

Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Title: Christ Crucified

Truth: Weak human messengers must simply point their hearers to Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday February 9, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

Studying the groupings of the verses in chapter 2 reveals something interesting. This chapter falls into two sections: verses 1-5 and 6-16.

1. The first section uses the first person singular pronoun heavily (I, my).
2. The second section switches abruptly to the plural *we*. The significance of this is that the apostle Paul widens his reference from himself to the larger group of the apostles. It is not just the apostle Paul who spoke or received revelation from God; it is the other apostles with him who conveyed this to the world.
3. The content of the first section has to do with the manner of Paul's presentation of the gospel when he came to the Corinthian church.
4. The content of the second section has to do with the message Paul preached. Its origin and nature are divine. It did not originate in man, nor is it delivered or understood by mere human devices.

I. Paul's Expression of the Gospel Was Not...

- A. With superior speech and wisdom, v. 1. The wise man, the scribe, the debater (1 Cor. 1:20) of the first century would not be impressed. The presentation and content of the gospel was not tailored to be well received by those who hold firmly to a worldly philosophy.

The word *excellence* refers to superiority or preeminence. We don't want people to look at us and say, "What a great speaker!" The superiority idea should not be applied to something human or worldly. Instead, it should be attached to the things of God. What we want in Biblical preaching is that people would say, "What a great God! What a great Savior! What a great gospel! What a convicting message because of my sin! I learned something about God and His word today!"

- B. With persuasive words of human wisdom, v. 4. His were not the words of a charlatan or a huckster. 2 Cor. 4:2 is related. Gospel ministers hate deceitful, manipulative methods. We are not to distort the word of God to make it more palatable. We are to plainly manifest the truth so that our hearers see the unadulterated message of the gospel, and they can see that the messengers are honest men.

APPLICATION. The pastor can work on his eloquence and eye contact and education, or on his illustrations, proofs, arguments, logic, humor, outlines, poems, alliteration, and all the rest. But if he does his best in all of these, and

people follow him, then that is all they have become—followers of a mortal man. But if the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God that is faithfully proclaimed—by even the dumbest of expositors—then the hearer can be converted to follow Christ, and sanctified to be like Him.

In other words, we must not think that the best presentation wins. Suppose we take the most polished evolutionary scientist and pit him head-to-head in a speech contest with the finest Christian speaker. If the Christian is a better presenter, this doesn't accomplish anything of spiritual value. It is the message preached and, as we will now see, the power of God that accompanies it, that is the basis of true conversion.

This has implications for how we teach preachers in classes that are traditionally called "homiletics." The focus must be on reflecting accurately the message of God, not with worldly methods or wisdom. The focus should not even be on "speech techniques" and diction and oratory and eye contact, even though those are not in themselves sinful and can be helpful.

The next section helps us extract a few principles of Paul's gospel ministry that will help us stay on track.

II. Paul's Expression of the Gospel Was...

- A. A declaration of the testimony of God, v. 1. "Testimony" is the statement of a witness to the things of God, like a courtroom witness. It is not second-hand, not speculation, not guessing, not "figuring." It is information from an eyewitness.
 1. What are we a witness of? The text indicates it: the testimony "of God." This is not just testifying *about* the Triune God, about His attributes and such. It is the message delivered by God to His people to testify of to all humankind. In other words, this is the testimony *from* God, the facts and meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 2. Examples: Acts 1:8. This is very relevant because it mentions the Spirit and power like this passage. 1 Tim. 4:13 tells us to give attention to reading of the Bible, exhortation from the Bible, and teaching of the Bible. We are warned from going down the road of 1 Tim. 4:1-2 where "the faith" is set aside for the teachings of demons. 2 Tim. 4:1-2 teaches us to proclaim the gospel message, resisting the tendency to "cave in to popular demand," that is, the demand that you to supply itchy-ear teaching. This kind of desire is for "things I like to hear," not "things I need to hear."
 3. This is completely relevant for the modern church and the world to which it is joined at the hip. The so-called church—i.e. religious communities loosely associated with Christianity— and their friends in the world want to hear that LGBTQ is to be celebrated; that social justice is the center of the gospel; that science is assuredly right (except when that is inconvenient). They want to hear that patriarchy is bad and matriarchy is good; that boys can be girls and girls can be boys; that miracles are nothing more than myth; that there

are multiple ways of salvation; that Christ is not absolutely necessary. They want to listen to messages that don't confront sin or call for repentance and faith, and they certainly don't want to hear that they must abandon their sinful ways and thoughts and turn their entire lives to Christ. They don't want their ears to be invaded by thoughts that Christ is due to come any day as judge, and that they must become disciples (followers) of Him. In short, they want to hear everything that affirms their man-centered philosophy and which makes them king instead of God.

- B. Only Jesus Christ and Him crucified, v. 2. That is to say, the person and work of Christ are the focus and core of the message we are told to proclaim. It is because Paul determined this was his method (“for” at the start of the verse which is shown in most modern versions) that he came in the manner described in verse 1.

We can far too easily get distracted by pet issues such as science or reason or politics or even a particular doctrine of the Bible we like. But if our sharp focus gets off of Christ and His salvation, then we are missing God's point. Paul gives us *one* focal point here because it is so easy to get off track that we cannot deal with multiple. In fact, there *are not* multiple, because Christ is everything. He is the creator, sustainer, redeemer, judge, and coming king. The message is all about Him.

This does not mean that our preaching deals with the gospel only, that is, evangelistic messages with an invitation appended at the end. Paul's message was expansive, like the Great Commission commands it to be. It included the whole of divine revelation in Scripture. See it in action at Acts 18:11, and in review at Acts 20:27.

- C. Delivered in weakness, fear, trembling, v. 3. Humanly speaking, Paul was spent because of his recent experiences. He was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, unjustly handled there by the authorities; he was run out of Thessalonica and Berea, and mocked at Athens. Yet at each place, some believed the gospel message. That was encouraging. But in mere human terms, Paul had nothing to offer. He relied on courage from the Holy Spirit to help him preach boldly in spite of his shakiness. “How are these people in Corinth going to respond? After all, this is known as a very wicked city!”
- D. Accompanied by a demonstration of Spirit and of power, v. 4. There is somewhat of a parallel passage in 1 Thessalonians 1:5. What does this pair of words mean? It is easy to read over them because they may seem abstract. Here's how we can understand them: the persuasiveness of the message, as opposed to being human in nature, is divine in nature. When the message comes and the recipient is convicted of sin and righteousness and coming judgment, that is an evidence of the work of the Spirit (John 16:8-11). When transformation comes to a life, *that* is a manifestation of the power of God raising a sinner from death to life.

Although Paul could work miracles, that miracle-power is not given by God today. Therefore, *power* cannot refer to power evangelism by which miracles are done to convince the audience of the truth of the gospel. I take this view because I don't believe Paul is giving us a method of ministry that only applied in the first century. It applies in any century. In fact, a claim to miracle-based evangelism would actually undercut the basis of the gospel in Christ alone. It would revert to the Jewish desire for a sign, which Paul explicitly rejects in 1 Cor. 1:22. Christ refused to give signs when people demanded; in fact, the only sign needed is the resurrection of Jesus, and that is a completed historical fact.

III. Consequently, the Corinthians' Trust...

A. ...Did not rest in the wisdom of men, v. 5a. There was none of this present in Paul's preaching to "latch onto" or with which to become enamored. This simple method tends to point people away from the messenger and, if anything, toward his message. It may also repulse them and turn them away from the message. Pastors, if that is the case, do not fret. It is God they are rejecting, not you (1 Samuel 8:7). The sinful heart always says, "We will not have this man to rule over us!" (Luke 19:14). Since the focus then is on the message about Christ, the watershed is the *message* and not the messenger.

This applies to people who are searching for a church. (If you are not a member of a local church, you *are* looking for a good church, aren't you?) When you select a church, you don't choose based on a warm fuzzy feeling about the preacher or teachers who are there. You select a church based on the message preached and believed and practiced.

B. ...Was based on the power of God, v. 5b. This power is in the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation. It is the dynamic life-giving miracle of God by which He releases a sinner from bondage and gives new life, and in the future, physical resurrection from the dead.

Conclusion

If people are attracted to some non-Bible aspect of the church ministry, that is a bad foundation upon which to build. Suppose that it is the excellent or happy-feeling music which attracts the attention and followership of people. That will produce faith in the wisdom of men. (What wisdom? "Christian rock music works to gather a crowd." This is the human philosophy of pragmatism at work.) Or, perhaps it is the programs and social activities and youth events that are the primary draw. This is not what a church should use to "draw" people. Even if the preaching is powerful in wording and teleprompter-smooth in delivery and eloquence, that is not a basis for faith. It is the gospel that should draw; it is the proclamation of the Word which is to be front and center. It is Christ who is the main and only attraction.