

Preaching The Unvarnished Gospel

Non Series – 1 Corinthians

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 1:30-2:5

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I am so grateful to be with you today. Take your Bibles, if you would, and look with me at 1 Corinthians, chapters 1 and 2. Of course, we won't cover nearly all that material but we have a couple of verses at the end of chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians and then we'll look at the first five verses of chapter 2.

Just a couple of years ago, I was in South America visiting some of our missionaries and serving alongside them. If you know anything about serving in South America, when you arrive, you have your scheduled meetings and then you have your unscheduled, impromptu gatherings because once the pockets of churches and village churches find out there are folks there who are going to do Bible studies, they sort of do these impromptu gatherings and very often there are several hundred people. So as was the case, we were finishing up one of the scheduled meetings and one of the brothers said to me, "Hey, there's a group of folks meeting down in this area and they want to talk about a particular subject and so they'd love it if you'd come teach on that." So I went down there and I said, "Well, who is going to do the translation?" And he said, "Well, we've got this missionary who has been in the country for about twenty years and he's going to translate for you." I said, "That's great."

So we arrived and as I was greeting this missionary who was going to be doing the translation, he said to me right up front, "Now, you realize that the people here aren't very well educated and they're not really going to be able to handle a lot of deep truth, etc. and so this could get very difficult so you might want to try to remove some of the bigger words that you might use in a normal sermon maybe back in your own church." I said, "Well, okay, but what do you mean? What big words are you talking about?" I'm a pretty normal guy, I'm a pretty average guy. He said, "Well, you know, they just can't handle sort of the bigger, deeper, more difficult concepts in theology so when you teach the Bible, you just want to use really dumbed down words." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, things like repentance. Words like 'salvation.'" I mean, we're about one minute from me getting up on the platform to teach and I said, "You're kidding me, right? You want me to remove words like 'repentance' and 'salvation?' I can't remove those words. When it comes to Gospel ministry, that's not dumbing it down, that's eliminating the Gospel if I can't use terms that are foundational to what we understand about the Gospel." Of course, we got through the session but I wasn't about to remove

those words and that's because when you preach the Gospel, though we might be tempted to remove some barrier between us and those that are receiving it, though we might be tempted to in and of ourselves do something in the relationship to attract someone to what we're saying, we might be tempted to remove an obstacle that they have to get around to come to Christ, we shouldn't because if we're going to reach people, then our Gospel is unvarnished. We must just preach it.

One missionary said to me some years ago, we were concerned about a mission work and we went to visit with that missionary and they said to me, "Well, we're reaching 50,000 people this weekend." I said, "What do you mean you're reaching 50,000 people this weekend?" "Well, we're gathering 50,000 people in this massive deal, three day's worth and by the end of it we will have reached 50,000 people." I said, "What do you mean, reach them? Do you mean they heard the truth? It was a mass evangelism and they actually heard the Gospel? Because if that's what your definition of what it means to reach them, over time there are going to be problems." "Why?" "Because the Gospel is going to hit with such force on some hearts that they're going to reject it and now if your definition is that well, I've given them the truth, therefore, I have reached them, we've got a problem because you're going to be tempted to remove the alienation somehow. You're going to be tempted to remove it." There is a very, very popular teacher today who just finished writing a book on ecclesiology and that's precisely what he tries to tell evangelicals that they must do. "It is our job," this author says, "to remove the alienation that stands between the Gospel message and someone coming to Christ, the alienation they feel." You know how it is when you bring somebody to church and it's a relative that you've been trying to get to come to church, it's a loved one, and you bring them to church and the pastor is preaching and you're thinking, "Boy, I hope he doesn't say anything to step on a toe here today." So he just brings the word and then you're thinking, "Oh, I wonder how they're hearing that. Oh man, he really came hard with that one. Chill out." What are you doing when you're thinking that way in your mind? You're thinking, "I have to somehow pray for and hope that the alienation is less, is limited, minimized."

What we're going to see Paul do in this text is give you a theological truth, a theological statement, and then on the basis of that statement he's going to tell you how he thought about preaching with respect to the alienation of the Gospel. When someone is offended at the truth, there is an obstacle between them and Christ and so what Paul does when he's talking to the Corinthians, he's reminding them of how he came to them. And it was a pagan culture; it wasn't an irreligious culture. Clearly they were religious but largely their religion was wrapped up in paganism, steeped in self-worship and idolatry. He reminds them that when he came to them, there was a theological reason why he did what he did and then there was the very practice of it. Now, notice his thesis statement in verse 30 of chapter 1, Paul says, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus." I'm reading from the New American Standard. Some of you have the English Standard Version but it's essentially an original language construct that's just two words, "of Him." There it is. It's that simple.

30 Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption [here's the purpose

clause] 31 so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

There is Paul's theological thesis that drove how he presented the Gospel and how he dealt with this issue of reaching people and the alienation that the Gospel sometimes causes.

What kept Paul from the temptation to minimize or to use some human means to protect and shield someone from the truth hitting them the way it's supposed to hit them, what kept Paul from doing that was this theological thesis that it was "of God" that someone comes to God. It is God that draws. It is God that convicts. It is God that opens the eyes to the loveliness of Christ and it is God who grants the conviction unto repentance and faith and from God's perspective then, it is God who has brought Christ who becomes all these things to the believer in the newness of conversion so that no man will ever be able to boast. Now it's interesting that if you are tempted to minimize the alienation of the Gospel, if your heart is ever tempted to do that and I know that happens to all of us, we have to remind ourselves of this but when that happens, you must remember that there is an ultimate purpose that is spoken of here that would get violated if you indeed do achieve some minimizing of the alienation. In other words, if you help an unbeliever get around the obstacle that keeps them from Christ, if you help them walk around it instead of stumble over it, if you allow them somehow to hold onto the very thing that robs them of conversion itself, then you will be violating verse 31. You will be helping them boast in themselves. You will be handing them a salvation, a conversion, an experience, an emotion, some sort of religion added to their life, you will be helping them do it themselves so that then they can boast not in the Lord exclusively but in themselves.

And so you never, ever want to do that. This is why Paul reminds the Corinthians, "Look, when I came to you, I had a theological drive-train. I had this truth driving me, 'of him you are in Christ Jesus.' Of him." It is in strong contrast all through chapter 1 with the ability of man or literally the inability of man, the impotence of man. Notice chapter 1, verse 21, "the world through its wisdom did not come to know God." Verse 26, "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble." Those are just references to us now who realize that through our nobility, through our wisdom, through our power, we could never come. Notice verse 27, "God has chosen the foolish things, the weak things," things that the world would never attach themselves to because the world is chasing whatever they are chasing. We come along and give them the Gospel that they must stumble over and they call it foolishness. The Jews search for signs, Paul says in chapter 1. Why? They are saying to God, "Prove it to me." They are saying to Jesus, "Prove that you are the Messiah. I don't care about your message, I want you to satisfy my sense of religion, my sense of my own righteousness." That was the Jew. For the Gentile, the obstacle was foolishness, "Ah, who is this idle babbling?" they said on Mars Hill. "Who is this guy?"

You know, it's ironic because whenever Paul went in to preach somewhere, "to contextualize," do you know how he contextualized? He set up obstacles. He didn't take them down. Acts 17, do you remember what happened on Mars Hill? We were there several weeks ago with a group from our church and I was standing on the Areopagus,

that rock again. We had just read the passage and I was looking around and to your left there are old temples and down there in the valley, in the agora, there are ancient temples and then there is the Parthenon to your right and you are standing there looking around noticing what Paul said he noticed and that which stirred him up inside, Acts 16 and 17, and he set up barriers to the people. He said, "I notice you are very religious but let me tell you something, you worship all this stuff in ignorance. Even this altar to an unknown God, you are ignorant of the real God," and then he went on to tell them that God has fixed a day through which he will judge the world and one man is that judge, he is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. So he said he's calling every man everywhere to repent.

Paul sets up obstacles. Paul it seems, wants the Gospel to alienate unless God is drawing and so that's what you see here by the time he gets to the end of chapter 1, "By God's doing, you are in Christ Jesus. Of him." Then just sort of come into the verses we're going to work through, the first five verses of chapter 2. Notice verse 30 of chapter 1, "Christ became to us wisdom from God." What is that? That is everything we need to know about our needs so that is moral wisdom, right? That is the wisdom about all created things; the way things really are; the fact that that there is a God who has been violated and we will be judged and judgment is coming. So there is our moral wisdom. Christ becomes to us the reality of our sinful condition as we were singing about. But then also redemptive truth, the wisdom of Christ regarding our redemption. He tells us of our need. He is the promised Savior. He is the faithful one who became incarnate. He is the one who did his work on the cross and brings regeneration and renewal and sanctification, etc.

So he became to us revelation in all the moral ways we must understand it. Notice he also became to us righteousness. What does that mean? Well, he is the one who explains the righteousness of the Father. "No one has seen God at any time," John 1:18, "the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." He has exegeted God. Do you want to know who God the Father is in terms of his holy character? Look at Christ. So he is our righteousness in that sense and in conversion he also became the covering righteousness that shields us from God's judgment so when you are saved by faith, you are declared righteous and therefore acceptable to God under Christ's covering righteousness. He also became to us sanctification and then redemption. That's just another way of saying that you are set apart unto usefulness to God. He has given you his Spirit to grow you in holiness so that you begin to match what you have already become on the inside and then full glory. The full redemption package. Start to finish. Of him, you are in Christ Jesus.

So how does that affect you when you present the Gospel? Well, we'll see how it affects Paul in a moment but just think about it practically for a minute. If you knew, verse 30 and 31, if you knew that of him you were in Christ Jesus and it is Christ who became to you wisdom for the masses, when you hand out the Gospel to somebody, when you preach it to somebody, your wisdom is not the issue. You can't take away the alienation by adding little clever human answers to philosophical questions. You can't do that. You can't prove somebody into the kingdom through philosophical questions as important as those questions might be. You can't prove someone into the kingdom. Christ becomes

moral wisdom and redemptive wisdom through God's power alone and when you offer someone the righteousness of Christ, God is the one who has to convict you of your need for a covering righteousness otherwise you'll go to meet the Creator of the universe thinking you are good enough on your own. It affects your evangelism when you think of it this way. "Wait a minute, I can't try to be clever. That person sitting next to me and Pastor Caldwell got really stiff on that passage and he could offend this relative and they may never come back to church." That doesn't matter. Of him. Of God this relative of mine will be in Christ Jesus. If God wants to move, he'll move through that truth that way.

I'll never forget preaching Romans and I was in chapter 2 and I was preaching 2:17 which is about Paul's way of chiding the Jews. "Oh, you think you're special because you have the law of God? God is not partial. The Gentiles will not get off because they didn't know the law of God and you will not have special treatment in glory because you had all those privileges." He chides them and he says, "You know the law of God but do you violate it? You say it doesn't steal and you preach and teach not to steal but do you steal? You violate the very law you know," and he says that God is not going to be partial. Well, in that service afterwards, this young lady comes up to me in tears. She is shattered and she says, "I am a Jewess, a practicing Jew and I just got saved right there in the pew." I was like, "Wow." I shouldn't have been surprised but I was gloriously rejoicing with her but I shouldn't have been surprised. God can do that. Why? Because it's of him that you are in Christ Jesus. What a thrill. Now maybe her husband didn't want me to be preaching on the pharisaical hypocrisy of the Jews when he brought his wife who was a practicing Jew but God became to her the wisdom of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the sanctification of Christ and ultimately redemption. That's Paul's thesis.

We could put that into one heading. I'm just going to give you two points this morning so that thesis, all that I just explained, put it under this if you're keeping an outline: every conversion is by God's power unaided. Every conversion is by God's power unaided. It doesn't mean that God doesn't use means to do it like the truth preached but it is unaided by human cleverness, human ingenuity, human power. We bring nothing to it but the tongue that speaks the message. That's what we bring. Hopefully a holy, transformed life to put teeth to what we are saying so that we don't become some unnecessary obstacle. So that's the thesis and now we come to chapter 2, verses 1 through 5 and you can put this all under this heading then: if every conversion is by God's power unaided, then every message must be God's truth unvarnished. Unvarnished. That's exactly what we see here. Notice what Paul says, chapter 2, verse 1,

1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that [here it is] your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

So that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of of man but on the power of God or in the power of God. Paul had one concern when he preached the Gospel. He had a serious phobia when he preached the Gospel and it wasn't that he was afraid of them being alienated. He wasn't afraid that somehow they would persecute him. He got persecuted all the time. He wasn't afraid that they might put him out of the marketplace so that it he couldn't do business. What his phobia was was that someone somewhere would believe some technique, that they would be persuaded by some human ingenuity, something that touches what a pagan wants more than Christ and when you touch what a pagan wants more than Christ, they would believe in that and take Jesus the way they want him. That is Paul's phobia here.

Now, let's just walk through this and it should unfold very, very clearly. First of all, he did not entertain human intellect. He would not entertain the exaltation of human intellect. Notice, "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." By the way, he is emphasizing his arrival there. That's why in the original language he kind of puts all of these terms together, "And I, having come to you brethren, I did not come." That's how the original could be translated so he's just putting all this emphasis right up front. "Listen, remember when I came to you. I did the opposite of what all these other guys are doing. They are flaunting their brilliance." Notice, "superiority of speech or of wisdom." Your ESV translation says, "lofty speech or wisdom." It could be literally translated "according to lofty words or clever rhetorical devices." There is nothing wrong with speaking clearly and even using rhetorical devices to achieve clarity and we'll see that Paul was no slouch in just a moment, but to make the substance of your speech or your preaching, your sermon, your discipleship, your teaching, to make the substance of it some technique of rhetoric was dangerous, Paul said.

That was the issue in Corinth. There was an overexposure to rhetorical technique much like we have an overexposure to multimedia electronics today. We understand today that sometimes how people can even be persuaded by the gimmicks, the graphics, the motion, digital media, etc. etc. I have two of my own, I have a son-in-law and a son that are wrapped up in a massive company, a media and branding company and they show me some pretty amazing stuff that these companies do and it is tantalizing; it is attractive. Well, in the day in which Paul came into Corinth, they were just as enamored with the sophists, they were called. These were guys that would stand up and they would dazzle people by asking philosophical questions that when your heart was wanting to feel intellectual, when you idolized the human mind, when you exalted human intellect and the rank and file crowd came to listen to these guys they were being persuaded by the idea that the human intellect was this amazing thing and we could just capture so much if we could just rise to their level. And so these guys enjoyed sway and persuasion by merely these rhetorical devices that raised questions that people couldn't answer and it made these men seem esoteric and beyond everyone and since the people idolized the intellect in the culture, the sophistry of it, the use of words to show how smart you were, the turning of a phrase in a lofty expression, the newest terms no one had ever heard, mysterious philosophical questions, then they explored these concepts in front of the

crowd and they literally wowed them like you would be wowed by a three dimensional, graphic, high definition visual. That's how it was done. The content wasn't important at all.

So Paul comes into town and he knows the dangers. He's very, very concerned. He's not going to focus on eloquence and deep philosophical insight because that would mean to neglect or deliberately avoid the serious content that became an obstacle to the Gospel. And he knew that if somebody was waiting for Paul to use the same rhetoric, the same temptation to pride would be in the crowd and the Gospel would get murky. If you were a great communicator you had to handle that kind of influence. Man, we see the same thing today. People who have flash growth in some church: they went from 15 to 1,500 in just a year. You don't know if it's a church. Is this unwieldy thing but everybody came for that guy's whatever" his communication ability, or the way he thought, or the way he orders his thoughts or maybe whatever he does on stage. One year, tons of people there. Can he handle that? Paul thought that was dangerous. That was very dangerous. That's a lot of souls to be responsible for when they got there by what, your rhetoric? It might have even been good Bible substance but it's going to be still difficult for a guy that popular all of a sudden to handle that kind of influence. People are prone to pride with those kind of things, not just speakers but audiences. And so notice Paul says, "I didn't come with the lofty techniques of the day." It would have been so easy for him to do but he did the opposite. He came proclaiming to you the testimony of God he says, "For I determined," here it was, "here's what I did, I considered it the only focus to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I knew it would not be popular right out of the gate. I wouldn't be like them. You're attracted to the elevation of intellect. I've got one simple message and if it sounds stupid that's fine because that's the obstacle you need to step over to get to Christ. You've got to stumble over what you think is foolish in order for you to have it." Remember that's what he says in chapter 3:18. Do you remember what he says there? He says, "Let him who thinks he is wise in this age, he needs to become foolish so that he may become wise." The Greek word for "foolish" there is from which we get the word "moron." If you really want wisdom, then you can't run around thinking that men have this exalted intellectual ability to solve all of those questions and answer all of those mysterious mysteries, those things we have trouble delving into.

Paul would not exalt the human intellect because he didn't want to dress the Gospel. "I don't want to know anything among you except Christ and him crucified." It didn't mean just the message that Jesus died on the cross but it was none of the varnished covering, the rhetorical polish and technique that stirred up a crowd to elevate human intellect. He wouldn't do it. And by the way, just so you know as I said earlier, Paul did not abandon articulate communication. We go to seminary to learn how to handle the word of God and then we even have classes to help us become homiletically helpful to you. By the way, homiletics is worthless if it's, "Hey, I want you to add this rhetorical technique and this device because that will really get them." That's useless. Do you know what homiletics is about in seminary training? Clarity, that's all it's about. "Jerry has to learn to eliminate things that take away from clarity in the hearer's heart and mind and I have to add things that would enhance clarity and only for that purpose," like an outline or whatever. In fact, in Acts 14:12 it indicates that Paul was called the chief speaker so he was no slouch when

it came to communicating. They likened him to the Greek God of communication. They said, "Oh, he's Hermes." No, he was all about the disciplines of clarity and sound logic.

But here in Corinth he was concerned because the intellectual time in which they lived, the tendency to elevate the human mind in mysteries and philosophical questions was a concern to him so he just set up a barrier to it. He didn't eliminate the alienation. He just stuck it in the ground right in front of them and said, "I'm going to know nothing among you except this cross-centered message, the scandal of the cross. Nothing among you except that scandal." Why? People must face the scandal and stumble over it. They must. I marvel at how many times early in my Christian life I tried to coddle the people I was trying to share with. I tried to coddle them. It wasn't about living a godly life in front of them, of course I was supposed to do that, but that isn't really the most difficult part. The most difficult part is getting over your fear of man and so in my early Christian life I thought, "Well, maybe if I soften this and I shared the Gospel with that guy and he got offended. He won't talk to me again but I did a thing different with this person. I softened it a little bit and I kind of helped him get around the thing that really offends them about Christianity and they came to church. Maybe that's the way I should do it." Then later, thankfully in the grace of God and the study of his word, I just realized, "Look, if that is the obstacle between them and Christ and you move it out of the way, they will choose another Jesus." They will choose another Jesus. The church has been filled up with people who've chosen another Jesus.

And there are some amazing things here about what Paul says next. He didn't elevate human intellect and he wouldn't elevate human strength in and of itself, self-confidence. Notice verse 3, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." That's very fascinating. Do you know what he's saying? Literally, the terms mean that he was frail and vulnerable in and of himself. That's how he viewed himself. That was the reality. If you got around Paul in his personal life, he was physically beaten up and he was, what he says here, in weakness. He was vulnerable. There wasn't this gratification of man's love for self-confidence. Like the speakers of the day, they came in and there wasn't a question they couldn't answer, there wasn't a peasant mind in the crowd they couldn't stump. There you were, the rank and file. They saw themselves automatically above you and they had all this bravado and self-confidence in the sophist world of Corinth of the day.

Paul said, "When I came to you, you saw my vulnerability. I was with you in weakness." He's not only talking about the physical problems that he had; he had all kinds of physical infirmities including a problem with his sight, his eyesight according to the New Testament. But more than that he's saying, "Look, I didn't have the self-confidence that these men have who come in with all their rhetoric and their cleverness." Do you know why? Because they have seen when they get in front of a crowd that they can use devices and if the people are vulnerable, the people will come. I mean, they have them eating out of their hands. Isn't that the phrase we use? "Oh, he's got the crowd eating out of his hand. That guy's a real evangelist." What do we mean by that? The only thing I want to know is: does he preach an unvarnished Gospel? Because if he doesn't preach an

unvarnished Gospel, he's not an evangelist. If he comes into town and he's got people eating out of his hand what is he doing? Could it be self-confidence? Possibly.

Paul says, "I'm not crafting any technique. When I came to you, you know I was vulnerable." Notice he says "in fear." That's very interesting. This is Paul. Paul had no absence of conviction, you know. The absence of conviction makes one have error and teach false things and live a compromised life but the absence of self-confidence with the true Gospel is what every one of us ought to strive for. You want the Gospel and God's sovereignty in it to crush your self-confidence. To crush it. Why does Paul say, "I was with you in fear" here? Fear and much trembling? It is the word for fear. Basically he had one apprehension, "Look, I can get in the way of the Gospel or mess up its clarity." That was it. So when he spoke, I can imagine even with his confidence and his speaking ability and his well educated background, I can imagine that still when he preached nothing was off the cuff. He didn't pontificate away from the Old Testament Scriptures when he preached. He quoted them often. He didn't walk around and muse on his own thoughts and make it up as he goes seemingly. He wouldn't do that because he was fearful and trembling of either getting in the way of the Gospel with his own self or messing up the message, making it murky. Boy, that is such a different attitude than today's common approach to teaching people how to evangelize.

Look beloved, you will not eliminate the alienation of the Gospel. You won't. The alienation of the Gospel is caused by a dead, corrupt heart and until God in his rich mercy a la Ephesians 2:3-5, until God in his rich mercy quickens that dead heart as you proclaim the unvarnished gospel, the heart will remain dead. The alienation will remain there. You say, "Oh but I've been able to work and massage that relationship and I got them to come to BSF Bible study and I got that person to come to church and they're actually studying this and studying that." Yes, but do you revisit the Gospel with them? Lots of people schmooze on into your Bible studies. Lots of people sign on the dotted line, "Yes, I will keep the charter of this BSF study and I will go to it and oh, I love the Bible study." Yes, but have you ever dealt with the thing that was your obstacle before you came? Because if you've never dealt with that, I have to tell you, I have to give you the unvarnished truth because you're still alienated and you're snuggling up to a Jesus that he doesn't offer.

Paul was so concerned and so he reminds them, "Hey, I didn't have any exaltation of human intellect and I certainly was there without a bunch of human power. My love of persuasion, the culture's love of persuasion, I just threw that off. I wouldn't manipulate people. I wouldn't gratify your love of intellect or your love of self-confidence." And the ability to persuade, notice verse 4, "My message and my preaching were not in the persuasive words of wisdom." What does he mean here? Whatever is fashionable. Whatever put man on display. Whatever was trendy. Whatever persuaded the hearers with manipulative device and technique. Listen, all such things need to be discarded when you're talking with someone because you want to take away all the distractions that attract the flesh and earthy and human vanities. You just want to remove all that. When I'm talking to someone about the Gospel, it doesn't take too long before I can tell if they've had any background with it at all. I can tell why they hav rejected it because it

comes right out of them. They just say it, "I don't like this person or I don't like the church for this or Christians are always this, or what about questions that can't be answered or what about the Bible's written by men? What about those? You don't answer those contradictions." They pretty much come right out to tell you what it is that stands between them and Christ. Maybe a hypocritical church they went to. Maybe a father who did them wrong. Someone mistreated them and called themselves a Christian. Maybe they grew up in a background that was all talk but no life. Or maybe they had no religious background and it all just seems like so much confusion and folly. But when you get them to that point, it's a moment that you want to capitalize on because all the earthly human vanities are now in the background and you want to go after that point. Paul knew that if you could get rid of all those things that stood between them and Christ, then they will have a Gospel that they can rest on rather than some human attraction from within.

In fact, notice the contrast. "I didn't come to you with all those persuasive techniques but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." What is that? What is the demonstration of the Spirit and of power when you give the Gospel, when Paul gave the Gospel to Corinth? Well, it's several things but you can put it all under the category of the evidences of the Spirit of God moving. So when you give the Gospel to someone and they show an initial attraction, don't draw any final hard conclusions about that. If they show an initial attraction, you have to bring them to the word of God and to greater clarity even if you do bring them to church. Don't let them wiggle away and say, "I was originally interested but you got in the way." Don't worry about that. Don't do that.

If they are initially attracted, don't draw any hard and fast conclusions but ask yourself: are the evidences of the Holy Spirit beginning to show up? What are the evidences of the Holy Spirit? First of all, conviction. The drawing work of the Holy Spirit is a work of conviction Jesus said in John's gospel. It's a work of conviction. There needs to be a message that came to that person from God's word about their need and the evidence of the Spirit would be that they are beginning to question it, stare at it, look at it, be overwhelmed by it and ultimately it starts to break down the prideful sense of their own acceptability, their own righteousness. Conviction, John 16:8. And then you're going to be looking for regeneration, the renewed heart and mind. I do not like it when someone for a long period of time snuggles up to Christian verbiage, Christian Bible study environment, churchgoing, all of those kinds of things, if I do not hear them beginning to use the language of a renewed heart and mind. What is that language? Well, I mean, I kind of tell my church that while there's the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 and all those things are wonderful, it takes a while even for a new believer sometimes to manifest some of those character qualities visibly but there should be Spirit-produced at least four basic things when someone is being drawn and comes to Christ. Four basic things and this should come out somehow in their speech if regeneration has happened. In fact, I'm convinced that you can't have a regenerate person without these four things showing up in some way in the earliest speech, the most beginner's language in Christ.

Number one" a love for Christ. "I love Jesus. I don't just love singing about Jesus or being with the people who say they love Jesus, I love him. He is an object of my allegiance and love." Secondly: a love for knowing him in his word. There is a hunger

that begins. Small, embryonic though it may be, there's a hunger that begins to want to know this beautiful Master and Savior that has purchased my life. Thirdly: there should be a hatred for sin. There should be coming out of their language the kind of terminology about their old life and about sin that doesn't represent any kind of love or affection. Certainly a struggle maybe, certainly they are still pulled to the world while they fight to get back in the truth but a growing and beginning hatred for those things that would offend the sweet Savior. And lastly: a love for God's people. "Where are the Christians? I want to be a round Christians. I certainly want to witness to the world but I've got to be with God's people. Are there any more people like this? I got saved. Are there any more people like me that want to sing to him and pray together and, oh what, there is a gathering of them? Take me there. I've got to go." 3,000 Jews on the first day of the New Covenant's preaching ministry. 3,000 souls and they gathered. They loved the Lord. They wanted to know from the apostles how to serve their Lord. They hated the sin of their old life and they wanted to separate it from the self-righteousness of it and they loved each other. That's what it is. That's what Paul was looking for here. He comes strolling into Corinth and he says, "You guys are all about rhetorical technique. Look, I'm going to give you Jesus Christ and him crucified you can call it foolish if you want but that's the obstacle between the Gospel and you. You think it's foolish and you want it proven to you in all of these philosophical arguments, I'm not giving you that. I'm giving you Christ and your need and I'll know when you've changed because I'll see the demonstration of regeneration in your life. I'll see the evidence of the Spirit." The demonstration of power, Paul calls it, because of the Spirit.

Finally, he didn't want a human result. Notice verse 5 and we'll end with this, "So that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God." Do you know what, beloved? We are sometimes far too satisfied with someone's initial interest or long term infatuation with the things of God's people. Paul said, "That is not what I'm interested in. I want to know that your faith rests on God, on Christ." That is the term here: to stand, to exist, to be established. Literally, to sink its footings. We could translate the verse like this, "That your faith should not exist due to the prowess of some human thing. Due to the strength or the power of some human thing, human method. That your faith would not exist or be established or grounded in something about us."

Now, I'll tell you what, through the years, teaching the Gospel, discipling people and preaching, I think I'm beginning to understand a little bit of this phobia Paul had. I don't want anyone going out of my church on a Sunday morning who visited there with anything they can attack themselves to that would allow them to step around the obstacle between them and Christ. Anything. "Oh, we really love your music and we just love the emotion of it." I don't want you buying into a Jesus of emotions. "Oh, I just love the preaching because it answers a lot of really smart questions that I have. I'm an intellectual. I like things systematic. I'm an engineer, I like things laid out. This guy lays it out like that." I don't want you buying into a Jesus that exalts your human intellect. There are all kinds of vulnerability and that's why the unvarnished exposition of Scripture and you are so privileged in this church, the unvarnished exposition of Scripture keeps knocking away all those distracting things and getting them out of the way. You young people in this room, you have right now some idea of the joy of a healthy ministry. You

have no idea the privilege of having all your little subcultural and youth pop cultural things knocked out from under you and you're being made week in and week out to face Jesus, the Jesus of Scripture. That is a privilege.

My kids, they are all married now but my boys will make fun of the reality that when they talk to one another they say, "You know, you remember when we were in high school and Dad told us this and we would argue that he didn't know what he was talking about? He doesn't understand the issues." They would secretly in their rooms say, "He doesn't understand." Then in their early college years, they would call one another or see one another and they would say, "You know, he was right about that. He was right about that. He was right about that. We can't tell him." That's what they'd say, "We can't tell him. There will be no living with him if we tell him he was right about all this stuff." That isn't about me. That's just the Scriptures through the years under great preachers like Dr. MacArthur and then having them in a church where there is all this healthy reinforcing of this teaching. It's knocking out the intellectual arguments against Christ. It's knocking out the emotional attractions to the things that you want. It's knocking out your comfort zone.

Oh, the comfort idolatry, people will choose Jesus if he gives them what they want, what makes them feel most comfortable. I'll tell you this: if people fear physical pain and you give them a Gospel that promises healing, that becomes the salvation message. The prosperity Gospel has made billions upon billions of dollars on that message. God promises you physical healing and so you fear physical pain, then Jesus becomes the healer of your physical life so you've got a different Jesus. Or what about fear of being alone? Suppose somebody fears being alone and you bring him a Gospel of friendship and family? Hey, that's compelling but that's not Jesus. Sometimes he may make you alone. He may leave you alone with no one around and he's got to be enough. What happens if you come to church and you fear conflict in relationships and so the Gospel message promises no more division? Everybody just gets along as long as we get it down to where we can all agree? You're going to have different Jesus, my friend, because fighting for the truth involves conflict and discussion and debate and conviction and sometimes yes, division over the truth. You don't want a Jesus that never has conviction. You don't want a Jesus that it's all about the comfort of physical healing or some comfort in friendship and family where there's no arguing, no being alone. It doesn't matter what your particular idolatry is. You want to live in a world without poverty and crime and disease and immorality? So do I. That's not the physical world, the temporal world, Jesus offers. Jesus offers himself. Whatever world you're left in to give the Gospel, Jesus offers himself.

Notice the supernatural hope that Paul puts as the exclamation, "And I don't want your fate to rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God." Paul has one and only one burden. When he preaches the straightforward, no frills Gospel, he is praying for the Spirit to move, for supernatural fruit. He is looking for the evidence of the power of God and nothing else. Why? Because he knew it's not possible to find God through the pursuit of anything worldly or human. The Executive Director of Grace To You ministries, Phil Johnson, said this not too long ago, "Philosophy, politics, arts, and aesthetics and every

other kind of worldly wisdom, all of those are utterly devoid of any special power to transform a sinner into a saint. We can say the same thing about comedy, entertainment, yoga classes, sex education lectures and all the gimmicks that are used to draw appreciative crowds without really teaching them the true Gospel. There is only one thing that give a sinner a new heart and that is spiritual regeneration, the new birth."

Peter said it this way in 1 Peter 1 verse 23, we are born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the living and abiding word of God. So powerful. Disciples and apostles that would never even pay attention to Jesus and what did he say happened to them? John 15:3, "Now you are already clean through the word which I spoke to you." There it was: the unvarnished presentation of the Father's words in truth about himself to his apostles and they became clean from it. "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel," Paul said, "it's the power of God unto salvation. To the Jew first and then to the Greek." There it is. "I'm under obligation to preach to the whole world and if your are a Jew and all the law, God can save you by his mercy but it isn't going to come through your own self-righteousness. And if you're a Gentile that thinks the Gospel is foolishness, I am not about to remove your little pagan idols out of the way so that you can have Jesus added among them. I'm not clearing out a space for Jesus. We're crushing all the idols. We're smashing them all."

2 Corinthians 10:5, the word of God taking thoughts captive, brings down fortresses of all your idolatries. I want them to face Christ head on whatever alienation that may bring. I don't want to be unkind, I don't want to not be a nice guy, I don't want to walk into some retail store and start pointing my finger. I may end up in jail that way. People think you've lost it; you're not taking heed to the stewardship of your social graces. But the message? I'm not interested in removing the alienation. Not at all. Every conversion is by God's power. Unaided. He must do it and if that's the case and it is, then every message I speak no matter to whom or where, it must be unvarnished truth from God. Amen?

Bow with me.

Lord, we come to you as a people prone to weakness. We are prone to want revival that is manufactured by techniques and our human reason. We get dissatisfied with how many times the Gospel is rejected and we see it in our country, our culture and it makes us discouraged, frustrated, even fearful and in our desire to relive better days or see a turnaround in some revival sense in our own culture, in that fear, we are tempted, mightily tempted to take our cues from the world, to take our cues from people who aren't saved. When they tell us how they can be reached, we can tend to use those techniques. How can an unbeliever know what will reach them? Lord, may we reach them with the Gospel and may we be clear and straightforward, truthful. Give us new courage. Overcome our sinful fears of men. May we not pray for revival with some motive to spend it on our own comfort. May we never manufacture conversions by accepting people who have been able to have Jesus and their obstacle. Lord, use this church, use these believers, its leadership, its servants, in this place with the unvarnished truth and whatever alienation comes, whatever conviction comes, whatever drawing comes,

whatever conversions come, may Founders Baptist Church be faithful and boast only in you for the fruit that comes of it. We pray it in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.