

Dear Friends,

Our first task in studying Scripture should be to ensure that we are reading the right words, not substituting our own words for the text. How often we've heard--perhaps said it ourselves--folks refer to our study passage and misquote, "I determined not to preach anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." If we take the time to thoughtfully read First Corinthians, it becomes clear that Paul wrote and taught the Corinthians a multitude of things other than "Jesus Christ and him crucified." However, a correct reading of the verse supports every truth that Paul taught in writing or in preaching. For example, Paul's first errant idea in 1 Corinthians 1 was preacher alliances over the faithful harmony of the church by its loyalty to Jesus. On what basis did Paul rebuke the Corinthians of this error? They were making one or another preacher more the centerpiece of their thinking than Jesus. If they stood with Paul on his knowing only "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," they would never think of so magnifying any preacher or any other person into competition with Jesus.

How should contemporary Christians, wholly devoted to the New Testament example, bear their testimony to the world around them? For too many believers, the answer is to search for some catchy idea or persuasive strategy to gain the attention of their audience. Not so for Paul. He relied on the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit alone and preached the gospel to idolatrous Corinth without compromise. Let's spend some time this week in private prayer for the Lord to teach us how more to stand with--and for--Him and to walk worthy of His calling. Then pray for grace to stay out of the way and pray for the Holy Spirit to do the persuading.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

## 1 Corinthians

*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5 KJV 1900)*

The record of Paul's first visit to the City of Corinth and the beginning of the church there is recorded in Acts 18:1-17. Despite resistance from both the synagogue and from pagan worshippers, the Lord protected Paul and encouraged him to remain in the city and continue preaching. Preaching the gospel is not always accomplished with ease. As I've had abundant reason to ponder the decaying trend of godly faith in our own culture over my lifetime, I realize that often the values and attitudes in a culture weave their way into the most informed and devoted of churches. Only by a daily immersion of our minds—and especially our emotions—in the teachings of Scripture and in regular and faithful fellowship with other faithful believers can we inoculate ourselves from this influence.

If we assess each church named in the New Testament, Corinth was likely the most compromised and erring church of them all. Perhaps the churches in Corinth and Laodicea might compete for that infamous title, but who really wants that title?

When Paul arrived in Corinth, what did he find? What was the dominant culture of the city at the time? Corinth was one of the largest cities in Greece and a thriving commercial hub. Wealth abounded. No surprise, if we wisely assess the prosperity of our own culture, Corinth was also one of the most wicked cities of the age. Immorality, dishonest business was an accepted way of doing business. Think of a dominant business ethic of our age. There is no moral foundation. The leading idea is that anything is acceptable so long as you can "Get away with it." You are only judged as bad if you are so careless as to be caught in your dishonesty.

Of the numerous pagan religions practiced in the city, the most popular was the worship of Aphrodite, pagan goddess of love and beauty, emphasis on the physical of both qualities. The temple of Aphrodite was located in one of the most prominent locations in the city and was populated by a thousand "Temple prostitutes." Quite literally, amoral sexual activity was a dominant "Religion" of the city.

It was this corrupt culture into which Paul first preached the gospel in Corinth. Today's culture with its primary focus on personal pleasure matches ancient Corinth far more than it differs. How should godly, Bible believing Christians effectively impact this sinful world? Bible believing Christians I define as those who truly holding that Scripture alone, not Scripture plus personal opinion or popular opinion surveys, is to be regarded as the rule for life in the trenches. Send out an opinion survey to all the citizens in the neighborhood, asking them what they like and want in a church? Look for ways to compromise your faith in order to gain these people? Such strategies abound in our pseudo-Christian world. If we hope to follow the pattern of Scripture in our preaching and living the gospel, should we not look to the New Testament's "Opinion" and strive to follow its teaching instead of the opinion of the broken sinful culture in which we live?

How did Paul approach his charge to preach the gospel and start a church in Corinth? Our study passage tells us far, far more than we normally acknowledge about his method in first preaching the gospel to people in Corinth. Compromise Biblical faith to gain a foothold? Never. Read our study passage as Paul's reflection of his mindset when he first arrived in Corinth and started preaching. Read this mindset back into the narrative of his time in Corinth from Acts 18. There you have it. The true Biblical model for preaching the gospel regardless the culture in which you preach it.

Paul faced the immoral decadence of idolatry as the popular "Religion" of the city. When Paul first entered Athens, Acts 17:16 describes what he discovered, a city "*wholly given to idolatry.*" He likely found a similar situation in Corinth. What did he preach to turn people away from that way of life to Jesus? He "*...determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*" The combination of "determined," a deliberate decision that Paul consciously made seems an odd combination with "to know." Do we normally decide what we know and what we do not know? Since Paul framed this sentence in the negative, "*I determined **not** to know...*" let's consider a slight paraphrase of the idea. "I determined to forget everything except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Think of all the baggage, all stuffed with useless junk, that we often pack into our thinking about our faith. Why fill your mind with all that stuff? Go back to the foundation the Lord gave you when you first heard and believed the gospel. What was it? Ah, if you heard a faithful gospel message, you heard and were touched by "***Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.***"

The Greek culture of the first century prided itself in how much its people knew. While they were cataloging how much they knew, Paul focused all his attention, thinking, and preaching on knowing one truth above all else. And the “What” the culture “Knew” stands in unworthy contrast with the “**Who**” that Paul knew. Paul didn’t strive to know all the Greek nuances of philosophy, though his sermon in Acts 17 (Mars Hill) indicates that he did know much about Greek philosophy and history, but all that knowledge meant nothing when he considered preaching in the setting of the city’s broken sinful culture. Again, the Greek culture in Athens was likely similar to Corinth.

*(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) (Acts 17:21 KJV)*

How did Paul identify the possible ideas that he might have considered when he entered the City of Corinth and weighed what to preach? When pondering (And praying for the Lord’s guidance) what to preach to the people in Corinth, Paul “...came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom.” Polished professional speech and a working knowledge of the “Wisdom” of the various Greek thought of the day would seem the most logical ideas from which to build his preaching of Jesus, but no. Such preaching would rather have been a compromised message that highlighted Paul, the man and preacher, not Jesus, the content and theme of his message. In vivid contrast to many modern “Evangelists,” Paul made a deliberate point of avoiding focus on himself. He wanted the Corinthians who heard his message to remember one truth, just one, “**Jesus Christ, and him crucified.**”

Frequently we hear folks misquote this verse to “I determined not to preach anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Paul preached many truths to the Corinthians, but the bedrock foundation of everything he preached was clear—and singular. When Paul wrote First Corinthians, he taught the church many and varied truths, several of which related to errors in their belief and conduct, but the foundation of all that teaching was clear, **Jesus Christ, and him crucified.**”

*And my speech and my preaching was not with **enticing** words of man’s wisdom.* In this verse, “enticing” is footnoted in many King James Bibles with an alternate word listed in the margin, “**Persuasive.**” New Testament Greek dictionaries support this idea. In his preaching, **Paul relied far more on the Holy Spirit’s “Persuasion” than on his own.** Few ideas could more contrast with modern preachers/evangelists who work long and hard to find the most persuasive reasoning possible in their preaching to non-believers. Paul emphasizes this point in the words that follow, “*but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*” Whatever his physical appearance or phrasing of his thoughts, Paul relied far more on the Holy Spirit’s “Persuasion” and power than on his personal “Salesmanship.” No wonder then that so much contemporary preaching is so anemic when the preacher and his supporters rely on their personal persuasion and polish instead of the Holy Spirit.

*That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* Few churches in any generation had as many options to abandon their faith in favor of one human philosophy or another as our own. But for both Paul and his believing hearers to anchor their faith in the power and wisdom of God, personified above all else in “**Jesus Christ, and him crucified,**” the strength and sound health of a faith in the power of God could not be more beneficial. While many in our time and culture might look

down on the crude and carnal philosophies of the Corinthian culture, are our substitutes to the faith of Jesus and the gospel any less carnal or crude? Love of money is no less a substitute religion than it was then. Otherwise, why did Jesus speak of it and His followers write of it in our New Testament? The coliseums of Greece and the Roman Empire speak volumes of the “Religion” of athletics. And are we any less obsessed with sports? Many in our country have openly magnified our country into a religion of patriotism, investing far more emotion, commitment, and energy into political parties or individuals, causes, and our history than in their faith, often becoming highly offended at any who dare not worship at that altar. The Greeks regarded their form of government as superior to any other in human history. Need we continue the frightening comparison? The danger of our faith being subverted to “the wisdom of men” is no less real than it was when Paul wrote these words.

Our faith cannot compromise and blend both the wisdom of men and the power of God into one. If we choose the wisdom of men, any men, founding fathers, leading Christian giants in the faith, or revered family ancestors, we abandon “the power of God.”

From his first word to those pagan Corinthians, Paul strived to direct their minds, hearts, and faith in “***Jesus Christ, and him crucified.***” I fear that many believers in our time need this re-direction almost as much as those ancient Corinthians. Where is our faith anchored? What commands most of our emotional investments and energy? If it is anyone or anything other than “***Jesus, and the resurrection,***” we need to revisit Paul’s message to the Corinthians.

I’ve devoted this “Chapter” to Paul’s initial visit to Corinth and his mindset as he first preached there. Lord willing, our next study will focus on the content of the letter.

Elder Joe Holder