

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

The Power of God's Message

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Introduction

ILLUS: Story of a boy whose church had a stained-glass window behind the pulpit with a depiction of Jesus. One Sunday there was a guest preacher considerably shorter than their preacher and the kid asked, "Where is the man who usually stands there so we can't see Jesus?" (Taken from Wiersbe, 573)

Salutation, Unrealized Potential, because of the Danger of Division, then Paul launches into a 3-paragraph explanation of the futility of division within the church because the Gospel itself is a display of The Power of God's Wisdom, The Power of God's Call, and this morning he turns it personal in addressing the Power of God's Message.

"Corinth was noted for its eloquence ... [so much so that] ... If a man was eloquent in diction and style, they described him as using 'Corinthian words.'" (G. Campbell Morgan, 44)

1 Corinthians 1:18a (NKJV) — 18a For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing ...

“This reality (that the lost are not attracted to the message of the gospel) open the door to a dangerous temptation. We start to wonder if perhaps what we need to do is adorn the cross and make the message more attractive ... and ... spruce up the presentation, [so that] people will respond.” (Akin & Merritt, 42)

This is undoubtedly what had happened in Corinth.

Ephesians 4:11–12 (NKJV) — 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ

“The whole Church is in the ministry. The whole Church is committed to the revelation of this tremendous message.” (G. Campbell Morgan, 41)

The Power of God’s Message ...

Is Not in the Presentation (1)

Before we begin on the presentation, I should say a word about what was being presented.

While most of your translations, as mine, reads “testimony,” there are others that read “mystery” The two words are similar in the Greek language *marturion* and *musterion*. Both have textual support as one is used in 1:6 and the other in 2:7, which bring them into this context. Also, both have manuscript support.

“Either reading would be theologically accurate and thoroughly in keeping with the truths revealed elsewhere in the Bible.” (Patterson, 42-43)

Excellence: speaking of superiority

This is not to say that presentation is not important.

Acts 17:17–18a (NKJV) — 17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. **18a** Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers ...

ILLUS: “To the unknown God” ... quoting their own poets.

1 Corinthians 9:22b (NKJV) — 22b ... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

“Those who minister the Word must prepare and use every gift God has given them – but they must not put their confidence in themselves.” (Wiersbe, 573)

However, it is to say that the presentation is not the priority and should never overshadow the message.

“... using language well is bad if it detracts from or substitutes for the message of Christ crucified.”
(Wilson, 26)

Acts 17:32 (NKJV) — 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.”

ILLUS: the truth is any person with the least gifting in speaking, if he/she has understanding of the context and some knowledge of the audience, can make what would be considered by the audience a good presentation.

“We should not come to church to hear the pastor’s opinions ... We should come to hear a word from the Lord through the pastor.” (MacArthur, 55)

“What we are after is not that folks shall say at the end of it all, ‘What an excellent sermon!’ That is a measured failure. You are there to have them say when it is over, ‘What a great [Savior].’” (John Henry Jowett quoted by Akin and Merritt, 43, from “Preaching” in *Christianity Today*, July 202, 62)

The Power of God’s Message is not in the Presentation. The Power of God’s message ...

Is Not in the Perplexity (2)

When Paul says that he is “determined to not know anything among you” it is not a reference to Paul’s lack of intelligence or education.

Acts 22:3 (NKJV) — 3 “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.

Neither should such a statement be taken as an excuse for a lack of preparation or study.

ILLUS: Those who want go to “cemetery” – seminary.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV) — 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

And, finally, this statement should not be taken as Paul’s final focus of the Gospel message.

He will spend the entire last chapter of this very book talking about the necessity and importance of Jesus’ resurrection.

Paul is speaking here of the foundational point and priority of the Gospel message. That Jesus is God in the flesh who came for the express purpose of dying on the cross for our sin.

This is the simple, clear, foundational truth of the Gospel.

Yet, there are some, as John MacArthur notes, who “will go from church to church looking for the right preacher ... not biblical exposition ... They are not looking for a word from God to believe but for a word from man to consider.” (MacArthur, 55)

2 Timothy 4:3–4 (NKJV) — 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; **4** and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

But the power of the gospel is not found in the perplexity of the message but the simplicity of the cross.

“The cross confronts us with how we really are (sinners) and what we need (rescuing and forgiving grace).” (Paul Tripp quoted by Akin and Merritt, 44)

The Power of God’s Message is not in the Presentation or the Perplexity. The Power of God’s message ...

Is Not in the Preacher (3)

Weakness: can mean sickness, limitation, or feeling of inadequacy.

2 Corinthians 12:7 (NKJV) — 7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (NKJV) — 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

2 Corinthians 12:10 (NKJV) — 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Fear: intimidation, apprehension, anxiety

Leading up to this, Paul had been beaten and imprisoned at Philippi, caused a riot and was snuck out of Thessalonica under the cover of darkness,

moved on to Berea where the mob of Thessalonica followed him so he had to hop on a ship “with all speed, only to arrive in Athens where mocked and maligned, and leaving there he came to Corinth.

Was he fearful because of what might happen, because of the immoral reputation of those in Corinth, because of the educated and philosophical status of the people, because of the probability of being rejected?

Acts 18:9–10 (NKJV) — 9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; **10** for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”

Much Trembling:

Philippians 2:12b (NKJV) — 12b ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling

The Power of God’s Message is not in the Presentation, the Perplexity of the Message, or in the Preacher. The Power of God’s message ...

Is Not in the Persuasiveness (4a)

This again does not mean that in his preaching that Paul did not seek to persuade people. That is the point!

2 Corinthians 5:11 (NKJV) — 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ...

The question is the object of persuasion.

Galatians 1:10 (NKJV) — 10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

If the point of one's preaching is to persuade one to oneself, to one's philosophy, to one's ability, or to a decision – that is a false gospel.

“What you win people with is what you win them to. Youth and children's ministers know this better than anyone.”
(Wilson, 25)

If someone talks you into something, then someone else can talk you out.

As with everything in the gospel message the purpose is to point one to Jesus.

The Power of God's Message is not in the Presentation, the Perplexity of the Message, in the Preacher, or in the Persuasiveness. The Power of God's message ...

Is in the Power of the Spirit (4b-5)

Demonstration: proof

Can't you see that the Power of God's Message is not the in the presentation, the perplexity, the preacher, or the persuasiveness ... but in the demonstration – the proof – of the Spirit's power.

This power it that which was demonstrated in their faith!

“The evidence lies with the Corinthians themselves and their own experience of the Spirit as they responded to the message of the gospel.” (Fee, 100)

This brings Paul’s argument full circle

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NKJV) — 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

“The power that is in the gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be converters of souls, nor does it lie in the preacher’s learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the word of God to give it the power to convert the soul.” (Spurgeon quoted by MacArthur, 57)

This is because the presentation, the perplexity, and the persuasiveness all point back to the “wisdom of the preacher” instead of to the power of God!

Conclusion

The Power of God’s Message is not in the Presentation.

The Power of God’s Message is not in the Perplexity.

The Power of God’s Message is not in the Preacher.

“If the most aggressive and passionate missionary in all history knew these human emotions (weakness,

fear, and trembling), it is not too much to suppose that we will know them also.” (Patterson, 44)

But we must never forget that ...

1 Corinthians 1:27 (NKJV) — 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty

The Power of God’s Message is not in the Persuasiveness.

The Power of God’s Message is in the Power of the Spirit.