

WHERE DOES OUR FAITH REST?

I Corinthians 2: 1-5 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

The apostle Paul was writing around AD 59 to a church that was in trouble. Churches all over the world, and all over America, and even our church is often in trouble. How so? Why? Paul gives us the answer in I Corinthians 1: 10-17. Listen! I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." So, what was the trouble in Corinth? The believers there were focusing on the wrong things. They saw themselves as believers in possession of superior wisdom and knowledge. They compared themselves among themselves, which is not wise. (II Corinthians 10: 12) They were puffed up with pride. They were abandoning the central Gospel message of the cross, the power of Christ crucified, buried, and risen, to start quarreling among themselves in disunity. They had their favorite preachers, and the Gospel was becoming more about the messenger than the message, more about the style of delivery, then the power of the cross.

The power of the cross in our Gospel message is not found in what we bring to it. Human wisdom, eloquence, or style of preaching or testifying will never energize the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in our text today, in I Corinthians 2: 1-5, saying, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Only God the Holy Spirit can ignite our words when we deliver the Gospel to others. The power of the Gospel message of salvation is the Holy Spirit's power. The message of the cross carries its own Holy Spirit energy. None of us can make the Word of God one ounce more powerful. The message of the cross is powerful. The preaching of the cross of Christ is mighty to save, and mighty to bring us to live holy and sanctified lives. As important as our preparation for delivery of the message of the cross and as important as our passion in which we preach the message of the cross is, and as important as our delivery of our message is, none of that is the power of the cross, or the power of preaching. The power of preaching the message of the cross, comes from the message of the cross itself. The very

message of the cross itself, when preached and testified, has within it, the saving and sanctifying power of the cross, when we determine to know nothing when we preach except Jesus Christ and Him, crucified. Our anointing and our power come from the Holy Spirit, when we preach the power of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Each of us, if God is to empower our message must learn how to carry and deliver the Gospel message. Paul exposes two ways we must not go to others with the Gospel message of the cross, and he reveals to us two ways we must carry and deliver the Gospel message. The way Paul exposes for us not to carry the message of the cross is forever wrong, and the right way Paul reveals for us to carry the message of the cross is forever right. What is the wrong way to carry and deliver the message of the cross and what is the right way to carry and deliver this powerful message of the cross, so our message is not emptied of its power?

HOW MUST WE NEVER CARRY AND DELIVER THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS? (I.)

In essence, Paul is telling us that how we carry or pack the message of the cross and how we deliver it to others makes all the difference. Notice verse 1 – “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.” Go back to Paul’s words in I Corinthians 1: 17, 18, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.” Now don’t think that Paul did not baptize. He did, for he speaks of baptizing Crispus and Gaius, and the household of Stephanas. (I Corinthians 1: 14-16) Yet, when Paul says that Christ did not send me to baptize, the truth is, Paul is saying, that was not my central or main message. Our central message is “to preach the Gospel without cleverness of speech, or an attempt to be eloquent, so that the cross of Christ should not be made void and emptied of its power.”

The word Paul used for eloquence or cleverness of speech, in I Cor. 1:17 is **sophia**. It means knowledge of various and diverse matters, knowledge and wisdom that belongs to men, human wisdom. (1) We must not carry the Gospel of Christ or deliver it in a method or a foolish attempt to try to convince others with our human cleverness, wisdom, or persuasion. Eloquence wins a following, but it will never change a heart of sinful stone to a heart of flesh that God can mold into a repentant heart for Him. Paul was a deep thinker, and a mighty preacher. He had a degree, an equivalent-Ph.D. from sitting at the feet of the rabbi, Gamaliel. Yet Paul knew full well that no Gospel delivery appealing to worldly, unspiritual admiration of his oratory and wise intellect, could or would ever be used of God or have any power. In I Corinthians 2: 4, Paul shared the second way he did not come to speak at Corinth with persuasive speech. We read “and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom.” This is a one-time used word God gave to Paul—**peithos**. **Peithos** means enticing, persuasive, apt to persuade by humanly convincing arguments. (2) We must not carry and deliver the Gospel by trying to bring about a change of mind through the influence of our reason. Paul had no

desire to win a mental argument. He desired only that the power of the cross, the crucified Savior would rather set men free. He wanted to let the Word of the cross loose. We must not sugar-coat it, homogenize it with the world, secularize it, or seeker sensitize the Gospel. It is a false gospel to view the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as only past tense, the once for all substitution of the Son of God dying on the cross in my place, so that we will never have to suffer, but rather we will enjoy the abundant life Jesus purchased for us.” This is a gutted message of the cross. Secularizing the Gospel leaves out the distinct discipleship part at the heart of the Gospel. Jesus said in Luke 9: 23, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” When Christ died for us, He not only took our place, accomplishing what we could never do to forgive our own sin, but there at Calvary’s cross, Jesus powerfully draws us to Him not only to repent, believe, and receive Him, but He empowers us to live the power of the cross, taking up our own cross, joining Him, being crucified with Christ, and saying, “Not my will, but Thine, be done.”

Jesus died to save us from sin and self and death and hell. But He never died to save us from the cross. He died that someday, we who are saved, and who are being daily sanctified, can in glory, be glorified. Jesus did not die to save us from being crucified. Paul declared in Gal. 2: 20, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” The seeker sensitive message of the cross puts the cross of Christ in merely an historical, past place of substitution for us in our sin. That much is true, but that is not the complete Gospel. The cross must become for all believers a present life of daily discipleship, daily being crucified to sin and to self.

In Romans 6: 6, 11, Paul adds, “Our old self was crucified with Him, so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be slaves to sin...Reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” We must never let the cross lose its crucifying power in our lives. Jesus was not drenched in His own blood at Calvary, so we could be self-satisfied, wealthy, rich, and be able to evade persecution. We must allow the cross of Jesus to have its crucifying effect in our present lives. We cannot advance beyond the cross. Some preach that “the cross was necessary to get us past the pre-eminence of sin in our lives, but we must get on—past the cross to becoming rich and wise and strong.” For these people, the weakness of the cross, the foolishness of the cross, and the humiliation of the cross are things we must get past. This new false Gospel empties the cross of its power to keep us humble, dependent, children of the King, and to keep our inheritance from being contaminated by pride. We cannot leave the cross of Christ! We are to take it up in the present, not relegating it to the past. We dare not declare that we must have now what Christ promises us for the future—when we stand before Him unashamed, in His power, and in the dignity of our glorified body like unto His glorious, resurrected body. Avoid this wrong way to carry and deliver the Gospel, coming to others with eloquent speech and enticing, persuasive, words to create a false Gospel void of God’s power, a “gospel” allowing pride and boasting of how great we are. How must we carry and deliver the Gospel message of the cross?

HOW MUST WE CARRY AND DELIVER THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS? (II.) Paul reveals to us two ways to carry the Gospel that must never change. Notice verse 3. (1) We must carry and deliver the message of the cross in the weakness of each of our personal weak vessels. Paul says, “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.” We don’t come with superiority, but in weakness. Paul states in II Corinthians 10:10, that it was said of him, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible.” Paul carried with him what appears to be some kind of a chronic weakness, a sickness, an ailment, or affliction. In Galatians 4: 13, 14, Paul wrote, “But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the Gospel to you the first time. And that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.” Paul is saying we must recognize our own weakness and our impotence without the power of the Gospel—the power of the cross. It should put us on our faces before God in prayer. When others know we are weak in our earthen vessels, the power of the Gospel is clearly not of us, but of God and God alone.

This weakness, fear, and much trembling is the very opposite of a cocky air and arrogance, or of a spiritual strut and swagger. Paul is speaking of a deep sense of inadequacy, necessary for the Gospel to go out in power. When we realize and never forget that lost sinners are going to hell minute by minute, it results in meekness and trembling because the stakes of our preaching and witnessing are so high. Our Sunday School teaching, our Wednesday night teaching, our VBS leading, our preaching, our testimonies at work, at home, and in our neighborhood, may be the first and last time some of these children or neighbors or attenders will ever hear the Gospel message. God wants us to make peace with a continual sense of personal inadequacy and weakness. Paul declared in II Cor. 2:16, “And who is adequate for these things. In II Cor. 3: 4-6, Paul explains, “And such confidence we have through Christ toward God, not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant.”

Beloved, we all have some handicap. None of us are perfect vessels. But we are children of God. We are not what we do, but we are who we are, children of God, the Bride of Christ, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, bond-slaves of Jesus. The power is not in my person or yours. The power of the Gospel and message of the cross, is of God and not of us. Why? Verse 5 tells us why, “that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, or rest on any preacher or pastor, or upon any individual, but in the power of God. We must be humble ambassadors with the Gospel of reconciliation, speaking contritely with humble spirits and as Isaiah 66:2 declares, ‘trembling at God’s Word.’ This actual word for trembling is **tremos**. It means a quaking in realizing our inadequacy and distrusting our own ability, with a total dependence upon God, and the mighty power of His cross.

Secondly, and most important of all, (2) We must carry and deliver the message of the cross by determining to know nothing but the centrality of the message of Jesus

Christ, and Him crucified. Paul tells us in verse 2, “For I determined/decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” That doesn’t mean that in the 18 months Paul was in Corinth, he never preached on anything but the cross of Christ. No! We know he spoke about love, the gifts, the place of the gifts, he spoke on the Lord’s Supper and even on church discipline and how to get over conflicts. So, what did Paul mean? These words mean that whatever Paul preached about, it was all related to the central message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Nothing can ever be allowed to detract from the cross or make it some historical relic. The message of the cross must stay at the center of every day of our lives and in the center of every relationship we are in. When Paul took time off to make tents, he made them in the shadow of the cross. He preached in the shadow of the cross of Calvary. He faced persecution in the shadow of the cross. He ate, he slept, and he faced his assailants and opponents in the shadow of the cross of Jesus. This made Paul’s message the message of a broken man, a broken-hearted man, out of step with this glory seeking world. Notice the effect in verse 4, his life became a demonstration of the Spirit of God and His power.

Is the cross the center of your Gospel message? Do you tell others Jesus died there to save them from their sin and to show them their sin? He did. Our sin sent Him there. As we see the agony of the cross, it shows us the gravity of our sin—that’s something almost gone in thousands of churches. Jesus had to go to the cross for you and me. There was no other way God could forgive our sins except Christ’s death in our place on the cross. Our righteous Father required Christ’s cross so we could be forgiven, because your sins and my sins are an affront to God’s holiness, justice, and righteousness. Our sin’s penalty was paid there at Calvary. Jesus paid it all. Do we tell others that the cross shows us there is nothing we can do to pay for our sin? We must ever say so. All our righteousness comes short of God’s glory and is to God as a filthy rag. None of us are in control of our destiny. We are morally incapable of being good enough to make heaven. Do we tell others the cross is the greatest demonstration of God’s love? It is! Do we tell others that the cross is where Jesus showed us how to live, daily dying to our own agenda? Do we affirm unconditional allegiance to Christ? The Gospel is no business success seminar, no get rich quick method, no road to getting our own way. We don’t follow the Lord for what He gives us or will give us. We follow Jesus because we have been to the cross and Jesus is Lord. Do we explain the Gospel as the exchanged life? It is. It means that we have given Jesus our life and He has given us His life in exchange. Now, He lives in and through us because of the cross.

Do you desire Paul’s declaration to be yours? If so, you will become a firebrand for the Lord. Jeremiah 15:16 declares, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of Hosts.” I am praying, “Lord, let us determine to know nothing among us except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Father, make it so, for Jesus’ sake, Amen. Is our life being lived in the shadow of the cross? Sinners, the only way to the Lord, is to come to the cross, kneeling there, and having Jesus lift your burden of sin. Come to the mighty cross today. Amen.