1 Corinthians 3:1 NASB

So rather, he described them as “fleshly” (*sarx*), which, in Paul's language refers to being controlled by our fallen human nature—our unbroken human strength (Rom 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3-5, 8, 9, 12, 13).

Now, we immediately think of ‘gross sin’ when we think of the *flesh*, of immorality etc. While this can be true it is not the full story. Paul's description of the *works of the flesh* also includes, “*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy*” (Gal 5:20, 21). The Greek word used for *selfish ambition*, according to W.E. Vine `denotes ambition, self-seeking, rivalry, self-will being an underlying idea in the word; hence it denotes party making’.

Does this mean that sectarianism and denominationalism are *works of the flesh*? It would seem so! It would appear Paul considered dividing the body of Christ as a product of the *flesh*:

... for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?

1 Corinthians 3:3, 4 NASB; see also 1 Cor 1:11

While *diversity* is intrinsic to the body of Christ *division* is not. The dividing of the body out of sectarian agendas, and self-seeking, is categorically a result of the *flesh*.

As long as division remains in the body of Christ the source of the problem will always be found in the unbroken strength of our fallen nature—the *flesh*. Left unaddressed this will habitually undermine our attempts at unity.

#### **The `natural' man**

So, while the Corinthian church experienced all manner of *charismata*, they were also dominated by the *flesh*. How could this be? Paul not only described the Corinthian condition as the *flesh*, but also diagnosed the cause. And it was this:

... the natural [psuchikos] man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him ...

1 Corinthians 2:14, 15 NASB

This was the underlying cause of Paul's difficulties with the Corinthians, including their rejection of his own apostleship in favour of the so-called *super-apostles*. If we want to see the restoration of true apostleship in our day this lesson cannot be fudged. Otherwise we – like the Corinthians – will reject the true apostolic for the false.

Because the Corinthians operated out of the “natural” (*psuchikos*), despite their experience with the *charismata*, they judged Paul, and one another, out of worldly values—after the flesh, “*comparing themselves with themselves*” (2 Cor 10:12). Viewing Paul through the Greek lens of beauty – the human form and oratory – they concluded that, “*in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing*” (2 Cor 10:7, 10; see also 5:12, 16). This short, bow-legged, bald, beetle-browed, stammering

Jew did not measure up. Certainly no career in our contemporary image-driven, celebrity-focussed church!

More significantly, these same mindsets caused them to not only treat the messenger as a *fool*, but also the message as *foolishness* (1 Cor 1:18-23). The Corinthians, as Greeks, operated out of the *natural*, looking for *wisdom*—something that would make sense and advance their cause. But the message of the cross – of life through death – was insanity to them.

**The issue in the contemporary scene**

Therefore, the *wisdom* of God is *foolishness* to men. This, in my estimation, is the issue in the contemporary scene.

Much of today's church fits Jude's graphic description:

These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded [psuchikos], devoid of the Spirit. (v. 19)

This is not to deny the awesome things that God is doing. However, on the whole, God's ways have been subverted by man's ways in the church, including the Pentecostal and renewal expressions of it. Jesus calls us to walk in his ways—to lose our life, to lay down our human way of doing things, our plans, formulas and programmes.

To truly follow Jesus, who is the Way, means we will be led into sometimes perplexing and unusual circumstances. Several years ago I found myself in that place. I had been pastoring and, more significantly, coordinating a nationwide movement of leaders with a heart for unity across the larger church; but within a very short period I found myself resigning all my leadership roles—in the church, citywide, and nationally. While some brothers, to some degree, were unwittingly used by the enemy in this process I was faced with having to process my own hurt and bewilderment, slowly coming to the realisation that God had meant it for good. To the natural mind letting everything go was crazy, and yet I couldn't fight the irresistible sense that God was leading us in a different way, and that it would ultimately fulfil his purpose for our lives. Now I wish I could say that this was an easy thing and that I'm a fast learner. The Scripture says that the flesh and the Spirit are in conflict (see Gal 5:17 & Rom 8:5-8). Within me there was a battle between the flesh – my need to defend and justify myself, to hang on to my reputation and position – and the Spirit — the call of God to forgive, to lay it all down, to humility, and to trust him for our lives, that he would bring to pass his plans for us.

This perennial warfare between the flesh and the Spirit is the one that rages in the church; first, inwardly in the hearts of men, and then externally through leadership teams, congregations, and across whole denominations and movements. Whenever we win the battle internally we are immediately set against the flesh in the external realm. Just as Ishmael – the flesh – mocked the son of promise, Isaac – the Spirit – so too will those who follow the ways of men in the church deride those who seek to walk in the ways of God. Like the *fool on the hill* they are minimised and marginalised.

But, in the end, it's not human activity that counts. As *the eyes in his head see the church spinning round*, the so-called *fool on the hill* will also see God turning up in the most unexpected and insignificant places. Places like a disused storefront in Azusa Street, Los Angeles (Pentecostal revival, 1906), like an obscure island called the Isle of Lewis (Scottish Hebrides revival, 1948), or an unknown Bible school in the prairies of North Battleford, Saskatchewan (Latter Rain revival, 1948), or a small unheard of church at the end of the Toronto airport runway, Canada (Toronto refreshing, 1994).

Jesus suffered *outside* the camp (Heb 13:11-13). Why do we think that the visitation of God in this day will be any different? He still comes to stables and sleeps in mangers, and still calls the insignificant and unlearned. As Paul reminds us:

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

1 Corinthians 1:26–29 ESV

**Living out of your *spirit***

Now, to take this home we must ask a question: What does it mean, practically, to live according to the *flesh*? As I've already mentioned Paul traced the problem to the "natural man".

But, what actually is the "natural man" (*psuchikos*)? He is the Christian that operates out of the soul (*psuche*), in contrast to the "spiritual man" (*pneumatikos*) who has learned to live out of the spirit (*pneuma*). This doesn't have a lot to do with "moving in the gifts of the Spirit" – as important as that is – but it does have a lot to do with hearing and heeding the voice of God in the circumstances of life. As we conduct our lives we are faced with the choice of either living out of the *tree of knowledge*, or out of the *tree of life*—out of the mind or out of the spirit. Through our choices we are either sowing to the flesh or to the spirit; and thus, over time, become either predominantly a *spirit-man* or a *soul-man* (see Gal 5:8 & Rom 8:2).

Sure, you might go to church, you might even be a leader or a pastor and even "move in the gifts of the Spirit", but still, like the Corinthians, be a *soul-man*. You may depend on your gifting, your native intelligence, or survival skills to dominate and control others. You may regard others after the flesh – worldly measures of status and success – respecting or disdain them accordingly. Or, you may regard yourself after the flesh, satisfied by the pride of life – a sense of worldly accomplishment – enjoying a degree of prestige and reputation, believing that you – or your church and ministry – are the measure for others. If so, let us hear Paul's wise counsel:

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

1 Corinthians 3:18 ESV

So, in conclusion, how can I be a man or woman of the Spirit? Through humbling myself: "*with humility comes wisdom*" (Prov 11:2). God's wisdom enters our heart only through humility. It is only as I submit myself to God's thoughts and ways, choosing not to depend on mine that I walk in the light.

What man considers foolish God considers as wise. His ways are not mine. My will, my strength, and my opinions must give way to his. Only as the Lord deals with me along a particular line against myself will I truly be a person of the Spirit.

Long live the *fool on the hill!*

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