

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

Chapter 2: “The Strong Gospel”

1 Corinthians 2:1-5, And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Paul contrasted himself to the first-century public speakers, the *sophists* and *orators*. The secular public speakers of the day engaged in the protocol of heaping praises on the town from which they spoke, including the patriotic accomplishments of their history. Concerning this, Clinton Arnold wrote in his commentary:

- Favorinus, who visited Corinth probably in the early second century ad, observed, “When I first visited your city the first time ... and gave your people and magistrates a sample of my eloquence, I seemed to be on friendly, yes intimate, terms with you.”
- Dio Chrysostom, addressing the assembly of his own city Prusa in Bithynia (northwestern Turkey), observed that in his travels he could visit “the greatest cities”—including Rome—and his arrival was “escorted with much enthusiasm, the recipients of my visits being grateful for my presence and begging me to address them and advise them and flocking about my doors from early dawn, all without my having incurred any expense or having made any contribution, with the result that all would admire me.”

It is of interest to note that Paul had just come from Athens. His initial stop in the fall of 50 AD marked the only time in his recorded ministries which he attempted to use a philosophic method rather than evangelistic. He attempted to reach out to a group of philosophers on Mars’ Hill, but in actuality was not a robust success.

- Acts 17:18, And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.
- Acts 17:32-33, Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.” ³³ So Paul went out of their midst.

Though Paul converted a few souls, the larger target of the elite, was not budged. His pearls had been trampled by elite swine (Matthew 7:6), but it appears he was determined to not let it happen again. In Corinth, he would not make the same mistake because, but would preach the simple message of Christ and Him crucified. He wanted to make sure that nobody would confuse him with another sophist.

How many times do we make the same mistake when reaching out to the more educated in our society? Why do we think we must reinvent the message of Christianity? Can we not

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simply preach the gospel of Christ without compromise? Sharing Christ with others is not a complicated thing, but a simple message. It is in the simple message that even the wisest of men cannot understand. People either get it or do not get it. Stop compromising with the gospel and keep it simple and to the point so that others will get it in the end. People either understand the simplicity of the gospel or they do not.

Illustration: When Christian missionaries came to the court of Clovis in the fifth-century, they told the story of the cross to the king of the Franks. As they did, the hand of the old king gripped tightly to his sword. 'If I and my Franks had been there,' he said, 'we would have stormed Calvary and rescued him from his enemies.' (Obviously he had missed the point of the presentation of the gospel).

The "*weakness and in fear and in much trembling*" is not to be confused with being afraid or ashamed of his gospel. That would not fit the profile of Paul, for he was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16). As William Barclay summarized "*It was what has been called the trembling anxiety to perform a duty.*" Paul was so anxious to go back to the core message of preaching the gospel, that he was moved with anxiety to preach the message. Being fervent for the gospel which has been memorized, but one which is dwelling in the heart. It is not a spirit of anxiety to share the gospel, but being anxious to share it with another.

Additionally, Paul's words were not the fancy, eloquent waxing of the sophists, but of the Spirit and with power. It was of the Spirit, for they were backed up with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was with power because these were the same words that changed the life and direction of a young man named Saul. All the teaching and preaching is of no use if it does not change that life of first the speaker and second the listeners.

Illustration: Years ago, there was a drunken reprobate which converted to Christ. His reprobate friends tried in vain to lure him back to his old world of pubs and hangovers. Then one day, an old friend called into doubt that Jesus turned water into wine. The new Christian man responded, "Of Jesus turning water to wine I cannot confirm for you, but in my life, He turned bottles of beer into Bibles and prayer." Once again confirming that the greatest example to the lost is the one that we live through our changed lives as a result of being saved by the blood of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:6-9, Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; ⁹ but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

This section of scripture reveals two types of instruction, *kerygma* and *didache*. The foremost referred to the very basic message of what was taught as the elementary structure of the gospel, including the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This was what enabled the

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Corinthians access God through the gospel. The latter was be the deeper teachings which follow the initial instruction of the kerygma. One would not dare teach the latter without having first established the former.

To the mature, or *teleios*, Paul focuses on the didache (the secondary teachings). They should have been able to understand the deeper teachings, for they had done well in the initial preaching of the gospel. To the Christians, these teachings made sense, but to the “*rulers of this age*” the Roman government, it was to no avail. The powers in Rome believed the message of the cross was ridiculous, a stumbling block of ignorance. This was why they ignorantly crucified the Lord of Glory (2:8).

We must always remember to allow the hearer of the word to hear the word of the gospel. Too many times, we offer the deeper issues of the doctrine and never enter the discussion as to whether Jesus was dead, buried and resurrected. People like to have a discussion on “once-saved always saved” or “musical instruments in the corporate worship services”, pushing church doctrine instead of focusing on the gospel. Until confirmation of the gospel in the foundation, all discussions with the lost tend to be futile. This was why Paul quoted *Isaiah 64:4*, “*For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You*”.

1 Corinthians 2:10-16, For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. ¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

God revealed Himself as the Elohyim of the OT. This is a plural term, for God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Just like we are three parts, being body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23), God is three parts as well. He is Spirit, knowing the deep things of God, for He is every bit part of the triune God. Just like the Son knows the Father, so does the Spirit of God.

Paul used this comparison to communicate that each person knows themselves more intimately than anyone else on the planet. We know ourselves in such a way that it allows us to view the world through a different perspective from others. A natural man, who holds to a worldly perspective, they can hear the same gospel message as a spiritual man, but only the latter will accept it. The natural man will trip up on this message because he is not ready to accept it. This was why Paul once again quotes Is in 40:13 that no one of the natural worldly realm can discern spiritual things.

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Once again, we must be careful in offering our spiritual perspectives to people that refuse to carry a spiritual view of the world. There is no sense in the mind of the one that attempts to spiritually appraise the wisdom of God with those that have not accepted the foundation of God.

In Summary:

The gospel message of Jesus is powerful, effective, and simple, but it must not be neglected. We can make every attempt to change the method of delivery, but must never compromise on the message of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. The primary focus of our discussion with those outside of the body of Christ should not be filled with peripheral and distracting discussion, but gospel-centered, forcing them to contemplate the historical fact of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Christ. Be determined to "know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).