

The Preaching of the Cross

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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“The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:25). Of course God is never foolish. But to the human mind, He appears to be foolish. Man says, “The God of the Bible does not follow our wisdom; therefore He must be foolish, He must not be believed.”

That God saves people who put their faith in a crucified Christ is foolishness to the wisdom of man. The world says, “How stupid to believe that the death of one man, on one hill, on one piece of wood, at one moment of history, determines the eternal destiny for every person who ever lived! That’s foolishness!” **“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Corinthians 1:18).**

That God saves many of the nobodies of the world is foolishness to the wisdom of man. The world thinks that if anyone should be saved, it should be the smart, the powerful, and the rich. But God has chosen to save more nobodies than somebodies in order to demonstrate to the world that He saves sinners only by His grace, not according to social rank. There was one mother who wrote the name of her son on the birth certificate as Nosmo King. Somebody asked the mother where she got a name like that. It turned out the mother was illiterate, so she just copied down the No Smoking sign in the room and wrote it “Nosmo King.” That boy is the ultimate nobody, named after a No Smoking Sign. But that’s just the kind of person whom God is likely to save. It’s no wonder that billionaire Ted Turner said, “Christianity is for losers.” **“God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:27).**

That God saves people through the despised medium of preaching is foolishness to the wisdom of man. True biblical preaching is not popular. I’m sure that many Christians wonder why we have to have preaching during our services (probably they think about this most when it’s noon and the preacher is still on his first of five points). If Christians sometimes wish God would do away with preaching, what must unbelievers think? Though preaching is despised by most in this world, God has chosen to save people through the preaching of **“Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).**

In **1 Corinthians 2:1-5** Paul reminds the Corinthians of his manner of preaching when he came to their city. His example is an excellent one for all present-day preachers, including myself. And these guidelines provide you, my congregation, with a checklist to make sure I am preaching as I should.

I. THE PREACHER MUST NEVER BE AFRAID TO PROCLAIM WHAT GOD SAYS IN HIS WORD (v. 1).

A. Paul was not concerned with entertaining his listeners.

Paul states, **“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or**

superior wisdom.” In other words, when he preached in Corinth he didn’t try to copy the styles of the popular public speakers of his day. Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians that some of his critics said, **“His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing” (2 Cor. 10:10).** I don’t believe that Paul was a bad communicator, but I would say that he was probably not physically attractive and it seems he was not a flashy speaker. He didn’t attempt to impress people with his style of speaking. Paul says in **Galatians 1:10**, **“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”**

Like Paul, my goal is not to entertain you from the pulpit. Many preachers try to become spiritual comics in order to satisfy their listener’s appetite for entertainment. But I don’t come to you this morning with the humor of a standup comedian. I come to you simply proclaiming the Word of God. So I don’t want you coming here each Sunday expecting to be amused by my preaching. My desire is that you come expecting to hear from God through the preaching of His Word. **The preacher of the Word is not a salesman or a showman; he is a spokesman!**

B. Paul preached the Word of God with authority.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, **“I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.”** To **“proclaim”** the Word of God is to **“declare it with authority.”** Notice that Paul was not preaching his testimony about God; he was preaching God’s testimony about God. His message came from God, not himself.

“Preach” is a bad word to many. They say, **“Don’t preach to me!”** And many preachers, afraid of being thought arrogant, avoid talking about preaching. They prefer to think of what they do as **“sharing.”** If I were only preaching to you my opinions, I would be guilty of arrogance. My opinions are no better than yours. But I am not declaring to you my words; I am declaring to you God’s words. Therefore I can preach to you with authority. **This is the preacher’s job; this is his calling; this is his divine appointment.**

Paul’s counsel to a young pastor named Timothy was to *always preach* the Word even if some people don’t want to hear it.

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage -- with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

People might choose to go to a church where they will be told “what they itching ears want to hear,” but that must never cause the preacher to change the message to simply

please his listeners. Paul instructed Timothy to **“preach the Word”** --- declare it with authority no matter how it is received.

II. THE PREACHER MUST ALWAYS FOCUS ON “JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED” (v. 2).

When Paul arrived at Corinth he made a conscious decision. He says to the Corinthians, **“I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”** Paul is not saying that he only had one sermon. He is not admitting that he was a lazy preacher who never spent time in diligent study. Rather, He is saying that all of his sermons were cross-centered. He preached about “Jesus Christ” --- who He is. And he preached about **“Him crucified”** --- what He did. **“Jesus Christ and Him crucified”** is the substance of the Gospel. And every doctrine of Christianity goes back to **“Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”**

Someone once asked **Charles Spurgeon** why all his sermons sounded alike. “That’s simple,” replied Spurgeon. **“I take my text wherever I can find it, and then I make a bee-line for the cross.”**

You don’t need me to give you my opinions on current events. You don’t need me to tell you the joke I heard this week. You don’t need me to share with you the touching story I read the other day. What you need is the message of **“Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”** However, in a strange twist, the preaching of the cross is now foolishness, not only to the world, but also to today’s church.

Billy Graham once recalled, “I remember preaching in Dallas, Texas, early in our ministry. It was 1953. About forty thousand people attended each night, but one evening only a few people responded to the appeal to receive Jesus Christ. Discouraged, I left the platform. A German businessman was there, a devout man of God. He put his arm around me and said, “Billy, do you know what was wrong tonight? You didn’t preach the cross.”

The next night I preached on the blood of Christ, and a great host of people responded to receive Christ as Savior. When we proclaim the Gospel of Christ, when we preach Christ crucified and risen, there is a built-in power to it.

One hundred years earlier, a reporter attending the great British evangelistic campaigns of evangelist D. L. Moody wrote something remarkably similar. Referring to the great crowds attending Moody’s meetings, the London journalist wrote, “One cannot but ask the question, ‘What is the magic power which draws together these mighty multitudes and holds them spellbound?’ Is it the worldly rank, or wealth of learning, or oratory of the preacher? No, for he is possessed of little of these. It is the simple lifting up of the cross of Christ --- the holding forth the Lord Jesus before the eyes of the people” (Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations & Quotes, pp. 170-171).

III. THE PREACHER MUST NEVER FEAR WEAKNESS (v. 3).

We would think that if any preacher had reason to be self-confident, it was the apostle Paul. However, Paul states, **“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.”**

For some reason, Paul trembled in fear about going to Corinth. **Acts 18:9-10** tells us that one night while Paul was in Corinth, **“The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’ So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.”**

Paul was a man who was aware of his weaknesses --- and he was even thankful for them! He writes in **2 Corinthians 12**, **“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then am I strong” (vv. 7-10).**

Paul boasted in his weaknesses, not because he enjoyed difficulty but because they were a sure evidence that the power in his preaching was of God and not of himself.

IV. THE PREACHER MUST ALWAYS AVOID MANIPULATING PEOPLE (v. 4).

Paul writes, **“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.”** He is not saying that he never tried to persuade people when he preached. For example, he testifies in **2 Corinthians 5:11**, **“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.”** He persuaded people to believe the truth, but he always avoided persuasion that was manipulative. In Paul’s preaching, there were no theatrics or techniques to manipulate people’s response.

Paul’s preaching was a **“demonstration,” (v. 4) not a “performance.”** The word translated **“demonstration”** means **“legal proof presented in court.”** The Holy Spirit used Paul’s preaching to change lives, and that was all the proof Paul needed that his message was from God. Sinners were transformed by the power of God! **(1 Cor. 6:9-11).**

V. THE PREACHER MUST ALWAYS RELY UPON THE SPIRIT'S POWER (v. 5).

Why did Paul refuse to manipulate people in his preaching? His answer: **“So that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”** Paul was very careful to rely upon God’s power and not his own wisdom. Paul was probably smart enough to talk people into being saved like a vacuum salesman talks a person into buying something he really doesn’t want. But he was aware that if people’s faith was resting in his wisdom and not God’s power, they would not be truly saved.

We often have the feeling that if we only had the right method or the right topic or the right style, we would see greater results. But we must never rely on methods or topics or styles. We must always rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is true, not just of preaching, but of every area of the Christian life. **“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty” (Zech. 4:6).**

The real power does not lie in the person or presentation of the preacher but in the work of the Holy Spirit. **John Knox** said, **“True preaching from start to finish is the work of the Spirit.”**

- The Holy Spirit inspired the Word we preach.
- He illuminates the preacher’s understanding as to its meaning.
- He anoints the preacher’s communication of it.
- He enlightens the minds of listeners.
- He convicts their hearts and prompts them to respond.

Preaching is the Holy Spirit’s event. If He is left out, preaching does not happen.

APPLICATION

· Paul knew that his own words were did not have the power to change lives. Only the message of **“Jesus Christ and him crucified”** can save.

· Paul knew that his preaching ability was not sufficient to change lives. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can do that.

Paul never boasted in his ability to preach. He once wrote, **“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).** He also said in **2 Corinthians 4:7**, **“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us”**. He compares himself to a cheap pot and the gospel to a treasure.

Whatever good we may do --- whether it be preaching or another form of service --- **ALL THE GLORY BELONGS TO GOD.**

My desire is not that you leave this place saying, “What a wonderful preacher!” My desire is that you go home saying, “What a wonderful Savior!”