

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.”

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One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism – Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians

*Part 8 – Saved by a Foolish
Message*

April 14, 2024

Sermon Text: 1 Cor 2

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 2

1Co 1:30-31 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (31) so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

The visible church today is largely characterized by a widespread and deadly error. There is a poison which has always threatened to destroy men’s souls, and this poison is prevalent today in our churches and pulpits. It deceives people and sends them to hell. What is it? Simply this:

The wisdom of the world.

1Co 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

What is the wisdom of the world? Well, in Corinth it included the wisdom of the philosophers. It was the idea that a wise person was

someone with great oratory abilities. Someone impressive in their personal appearance. Someone with a large following and a large income.

In our day the poison of the wisdom of the world is just as deadly and prevalent as it was in Corinth.

The wisdom of the world is the mindset of the world. It is the way in which the world outside of Christ thinks. The wisdom of the world values wealth and power and intellect and popularity and winners. To seek these things is wisdom to the world.

The wisdom of the world, in other words, is a wisdom, a mindset, that is antithetical to the wisdom of God. So much so that the worldling regards God's wisdom as foolishness.

Rome is worldly wisdom. Have you ever wondered why Roman Catholicism is so popular? It is because it is the creation of man and its theology is that of worldly wisdom. Do this and you can make

yourself right with God. And surely it must be the real thing – why, just look at its wealth, its Pope, its priesthood, its cathedrals, its antiquity.

Everyone who is still dead in their sins, outside of Christ, embraces the wisdom of the world. Even the religious zealot who takes some vow of poverty and goes off to India to spend his life among the wretched and poor – embraces this wisdom of the world. *Greatness and godliness is achieved by a man's own works. The sinner must make himself acceptable to God by the works of his own hands. This is also the wisdom of the world.*

The wisdom of the world is the wisdom which characterizes your unsaved neighbor's thinking. It is to be found in every culture, every nation, every race, every social class. Paul calls it "earthly wisdom" -

2Co 1:12 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, **not**

by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

The poison of worldly wisdom had infected the church in Corinth. It was evident in their vying for position and power, pitting their chosen leader against those of opposing parties and in their arrogance. The Apostle Paul rebuked and corrected them:

1Co 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. (18) 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.

1Co 1:26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

When I was in seminary, as I have no doubt mentioned to you in the

past, the following verses which capsulize the Apostle Paul's fundamental, biblical philosophy of Christian ministry, *were never taught or emphasized*. In many ways a ministry characterized by worldly wisdom was what was taught. But here is God's one and only way of *proclaiming the testimony of God*:

1Co 2:1-5 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) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

What was the world's take on Paul's method? –

2Co 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but

his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”

2Co 11:6-7 Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. (7) Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?

Paul's message and method were foolishness to the worldling. Jesus' message and method were foolishness to the world. And they STILL are today.

We must expect this response. In fact, if the world does not regard us as fools, if it does not consider our method and message as foolishness, we can be sure that we are not sharing and preaching the Word of the Cross, but rather we have altered it to make it appear as wisdom to the world.

Consider, for example, the ministry of George Whitefield way back in the 1700's in England. How was

his preaching regarded by the eminent ones in the Church of England? For the most part, they disdained him. They refused to let him preach in their church buildings. So, he went out into the fields and was even further mocked by them. And yet, crowds came to hear him? Who were his listeners? They were the poor, outcast coalminers. Here and there a person of nobility and wealth would hear him and be saved, but for the most part the great and mighty, the “wise” of the world held his message and method in contempt. The whole idea that a person must be “born again” was foolishness to them.

Paul tells us that if we begin to use and rely upon methods or a message which “make sense” to the thinking of the world, *there will cease to be the demonstration of the Spirit and of God's power to salvation*. It is the gospel of God alone which is His power for salvation for all who believe.

Paul told the Corinthians that if he had come to them, preaching “with lofty speech or wisdom,” so that

they all thought Paul was quite impressive and a wonderful speaker, *none of them would have been saved*. Why? Because their faith would have been in Paul instead of *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*.

Why do people go to church on Sunday morning? Why do they tune in to some well-known preacher on television? Many times it is because they are impressed with the preacher. Why? Because very often the message and the method are “in plausible words of wisdom” rather than in weakness and fear and demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Yet these Corinthians, like so many people today who claim to be Christians, were rejecting Paul and embracing a man of the world who preached an altered and therefore false gospel.

Many local churches are not founded upon Jesus Christ crucified, but upon the wisdom of men.

This thing is a deadly poison. It takes people to hell. And it is a very

appealing poison that appeals to our flesh – just like the fruit in Eden presented by the Serpent.

A Two-Fold Error

Notice that there are two ways that the gospel can be perverted into the wisdom of the world, so that it is agreeable to the world’s wisdom:

1. In the **person** of the one who shares the “testimony of God.” Embracing *superiority of speech*.

I have been at numbers of pastor’s conferences over the years – (I no longer go to these things because they are worse than a waste of time) – and I can give you some examples of worldly wisdom which is promoted as biblical ministry. For instance:

- A. Almost ALWAYS the featured speakers will be introduced as “a pastor of a large church in _____”. This is equated as a measure of success.

B. One such speaker pushed “connecting with your community” and told how when he took out a mortgage on his home through a local bank, he made it a practice each month to enter the bank with his payment, pretend to blow a trumpet, and announce “payment number 1” and so on. Pretty soon some people from the bank knew all about him and his church and some began attending.

C. Another such speaker pointed to a pastor within his denomination and said “if you men want to know how to do worship, go to his church and watch how they “do” it.

Is this kind of thing “weakness and fear and much trembling”? No. And all it produces is a false faith, the object of which is a man and not Christ.

I could continue, but do you see how all this kind of thing is contrary to what the Apostle Paul (and Jesus Himself) tells us here in Scripture?

2. And then **the gospel is also perverted if *the words*** of the message are ‘tweaked.’ “I knew nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” “The Word of the Cross is foolishness to the perishing.” Stray from this and it is no longer the power of God for salvation.

A. For example, we saw last time” *But by HIS doing you are in Christ Jesus.*” The foolishness of the cross was shown to be the wisdom of God to us, all by Christ alone. But the natural man sees this as foolishness, so very, very often preachers and churches and the big-names in Christendom will add in a dose of man’s contribution. Then this new “gospel” is logical to the world. It fits worldly wisdom.

Therefore the *manner and the message* must always be faithfully proclaimed, *in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, not in persuasive words of wisdom but in*

absolute reliance upon the Spirit and God's power.

Think very carefully about this – if you do, you will be encouraged. Our church body here is very small and even if you add in our faithful online members, we don't even approach what the world would deem "success."

Now, along comes someone who looks at us and says, "you need to do something to get more people here. You need to start a youth ministry. You must have classes for all ages of children. You need more advertising. Your building and the seating, the lighting and the mood all need to be designed to make people comfortable and to put them in a receptive emotional mood."

I reject all of these ideas. Just think carefully now. When George Whitefield began to preach, did he have a church building? No. Did he have programs for all ages? No. Did he have comfortable seating, a massive sound system, and a light show? No. What did he have? An open field where the people stood,

along with their children, and a foolish message of Jesus Christ crucified and a free offer of God's salvation to all who would believe in this foolish message and the One it proclaimed. That is what Paul means by the power of nothing more except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Where did Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount? Where did Peter preach on the day of Pentecost?

We have just ONE thing to offer, and it is the one thing needful to ALL – Christ crucified, the power and wisdom of God for salvation.

"It is one of the most significant passages in the New Testament that warn – and encourage – those responsible for 'building' the church of Christ. In the final analysis, of course, this includes all believers, but it has particular relevance, following so closely as it does verses 5-9, to those with teaching and leadership responsibilities. Paul's point is unquestionably warning. It is unfortunately possible for people

to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, 'pop' psychology, managerial techniques, relational 'good feelings,' or what have you. But in the final judgment, all such building (and perhaps countless other forms, where systems have become more important than the gospel itself) will be shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or his gospel in it." [The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Gordon Fee]

God's Wisdom in a Mystery

Listen again carefully as I read from verse 6 to the end of the chapter. Let these words really soak in.

1Co 2:6-16 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. (7) But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages

for our glory.

(8) None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

(9) But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— (10) these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

(11) For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

(12) Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (13) And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

(14) **The natural person does not**

accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

(15) The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. (16) “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

We will plan to return to these verses next Sunday. We dare not rush through them. But for now, let’s look at verse 14 –

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

By “natural person,” Paul means man in his sin, man in his human, unregenerate nature. Man apart from Christ. Man in the first Adam. It is this:

Eph 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in

which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

This man, this person, says Paul, simply *will not* accept the things of the Spirit – such as, the Word of the Cross. No exceptions – *none*. And he will not because *he cannot*. He cannot because God’s wisdom in Christ is absolute *foolishness* to him. In fact, *he has no ability to understand. No capacity to know these things*. He is dead to God and the things of God. He is deaf and blind. He cannot hear nor see. He may as well be a dead man – and indeed he is.

This is the very condition in which YOU and I were born into this world.

Now, let me ask you – if indeed this is the natural man’s condition, if

Paul's words here are true so that the sinner has no desire nor ability to accept the Word of the Cross – or anything God's Spirit has communicated to us here in Scripture – *if these things are true of your neighbor, of the people in this neighborhood, of your unsaved family members...just exactly what kinds of tactics and gimmicks and programs and conferences and concerts and methods on our part are going to overcome these obstacles?*

Can you give sight to a blind man? Ears to the deaf? Legs to the lame? Of course not, and yet that is precisely what so many pastors and churches and individual Christians are claiming today. They think that if they can alter the lighting and set the atmosphere for their meetings, if they can get a preacher up front who is able to speak so dynamically that the crowds are "moved," if they can use musicians in such a way that sinners will be compelled to walk down the aisle and accept Christ, if they can just make the gospel reasonable enough, *then they, through these methods, can overcome the natural*

man's inability to accept and understand the Word of the Cross which is foolishness to him.

Neither you nor I will EVER be able to make the blind see and the deaf hear. Never! And yet huge amounts of energy and money is being expended by churches today in an effort to do this very thing. As a result, the power of the Word of the Cross is lost.

If you are born again – why? How did that ever happen? It is only and entirely because of the power of God accompanying the Word of the Cross, making us a new creation, and showing us the wisdom of God which we once regarded as foolishness.