

Title: Simple Gospel – Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Introduction

Paul emphasizes the futility of mere human wisdom by considering the example of his own ministry and preaching. As a result of the influence of Greek rhetoric in Paul's day, a heavy emphasis was placed on a speaker's skill and mastery of philosophy and oratorical skills. However, when Paul preached to the Corinthians, it wasn't with brilliance of speech or wisdom (2:1)-that is, he didn't speak with eloquence because his goal wasn't to impress people. On the contrary, he acknowledges that he actually preached in weakness and fear (2:3). More than his delivery, Paul was focused on the content of his message: Jesus Christ and him crucified!

(2:2). His confidence was not in his own intellect, training, abilities, or background. Rather, Paul was confident in the Spirit's power that accompanied his message so that the Corinthians' faith would be in God's power and not human wisdom (2:4-5).

Key Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-9

1. The Cross Reveals the Power of God (2 Cor 2:1-5)

Paul had determined in his heart that he was an ambassador of the cross of Jesus Christ and not a salesman of the cross of Jesus. God had saved him and called him to preach the Gospel and not to perform. He knew that the power to give spiritually life to spiritually dead people came only through the preaching of the cross.

- A. **The Method must be simple (2:1)** – Paul says in that first verse, “And so it was with me, brothers, and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.” Paul was not interested in impressing people with his oratorical skills. He was not looking for people to say, “what a great preacher!” He knew people needed to see Christ and Him crucified to be saved.

John Henry Jowett (1863-1923), pastor at Westminster Chapel in London, is reported to have said,

What we are after is not that folks shall say at the end of it all, "What an excellent sermon!" That is a measured failure. You are there to have them say when it is over, "What a great [Saviour]!" It is something for men not to have been in your presence but in his. ("Preaching," Christianity Today, July 2002, 62)

- B. **The Message must be clear (2:2)** – When we share the gospel, regardless of our context the message must be clear. It is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Paul said, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” He had resolved even though he had all the qualifications and intellect to spice it up, he resolved to make it simple. If Christianity ever loses the

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centrality of the cross, it will lose Christianity. Its message is simple and must always be presented clearly and repeatedly.

- C. The Messenger Must Be Dependent on God (2:3-4)** – “I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.” Paul bares his soul and says his time in Corinth was marked by three deficiencies in the world’s eyes: his “weakness,” “great fear,” “trembling.” These phrases describe Paul’s state of mind when he arrived in Corinth. He was not self-confident or cocky. He was scared and weak, his heart was pounding, and he was weak in the knees. This is where God can use us best because our dependence is completely on God. A God dependent mindset impacted Paul’s approach to ministry and preaching.
- D. The Motive Must Be Sincere (2:5)** – “so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.” When it comes to preaching or sharing the gospel, we must ask ourselves what our motives are. Am I seeking my glory or God’s glory? His praise or mine? As those who faithfully proclaim the gospel, we must never seek to add anyone to our spiritual trophy case.

2. The Cross Imparts the Wisdom of God (2 Cor 2:6-9) –

The cross is both God’s power and God’s wisdom. Unfortunately, those familiar with the cross are always in danger of losing both. By neglect or adjustment, the message of the cross can be explained away and lost. A.W. Tozer expressed this concern when he wrote:

If I see aright, the cross of popular evangelicalism is not the cross of the New Testament. It is, rather, a new bright ornament upon the bosom of a self-assured and carnal Christianity whose hands are indeed the hands of Abel, but whose voice is the voice of Cain. The old cross slew men: the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it. The old cross brought tears and blood; the new cross brings laughter. The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings about the cross; before that cross it bows and toward that cross it points with carefully staged histrionics- but upon that cross it will not die, and the reproach of that cross it stubbornly refuses to bear. (God's Pursuit of Man, 62)

- A. There is Wisdom but Not of This World (2:6)** – “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.” Paul says however there is a wisdom that can be preached but it is a wisdom for the spiritually mature. In one sense Paul considers all Christians as “the mature”

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in contrast to the lost. He clarifies it is not a wisdom of this age and of the world but a wisdom of the cross.

B. There is a Wisdom for Our Glory (2:7-9) – *“No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” the things God has prepared for those who love him.”*

Romans 1:22 says of fallen, sinful humanity, “claiming to be wise, they became fools.” Perhaps nothing proves this truth more than what “the rulers of the age” did when they crucified the Lord of Glory. They thought it wise in their own eyes but did not realise the mystery that was being unfolded in the fulfilment of the scripture and prophesy.

3. Application To Us Today –

The simple message of the cross in our world today is looked at sometimes, as not having a deeper understanding of God, not having prepared effectively, not able to expand on other areas of the word of God. But Paul is encouraging us to resolve in our hearts not to coat the gospel of Jesus with any flashy words or descriptions, but to present it simple, clearly, completely dependent on God and with the right motives.

It is his wisdom that we seek, and we need to keep pursuing that more and more.

Conclusion:

I conclude this study with a word from the wonderful medieval writer Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471). He describes the gospel message so simply and so beautifully:

In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is life; in the Cross is protection against our enemies; in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross is joy of spirit; in the Cross is excellence of virtue; in the Cross is perfection of holiness. There is no salvation of soul, nor hope of eternal life, save in the Cross. (Inner Life, 16)

Table discussion

1. In what ways can "brilliance of speech" (v. 1) distort the gospel message? Is persuasive rhetoric always harmful? Why or why not?
2. What does having a simple method of presenting the gospel look like in your particular context?
3. How does Paul's focus on simple and clear preaching relieve the burdens we place on ourselves or the fears we have in evangelism?
4. Why does God delight to use people who are dependent on him? How is God able to display himself better through our weakness?
5. What is God saying to you today, and what are you going to do about it?
6. Who can you tell what you have learned here over the next week?

Memory verse:

2 Corinthians 2:4-5 (NIV) – “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 human wisdom, but on God’s power.”

References

- Daniel L Akin and James Merritt, *Christ-Centred Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians* (B & H Publishing Group, Tennessee, 2023)
- Charles R Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights: New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 2017)
- J. Ayodeji Adewuya, *1 Corinthians: A Pastoral Commentary* (Wipf & Stock, Oregon, 2019)