

The Power of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:17–25)

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Introduction

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness [wisdom] of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word [logos] of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1:17, 18 NASB).

First-century public speakers were expected to produce carefully crafted speeches that drew attention to their skillful use of rhetoric. Oratory was regarded in pagan religion as ‘magic’ because of its power to bewitch the hearers. Paul rejected rhetorical skills because he depended on the power of the cross via the message of the gospel to accomplish God’s purpose. Paul asserted that the Corinthian church was the evidence that this method worked.

As we saw in verses 4 and 5, Paul’s confidence in these Christ-transformed Gentiles was based on their changed lives due to their correct but supernaturally enabled comprehension of the gospel.

“I am always thanking God for you. I thank him for his grace given to you in Christ Jesus; I thank him for all the enrichment that has come to you in Christ. You possess full knowledge [logos, God’s Word] and you can give full expression to it [gnosis, correct opinion of it—correct application of the Word by godly wisdom], because what we testified about Christ has been confirmed in your experience” (1 Corinthians 1:4–6, Revised English Bible).

Today we want to examine the power of the gospel that saves.

I. The Power of the Gospel

1. The sovereign God ordained the *gospel* as His means to call out a people for His name.
 - a. The Corinthian believers were *called* (not “*to be*”) *saints*, as Paul was called an apostle by the will of God (v. 1). The Corinthian church was called by the will of God through *sanctification* — setting them apart as *holy*, belonging to God (v. 2).
 - b. God called the Corinthian believers to Himself by the gospel of Christ that Paul preached to them, creating new life in these formerly pagan Gentiles.
2. The clear evidence of their call by saving grace was their sense of Christ’s lordship over their lives (v. 2). Paul adds, “*both their Lord and ours*” (v. 3). Christ is *Lord*; thus, calling on His *name* is acknowledging His lordship and submitting to His authority.
3. The power of God is set in contrast to the religious expectations of fallen humans who saw this gospel as foolish (1:22–24).
 - a. The term **power** in the text connected to the message of the cross is the Greek ***dunamis***, the power of natural ability, general and inherent in God. It is used 119 times in the NT (for example: Matthew 7:22; 11:20; 22:29; Acts 1:8).
 - b. The Greek language has five other synonyms for *power*:
 - 1) ***Bia***: force, effective, often oppressive power exhibiting itself in single deeds of violence (for example, the power of a tornado; used only 3 times in Acts; 5:26; 21:35, 36; 27:41)

- 2) **Energeia** is power in exercise, operative or working energy; used 8 times in the NT (for example: Colossians 1:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:9–11).
- 3) **Exousia** is primarily liberty of action, then authority—either as delegated power, or as unrestrained, arbitrary power (the power of a king; used 102 times in the NT (for example: Matthew 7:28, 29; 9:8; Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 3:22).
- 4) **Ischus** is strength, especially physical, as an endowment; used 10 times in the NT (for example: Mark 12:30; Ephesians 6:10; Revelation 5:12).
- 5) **Kratos** is might, relative and manifested power and is used in the NT chiefly of God as He demonstrates strength. It is used 12 times (for example: Acts 19:20; Ephesians 6:10).

II. Power or Human Wisdom?

1. The Corinthian believers' *calling* was by "*the logos (Word) of the cross ... the power of God*" (v. 18). This power of the gospel is the *creative* power of God (2 Peter 3:5–7). The word will also condemn on judgment day (John 12:48).
2. One's response to the gospel determines his eternal destiny (v. 18).
 - a. Humanity is divided into two groups: (1) those on the path to destruction regard Christ and His cross work as *foolish*; (2) those on the path to deliverance find the *gospel*, the word of the cross, to be the *power* of God.
 - b. Paul cited Isaiah 29:14 to show the authority of his assertion.

What We Can Take Away

1. Does your salvation stand on the Word of the cross?
2. How do you define and express the gospel?
3. Do you live and minister in the power of God?

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).