

Challenges Christians Face

Proclaiming Christ Crucified

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Rev. Freddy Fritz

February 6, 2011

Proclaiming Christ Crucified

Scripture

Today we continue studying *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

Christians in the church at Corinth had misunderstood the nature of wisdom with regard to salvation. From Paul's perspective human wisdom opposes God's wisdom that is revealed in the gospel. Human wisdom is based on human knowledge and leads to destruction. God's wisdom is based on the gospel and leads to eternal life. Let's see how Paul expresses the difference between human wisdom and the wisdom of the gospel with respect to the preaching of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

¹ And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Introduction

When Billy Graham was a young evangelist he met a man named Charles Templeton. Prior to his meeting Billy Graham, a religious experience had led to a sudden conversion and entry into the ministry. Known then mostly as Chuck Templeton, he quickly rose to the top of protestant evangelism. He hosted the weekly religion show "Look up and Live" on CBS. He and Billy Graham toured the USA and the world filling football fields. Back in those

early days many predicted that it would be Charles Templeton and not Billy Graham who would become the biggest evangelical preacher in history. His son simply says, “But he didn’t. He went to the seminary to learn more and came out an agnostic.”

This was a pretty big event at the time. Though no preacher was as big as Billy Graham was toward the end of the twentieth century, it was almost like Graham renouncing Jesus.¹

My guess is that most of you have never heard of Charles Templeton. I had never heard of him until several years ago. In his day he was apparently an extraordinary preacher. But then he abandoned his faith. Why? What happened?

The apostle Paul makes it clear that it is not powerful oratory or clever preaching that is the power behind the gospel. No. It is something very different than one would expect.

Review

But before we examine it, let me briefly review what we have covered so far in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*.

After the introductory salutation (1:1-3) and thanksgiving (1:4-9) of the letter, Paul immediately addressed the issue of divisions in the church in Corinth (1:10-17). Paul urged the Christians in Corinth to heal the divisions in the church because they are contrary to the unity that exists in Christ’s body.

The reason for the division in the church at Corinth was due to a misunderstanding of human wisdom versus the wisdom of the gospel. In a series of three paragraphs, Paul shows how utterly incompatible human wisdom is in relation to the gospel.

First, he says in effect, “So you think the gospel is a form of wisdom? How foolish can you get? Look at its *message*; it is based on the story of a crucified Christ. Who in the name of wisdom would have dreamed that up? Only God is so wise as to be so foolish” (1:18-25).

¹ Taken from the website of Brad Templeton, son of Charles: <http://www.templetons.com/brad/cbt.html>.

Next, Paul says, “Furthermore, look at its *recipients*. Yourself! Who in the name of wisdom would have chosen you to be the new people of God?” (1:26-31).

And third, Paul says, “Finally, remember my own *preaching*. Who in the name of wisdom would have come in such weakness? Yet, look at its results” (2:1-5)²

Paul urged the Christians in Corinth to remember that he had not presented the gospel according to the world’s wisdom. Instead of relying on logic and rhetoric, he had focused his attention on the central message of the Person and Work of Christ.

Lesson

Similarly, in today’s lesson we are urged not to present the gospel according to the world’s wisdom. Instead of relying on logic and rhetoric, we should focus our attention on the central message of the Person and Work of Christ.

Let’s use the following outline for today’s lesson:

1. The Manner of Preaching (2:1)
2. The Motive in Preaching (2:2)
3. The Might in Preaching (2:3-5)

I. The Manner of Preaching (2:1)

First, let’s notice the manner of preaching.

At this point in his letter the apostle Paul is emphasizing the manner of his preaching with the Corinthians. They have become enamored again with human wisdom as the best way in which to understand and promote the gospel. But not Paul. He did not believe that the loquacious logic and resounding rhetoric were the way in which God had appointed for the gospel to be proclaimed. Paul believed in a different approach; he employed God’s methods.

² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 67.

A. *The Deficiency in the Manner of Preaching*

First, let's see the deficiency in the manner of preaching.

The deficiency in Paul's preaching were deficiencies as far as the Corinthians were concerned. Even though they had been converted under the preaching of Paul, they were moving back to a Corinthian fascination with human wisdom.

1. The Deficiency of Speech

First, the deficiency of speech.

Paul said in verse 1, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God **with lofty speech. . . .**"

Paul was a brilliant man. He had an extraordinary education. He had the equivalent of two Ph.D. degrees. And he wanted the Corinthians to remember that when he came to them he did not come **with lofty speech**. He was not like the Corinthian orators who used lofty speech to persuade people to agree with them.

2. The Deficiency of Wisdom

Second, the deficiency of wisdom.

Paul said in 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.**"

Paul did not employ human wisdom to try and persuade them to believe the gospel. This did not mean that Paul's preaching was unintelligent and impractical but rather that he did not try to impress them with his scholarship, schooling, and sagacity.

So, what was the manner of Paul's preaching?

B. *The Declaration in the Manner of Preaching*

And second, let's see the declaration in the manner of preach-

ing.

Paul said in 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.”

Paul came **proclaiming**, or *declaring* (NKJV and KJV), the gospel to the Corinthians.

1. The Multitude for the Declaration

First, the multitude for the declaration.

Paul said in 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.”

Paul proclaimed the gospel to the people in the city of Corinth. That was a great spiritual blessing to them that they were the ones to whom the gospel was proclaimed. In the providence of God, they were the ones to whom Paul preached the gospel.

It is no small blessing to hear the gospel proclaimed. There are millions of people today who have never even heard the name of Jesus. We should never take it for granted that we have heard the gospel. And we should be motivated to take the gospel to the multitude for whom the gospel is intended.

2. The Message of the Declaration

Second, the message of the declaration.

Paul said in 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.”

What does the phrase “**testimony of God**” mean? The Greek word for “**testimony**” is the same word that we use for “witness” and “martyr.”³ A martyr is someone who dies because he is testifying to something that he will not renounce. Paul is saying that his

³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

message was not one that he made up. He did not conjure it up. He did not figure it out. Rather, it was a message that was revealed to him and he is simply testifying to what was given to him.

That is what makes the gospel so radically different from every other religion in the world. The gospel is the only message that was given to us. It was God sending his Son, Jesus, to this earth to live and die on the cross to pay the penalty for sinners. In Paul's day that message was a stumbling block to Jews (because God said that anyone who died on a tree was cursed) and foolish to Gentiles (because they could not understand how a convicted and dead criminal get anyone to heaven).

Even today people struggle with this. People want to make up their own rules about how to approach God. But Paul made it clear that sound, biblical preaching is simply a matter of testifying to what God has done in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

II. The Motive in Preaching (2:2)

Second, let's look at the motive in preaching.

Paul gives us a bit of an insight into some of his motive in preaching the gospel.

A. *The Decision for the Motive in Preaching*

First, notice the decision for the motive in preaching.

Paul said in verse 2, “**For I decided** to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

In Greek the word “**decided**” means “to judge in one's own mind as to what is right and proper.”⁴ Some commentators think that Paul adjusted the content of his preaching when he came to Corinth. Prior to his arrival in Corinth he had been in Athens where his preaching had something of a mixed reception. So, these commentators assert, that when Paul came to Corinth he adjusted

⁴ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

the content of his preaching.

But that simply does not bear up under scrutiny. First, there is no hint at all in the Scriptures that Paul's ministry in Athens was a failure. Second, the assumption is made that Paul changed his strategy when in fact the word "**decided**" does not necessarily support that assumption.

All Paul is asserting is that he had deliberately focused in his own mind what was right and proper in the proclamation of the gospel.

B. The Defining of the Motive in Preaching

Second, notice the defining of the motive in preaching.

Paul said in verse 2, "For I decided **to know nothing among you** except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

"**To know nothing,**" says commentator Gordon D. Fee, "does not mean that he left all other knowledge aside, but rather that he had the gospel, with its crucified Messiah, as his singular focus and passion while he was among them."⁵

C. The Declaration in the Motive in Preaching

And third, notice the declaration in the motive in preaching.

Paul said in verse 2, "For I decided to know nothing among you **except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**"

This is one of the clearest—and shortest—statements of what the content of preaching is. Paul preached about the Person (**Jesus Christ**) and Work (**him crucified**) of Jesus Christ. All true preaching must somehow relate to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Let me unpack that a little. True preaching is about the Person of Jesus Christ. That means that we must proclaim that Jesus is fully God and also that he is fully Man. We must talk about his deity (with all that his deity implies) and also about his humanity

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 92.

(with all that his humanity implies). We must not misconstrue his deity or his humanity. We must proclaim clearly and fully who Jesus is as a Person.

And true preaching is also about the Work of Jesus Christ. That means that we must proclaim the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus. We must talk about his Virgin birth, his sinless life, his perfect obedience, his vicarious death, his substitutionary atonement, his ritual burial, his prophesied resurrection, his visible ascension, his glorious reign, and his definite return one day to end all of history. We must proclaim clearly and fully the Work that Jesus accomplished.

Now, I am not saying that every sermon must state everything we know about the Person and Work of Jesus. That would not be necessary, and it would not be required by the text of Scripture. But I am saying that all true preaching must somehow relate to the Person and Work of Jesus. You see, the entire Word of God is about how God is redeeming his elect. And that story finds its focal point in the Person and Work of Jesus.

So, for example, let's say you heard me preach on Ecclesiastes a few months ago. And let's say that you attended a Jewish synagogue last Friday evening. And it just so happened that the Rabbi was preaching on a text in the book of Ecclesiastes. I would hope that you would have recognized that his sermon was significantly different than mine. Why? Because the Rabbi's sermon had no reference at all to the Person and Work of Jesus, whereas my sermon showed how the message of Ecclesiastes points to the Person and Work of Jesus.

So, true preaching always relates to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, perhaps the greatest preacher in the nineteenth century used to say something like this, "Point me to any text in the Bible and I will beat a straight path to the cross of Christ." His point is simply that every text in the Bible has something to do with the Person and Work of Christ.

Now, that is not to say that it is always easy to do so. Frankly, some Old Testament texts, such as inventories and genealogies,

are difficult to understand in light of the Person and Work of Christ. But, it can be done, and it must be done, if our preaching is to be a faithful proclamation of the testimony of God.

III. The Might in Preaching (2:3-5)

And third, let's look at the might in preaching.

Paul's preaching was clearly effective. What was it that made his preaching so effective? The power behind Paul's preaching was divine and not human.

A. *The Performance for the Might in Preaching*

First, notice the performance for the might in preaching.

Paul said in verse 3, **“And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. . . .”**

Some commentators say that Paul was physically weak when he came to Corinth. That may have been so. His point is that he did not come to Corinth like all the traveling orators. They exuded strength and confidence. But when Paul came he was utterly different than the Corinthian orators.

B. *The Proclamation in the Might in Preaching*

Second, notice the proclamation in the might in preaching.

Paul said in verse 4, **“. . . and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. . . .”**

Paul did not rely on loquacious logic and ravishing rhetoric to proclaim the gospel. There is nothing wrong with good speech in presenting the gospel. But God does not bless the preacher who trusts in his oratorical skill to get people to change. Rather, God blesses the preacher who recognizes that only God can bring about change in a person's life.

C. The Purpose of the Might in Preaching

And third, notice the purpose of the might in preaching.

Paul said in verse 5, “. . . **that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**”

Paul understood that true change is a result of the work of God. He would not use popular oratorical devices to get people to agree with him. He proclaimed very simply and clearly the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, so that the **faith** of the Corinthians **might not rest in the wisdom** and oratorical skills of Paul **but in the power of God.**

Many of you may know the name of Charles Finney. He preached in the middle of the nineteenth century. He studied to become a lawyer but before he began to practice law, he had a religious experience. He started preaching, and he is single-handedly and largely responsible for much of modern revivalism. One of his techniques in preaching was that, like an attorney, he used to “argue a person into making a decision for Christ.” During his ministry in the northeastern United States tens of thousands of people made professions of faith. Finney was lauded as one of the greatest evangelists ever. However, upon closer inspection it was discovered that after several years almost none of Finney’s converts were still following Christ. Why? First, Finney’s gospel was false. And second, those people put their faith in the wisdom of a man’s gifted oratorical skill rather than in the power of God.

Conclusion

I pray that you and I will never present the gospel according to the world’s wisdom. I pray that instead of relying on logic and rhetoric, we should focus our attention on the central message of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAAYER:

Our Father, like Paul, the gospel we proclaim is simply about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

We live in a day and age in which it is fashionable for people to have all kinds of techniques and devices to get people to believe the gospel. There is the liberal gospel. There is the prosperity gospel. There is the works-righteousness gospel. But there is only true gospel, and it is about Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Help us to believe *that* gospel, and help us to proclaim *that* gospel.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, leave here today proclaiming the true gospel, which is about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ!