

1Corinthians 2:1-5 "The Message And The Power"

1CO 2:1-5 "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

As we come to the second chapter we see that Paul is not finished trying to convey the importance of how God is the One working in the lives of people to draw them to Himself and, in this case, how the Lord has even called Paul to be the instrument through whom these Corinthians are drawn to Christ through the gospel.

Again, Paul is going to be making contrasts between wisdom and foolishness, as the world perceives it, and wisdom and foolishness from God's perspective. And the reason that this is so important is because unless we see the gospel for what it is, the wisdom of God Himself, we may succumb to the temptation to think that maybe the wisdom of the world is really more viable.

Human wisdom may be able to contribute to temporal things, from transportation around the block to a trip to the moon, from healing a bacterial infection to replacing a heart, but it will never solve our eternal need of forgiveness for the sin which has separated us from God our Creator and a spiritual implant of a new heart from God, which only He can accomplish.

The prophet Ezekiel spoke of this new heart from God which brings new life and a hope of being reunited to the One who can give this life.

EZE 36:26-27 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

And as Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians he is about to give the same message of hope that Ezekiel writes about; the same testimony to the truth which God has revealed in Christ. But he wants them to appreciate this message for what it is. A direct message from God to this world. A message not devised in the minds of men, but delivered from the heart and mind of God.

1CO 2:1 "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God."

What Paul is referring to here is the first time he came to Corinth and introduced himself to these pagan people with a message from God, as he then introduced them to the Savior, Jesus Christ. You'll remember at the beginning of this series that this took place in Acts 18:1-18 when, on Paul's second missionary journey, he entered into the city by himself and then began a ministry there based on the gospel which lasted at least a year and a half.

There he met Aquila and Priscilla who helped him in this ministry and later was joined by Silas and Timothy. But the point that Paul makes about this first encounter is that when he came to them he did not try and persuade them into believing with any trickery or philosophy of men.

And I'm sure this was meant to be an encouragement to them because, keep in mind, that Corinth in the ancient world was the Las Vegas of today. It was a happening place where people from everywhere would go. And I'm sure there was the temptation for the Corinthian believers to think that the simple message of the gospel was not enticing enough for the worldly people in their town.

The believers in Corinth may have felt that we have to be more sophisticated in our approach to appeal to the wisdom espoused by the philosopher types, and possibly have to dumb down the message for those less sophisticated and more of the working-class types.

Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ and assures them that they don't need to change the message because it is a message for both the worldly wise and those uneducated. It is a message from heaven and the Creator of this world. And if this message is good enough for "the apostle" to the Gentiles then it's good enough for anyone.

The same holds true for us today. There is the temptation to try and figure out what we can do to make the church "happen". But, if we can make the church happen we don't need Christ. If we can create an environment for belief then we don't need the Holy Spirit.

Does this mean we throw out everything to try different ways of approaching people with the gospel? Not at all. There's nothing wrong with being wise as serpents and yet innocent as doves. But, it does mean that if we are preaching the gospel faithfully, as we are being wise with our methods, and still people reject the gospel, it is not our methods which necessarily need to be changed, because methods never saved anyone. It still comes down to preaching and teaching the truth.

And this is what Paul is conveying here. You see, he did not come to them with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to them the testimony of God.

The term wisdom here in our text alludes to what Paul said; the actual thoughts which are conveyed to these people. The term superiority of speech, or eloquence as the NIV puts it, is the way he conveyed his thoughts; the actual words he used to convey these thoughts.

The wisdom he was using, the thoughts themselves, were not from men. They were not man-devised philosophical attempts to explain the eternal. In fact, on one occasion, Paul went so far as to explain where he got his true message and it wasn't even from other Christians.

GAL 1:11-12 "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."

This obviously is not the norm, but in Paul's case Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Paul and gave him the gospel without the aid of another human being. In fact, this must have been common knowledge among the churches because when Paul wrote to the Ephesians he touches on this.

EPH 3:2-3 "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly."

By implication, Paul is saying that even the first converts, who were the disciples of Christ, did not receive their message from a mere man, but from the Son of God who humbled Himself to be born into this world of a virgin.

In other words, God Himself gave them this message of hope and then revealed the way in which this message of forgiveness would become a reality as Jesus Christ fulfilled all of the promises found in the word of God, as He then went to the cross and died in our place and then rose bodily, securing our life in Him.

This gospel which we possess and profess was not made up by the disciples or by Paul or by other Christians down through the ages. It was first revealed by God through His prophets, but then seen first-hand by the disciples as it unfolded before their very eyes in Jesus Christ.

The disciples didn't decide one day to come up with a new religion. They didn't sit in the upper room deciding how to get on with their lives by creating a myth or a story which would attract the masses. They were eye-witnesses of the Messiah who revealed the whole plan to them as He was sent from heaven to do, and then accomplished that plan of redemption.

2PE 1:16 "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

That's what Paul means when he uses the term "testimony of God" in verse one which he proclaimed to them. Testimony is essentially bearing witness to the truth one knows. That's what a witness does in a court of law. He testifies to what he knows. The "testimony of God" may convey a couple of things here:

1) This is God bearing witness of Himself as He reveals Himself to Paul, or 2) it may simply be Paul's own testimony about God. Both are true since the truth ultimately came from God Himself and Paul is the one conveying it here.

Either way, Paul is not going to take credit for a message which he did not make up, but received from God, thus making it a message not based on human wisdom or on the kind of human speech alone which could ever turn the heart of a man. Only God could do that as His message is coupled with the Spirit's work in the life of an individual.

Paul goes on to say, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1CO 2:2)

He wasn't going to embellish this simple message. How much more basic can it be? You have the One who accomplishes our

salvation in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And you have the means of salvation which is the cross.

The name we associate with our Lord is very instructive. Jesus is the Greek form of Yeshua or Joshua, which means Jehovah saves. The word Christ is the same as the Hebrew word Messiah which means anointed.

The one who is anointed of God, or chosen of God for the specific task of our salvation, is Jehovah who saves. This is Jesus the Christ.

And so, Paul is saying that I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ. There was no other reason for Paul to be in Corinth. He wasn't there for the Temple prostitutes or the gambling or the night life. The only reason he was there in Corinth and the surrounding area was because of Jesus Christ.

But Paul is not only representing Jehovah who saves, but the way in which He saves, which is vital for people to understand. And so he adds to the statement of knowing only Jesus Christ, the phrase "and Him crucified."

Now, there were lots of people who had been crucified in Paul's day. But this one crucifixion was special in that the one being crucified was accomplishing something through His death that no one else could ever accomplish.

He was actually able to take man's guilt before a holy God out of the way, thus reestablishing true friendship and fellowship with our Creator, which had formerly been broken because of sin.

Only Jesus Christ could do this because He was fully God and fully man, and being a perfect sacrifice He could be our substitute as He took our sin and paid the debt in full. But that debt had to be paid with a life. The wages of sin is death and only the death of Christ would do in redeeming us.

The alternative for man is to pay his own debt to God which is death, and to be eternally separated from Him in the lake of fire. There's a very simple solution to a very bad problem. And this is what Paul is saying here. He has been entrusted with the solution to mankind's problem of sin. And so, it would stand to reason that that is all he wants to proclaim as it relates to the way we're saved.

What Paul is not saying is that whatever words came out of his mouth were only the cross and Christ crucified. Obviously, he taught on a number of subjects from the word of God, but they all revolved around the cross.

Whether he taught on the way in which we are conformed into the image of Christ, or how we do spiritual battle, or the strength of God which we must rely on for all of life, it all comes from what Christ accomplished on the cross for us.

2CO 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

This is good news because it allows us to avoid a death penalty and instead receive a reward for the work Christ did on our behalf. It allows us to receive eternal life with our God. Let's continue in our text.

1CO 2:3 "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling."

There are some who suggest that what Paul means here is that when he came to Corinth with the gospel he was physically weak from the travel, and fearing the possibility of persecution, since this seemed to be a pattern wherever he went, and that he may have actually developed a trembling in his body which resulted from all of the stress and anxiety from such a hard life.

To whatever degree any of this may have been true, this is certainly not what Paul means here. The weakness Paul speaks of includes a couple of things. It involves his understanding that he is not able to accomplish his ministry in his own strength. He chooses to lay that aside in favor of relying on the Spirit who gives him true strength.

2CO 12:9-10 "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. 10 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 I am strong."

And so, Paul assures his readers that the weaknesses he entered into Corinth with were the weaknesses that he laid aside so that he might be strong among them with the truth. But there is another

sense in which he came in weakness, and that had to do with the actual message of the gospel.

Remember, earlier in this same letter, Paul said that the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. And so, Paul was immediately at a disadvantage or a weakness with a message he knew people would reject as they used their own wisdom to scrutinize it.

Now, of course, what may have appeared to be a weakness among man, was the power of God for those who believe, as Paul continued that thought in verse 18 of chapter one. And certainly, the Corinthians must have remembered their first encounter with Paul who would not compromise his message with man's wisdom and they may have initially felt he was a fool and weak.

But, Paul would not succumb, and would have been viewed as weak so that the power of the gospel through the Holy Spirit would accomplish its task and bring glory only to God, not man.

As far as coming in fear and in much trembling this was not as much about Paul's physical limitations as much as it was of understanding his own inadequacies of being able to convince people into the kingdom of God on his own.

He went to Corinth with a sense of awe that unless God draws them to Himself his work alone will never turn the first heart. Therein lies his weakness as well. But, I suppose that part of that fear and trembling had to do with how he knew people had reacted in the past to the gospel. To think that they would once again reject the Messiah was a fearful thing, not for himself, but for them.

He knew they would perceive his message as one of weakness, where his Champion would suffer and die. He knew they would view that as anything but strength. And Paul was one who understood this.

2CO 13:4 "For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you."

This is the other part of the cross that Paul preached. The first part may have appeared to be weakness, but that was only the first part because God had no intention of leaving our Lord Jesus in the grave. With power He lives, present tense.

We don't serve a dead prophet, but a risen and glorious Savior who lives today and makes intercession on our behalf. He is alive and by God's power we will live with Him so that we might serve Him in the power of the Spirit. And it is the power of the Spirit Paul touches on next.

1CO 2:4 "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,..."

Paul does not mean to suggest that there was no wisdom in the way he approached people with the gospel. What he means is that he did not rely on the wisdom of man to convey the simple truth of the cross. Remember, that this wisdom did not come from man but from Christ as our Lord gave it to Paul by revelation.

And so, Paul didn't need to find some polished 5th Avenue approach to bearing witness to the truth. He simply and methodically laid out the gospel as it was revealed to him. This was not without wisdom because it is the wisdom of God, but it was not by persuasive words of wisdom.

The word persuasive is the Greek word *peithos* or *peitho*. We have an English word "pithy" which is an equivalent to this Greek word. It's not a word we may use often but it means full of vigor and forcible.

We see this in the way some tele-evangelists deliver a message. They may not be saying anything with substance, but the force and the vigor of their delivery will cause crowds to do and believe anything they bring them.

And so, in many of those cases the "delivery is the message" to persuade people to follow them. Essentially, Paul is saying, "look, I didn't come in here with the polish and rehearsed rhetoric of a professional orator trying to persuade you with some hype. I didn't come to you trying to have you buy something I was selling. I came to you with a message perceived as weak by the world."

Paul didn't have to force himself on these people and come across as a man bewitched with some supernatural power as he flung himself around waving his hands and breathing the "Holy Ghost breath" to convince these Corinthians.

This doesn't mean that Paul wasn't a man of passion and conviction as though he strode into town with a cold and sterile detachment from what he was doing. He most certainly was passionate, but he didn't need theatrics to work for God. He just needed to be himself and give people the truth.

And that's all we need to do. You don't need to copy some popular evangelist. You don't need to hold off on sharing the gospel until you go to a 6 week course to do so. If you understood the truth to come into a personal relationship with God through Christ then you are ready to share that truth which is not just in your head, but in your heart.

Because you see, it doesn't depend on you anyhow, as to the outcome of faithfully sharing the gospel. And that's what Paul says at the end of verse 4.

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, *but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,...*"

What does Paul mean by this? Does he mean to suggest that these people believed as a result of the power of God being demonstrated with signs and wonders through the ministry of Paul?

Some have actually concluded that this is the only way to effectively preach the gospel and to convince people that it is God who is behind our message. According to some, unless the gospel is accompanied with miracles, then the power of God cannot be seen.

This could not be further from the truth. Where was the power of God when a humbled and humiliated Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with Him that day in Paradise, which infers that the thief believed on the Lord Jesus. It was not with any miracle Jesus performed for that thief, as in previous days, that convinced this man to believe.

Where were the signs and wonders of God when an old man by the name of Simeon believed that the child being brought to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the law was none other than the Christ? On that day he saw what he had already received by faith.

LUK 2:27-32 "Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his

arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

We could give countless accounts of how God's power was working in the lives of people without the slightest hint of any special outward manifestation of a sign or wonder from God. Does this mean He did not or could not do such a miracle? Of course not. And on many occasions our Lord did just that.

And yet, interestingly, when you look at the ministry of Jesus, even with signs and wonders, more times than not, the people still would not believe. The power of God that Paul refers to here in our text is not first and foremost signs and wonders from God, but rather the miracle of life given to people who now have their eyes open to their sin and see their Savior for the only solution to that sin problem.

We know this is what Paul means from the next verse.

1CO 2:5 "... so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

The word power in verse 4 which speaks of the demonstration of the Spirit's power is the exact same word we have here in verse 5. It is the Greek word *dunamis* which is where we get our English word dynamite.

By the way, this is one more indication that the Holy Spirit is none other than God Himself, the third person in the Triune Godhead. Notice that Paul speaks of the Spirit's power in relation to the gospel in verse 4, and then in verse 5 Paul speaks of God's power, again in reference to our faith in the gospel.

He speaks of the involvement of the same God in both verses. But the point I want to make is that the power of God here is in reference to what the Spirit is doing in the heart of a person, not necessarily to any particular miracle which is designed to convince someone of God's involvement in the gospel.

1CO 1:17 "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel - not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

And now he repeats that in our text in 1Cor.2:5. If our faith rested on any particular miracle which we saw when someone shared the gospel with us, I dare say that few of us would have been saved.

I don't doubt that someone may have actually witnessed a miracle which in turn caused them to look to the God who brought that miracle about, but not even that miracle alone would have convinced anyone of salvation.

The power Paul refers to here is the power of the Spirit together with the message of Christ which is the miracle power working in the spirit of a man. That's why Paul doesn't have to worry whether or not his message was given with persuasive words of wisdom.

And this is why you and I don't have to worry as to whether or not we have all of the style and seductiveness of a car salesman. Just give people the truth in love. Let them see Christ in your life and let the passion of His life in you be tasted, as well as expressed with words which the Holy Spirit will use to draw men to Christ as we give them the gospel.

And then stand back and watch as the power of God touches the life of that individual. If you don't see the power of God in that way as you share the gospel, then share it with someone else. But never think that you've wasted your time, because His word will not return void.

May we just continue as faithful sowers of the word, and believe me, our Lord will give us the opportunity to be harvesters as well, as long as we don't give up and we move forward with the truth of Christ crucified and risen from the dead.

And may that truth burn in our hearts daily as we consider what we possess in Christ and are thankful as we look forward to that day when we see our Lord face to face. May we be found faithful in Him to His glory. Praise you Lord Jesus!