

The unfolding of your words gives light.

The Temple of God

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

^{2:1}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^a. ²For I determined^b to know nothing among you^c except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified^d. ³I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much

^a **2:1 I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.** Paul went to Corinth to preach the gospel and faced almost immediate opposition in the synagogue (Acts 18:6). The Lord encouraged Paul to serve fearlessly in Corinth:

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." Acts 18:9-10

There can be no question about Paul's ability to skillfully argue his case. Just read his 13 New Testament letters. But he did not trust in his persuasive arguments. He was encouraged by the Lord that (sorry if this disturbs you) many of the elect were in the city and would respond to the only message that wakes the dead. The gospel really isn't the "testimony of God" if the power is in our talent.

^b **2:2 I determined.** Paul uses the word meaning "to judge or condemn" here. This does not mean he was judging people, but that he was making a decision. Luke used the word in Acts 20:16 of Paul's decision not to go to Ephesus in order to hasten his voyage back toward Jerusalem. Here Paul says he made a decision before he began his ministry in Corinth. Read on to learn of that decision.

^c **2:2 to know nothing among you.** This is not talking about ignorance. It is talking about priorities. Some people turn every conversation to their business or their children or whatever they treasure the most. Paul had decided to become an expert on the main thing he treasured.

^d **2:2 except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.** This must have been very annoying to some people. Paul treasured the person and work of Jesus Christ, so he played on that one string—much to the chagrin of the Jews who craved signs and the Greeks who preferred wisdom (1:22-23). Read the book of Acts from chapter 13 on and you can see that this was his philosophy of ministry everywhere he went. He told the Galatians that he had painted them a verbal picture of the crucifixion (Galatians 3:1) and that he boasted in the cross alone (Galatians 6:14).

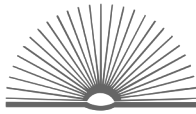
^e **2:1-2 News is too predictable.** Read the front page of a national daily or watch the evening news and you will find the standard fare: Someone did something heinous because he wanted something desperately or hurt someone because he could not control his anger. A celebrity died or was involved in a controversy. A natural disaster caught some people off guard. Even on a slow news day, many of the human-interest stories that make the front page get their intrigue because they spring from the other newsmakers (like the young father who rescued a child from a stolen vehicle or the effects of combat on women).

Things have not changed much since the first century. You do not have to be much of a historian to understand that the Roman Empire had its share of lust, anger, controversial celebrities and natural disasters. The Christians of that era were left with a question to answer: What do you have that makes a difference in my world?

This is why the apostle Paul sought to make his ministry in Corinth relevant to the times. He did not do this, however, by devoting his public ministry to giving movie reviews or "sharing a few thoughts from my heart." He did not seek to put on a show with signs and wonders—though he probably could have. He did not seek to court the Corinthian elite by flaunting his academic credentials—though he had some to flaunt. For Paul, the mission was simple: be an expert at the cross and nothing else.

The applications of this philosophy of ministry for our day are immense. Churches and Christians have become experts at nearly everything but the cross. People even complain when pastors dare to teach theology from the pulpit. After all, who wants hear about the purposeful atonement of Christ when you can hear "six easy steps to a marriage that sizzles"?

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians
Steven Svendsen, Sr.



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trembling^a, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom^b, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power^c, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God^{d, e}.

Here is encouragement for ordinary evangelists:

1. You do not need to help God or the gospel. Take comfort in that. Education is great, but having it does not make your message more believable.
2. You need only concern yourself with one thing. Wise parents encourage their children to pursue excellence in a few things rather than mediocrity in fashionable activities. For Paul the gospel was not just the main thing. It was the only thing.
3. Your talent may get in God's way. In a day of prosperity it is easy to get the mistaken notion that our wealth, talent and technology can win people to Christ. God uses means, but often our pride deceives us into replacing the message with a show.
4. Your friends will be kept by what wins them.
 - If you win them with your slick sales talk they will eventually come across a slicker salesman.
 - If you win them with talk of prosperity they will run away when trials come.
 - If you win them with music someone will get a better band.
 - If what wins them is the message of a violent, bloody death and abandonment by God that they deserved, they will cling to that message.

^a 2:3 **I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.** Paul was evidently not a picture of charisma and confidence. Luke describes the comfort the Lord gave Paul while he lived in Corinth, a city that must have rivaled the moral climate of Sodom:

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." Acts 18:9-10

^b 2:4 **and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom.** Paul did not seek to imitate the popular style of oratory that the Greeks admired. This does not mean that he shied away from public preaching. It means that he believed God would use something more powerful than the best worldly showmanship.

^c 2:4 **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.** An example of a demonstration of the Spirit and of power would be Luke's record of what happened when Peter was preaching to the Gentile crowds in Caesarea:

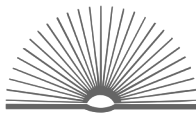
While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. Acts 10:44

^d 2:5 **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.** This requires patience. Notice again the words wisdom and power of God as opposed to the wisdom and power of men. Churches keep people with what wins people. Personality or music style cults fall apart as soon as another church puts forward a better orator or band.

^e 2:3-5 Wealthy nations with wealthy churches easily fall prey to the notion that it is possible to buy what only God can do. Consequently people put their faith in human resources rather than God and His word. Useful church facilities and music budgets and salaried ministers are blessings, but they are only useful as they point people to the only message powerful enough to call the dead to life.

Faith must have an object, but how can you know where your faith lies? It comes out in the way you seek to carry on ministry in the church. A gospel emphasis shows up...

1. When weakness is seen as a blessing rather than a deterrent to God's work. Praying for strength and deliverance is good, but praying for God to show Himself strong in your weakness is better.
2. When human leaders are viewed as instruments of God rather than mini-messiahs. Praise God for gifted church leaders, but remember that the power is in the message, not the personalities.



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3. When you remain confident in the work of God's word even when you cannot see results. Refuse to grumble when your church is not growing as fast as the one across town.

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