

The Foolishness of God, Part 3

1 Corinthians 1:29-2:5

1815

Take your Bible and look at 1 Corinthians 1 again with me, as we'll continue our study of this particular portion of Scripture dealing with Chapter 1, verse 18 through Chapter 2, verse 5. Now from 1:18 to 2:5 we have taken as a unit, and we've said that in this particular unit there is the contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of men. Now we have had to divide the particular passage into three messages because of its length and its importance and this part three and I apologize to those of you who missed parts one and two. But if you want to get the tapes, it'll give you the full deal.

We're looking particularly today from verses 29-5 of Chapter 2. We'll kind of warm up to that point and then go from there. I read this week about a small English village that had a small chapel as many English villages do. The chapel was made of stone and had a rather traditional ivy covered walls. Over the arch when the chapel was originally built they inscribed the words "We Preach Christ Crucified" so that everybody whoever entered would know what they were there for. And there was a generation of Godly men that did precisely that. They preached Christ crucified. But times changed and the ivy grew and pretty soon it covered the last word and the sign said "We Preach Christ." And the Godly men changed. And there were other men who came and they preached Christ, Christ the example, Christ the humanitarian, Christ the ideal teacher. The years passed and the ivy grew and finally it said "We Preach." And they did, economics, social gospel, book reviews, whatever else. And maybe that stands as kind of an illustration of how man's philosophy effects the gospel.

The wisdom of man is really in the business of crowding out the gospel of Christ. And from a historic standpoint as you look at the church that is precisely what has happened. There is no place within the church of Jesus Christ for the mixture of human philosophy with divine revelation. God doesn't need it. If He needed something, He would have said it. Human opinion doesn't do anything but muddle the waters of God's revelation. We've seen how human opinion regarding evolution has taken a simple creative account here and turned it into a mishmash called theistic evolution.

We've seen how that simple principles of the word of God for human behavior and human wholeness have been met together with Freudian psychology and come up with a mishmash known as Christian counseling that does or does not have any positive or redeeming virtue. Now we've seen this again and again with many things, the Bible, the revelation of God has never really needed human philosophy. It only adulterates it. Now that is the context in which we find ourselves this morning, because we are looking at book, the book of 1 Corinthians that deals with problems. Paul wrote this letter to deal with the problems in the Corinthian assembly. They had many problems.

The first of which was the problem of division. The congregation was being fractioned into little groups. First of all, over personalities according to 1:12. They were dividing up according to the men with whom they identified Paul, Apollos, Peter or Christ, but the second cause of division was they

were polarizing according to philosophical viewpoints. As Corinth was so dominated by varying philosophies and it wasn't very far from Athens, which was, of course, the spawning ground for philosophers, they had become a populous divided over philosophical viewpoints. And when they became Christians, they dragged their perspectives, their opinions about the various things in the world into the church and created little groups and rallied around unimportant viewpoint on man's destiny or man's life.

And what had happened was the church had been fractioned into all these little groups. Everybody claiming to be a believer, but everybody adhering to his former philosophy. So Paul writes from 1:18 to 2:5 to try to destroy in their minds this particular issue. To say to them human philosophy is unnecessary. And as we saw a couple of weeks ago, it is unnecessary. Where human philosophy is right, it's right because it matches divine revelation. So if you have divine revelation you don't need it. Where it's wrong, you really don't need it.

So human philosophy is really either superfluous or dangerous. Now when you have the word of God you have the solution to the problems that God wants you to solve. God didn't give us an incomplete revelation. Now we're not saying you should alienate your brain and be ignorant about everything. We're simply saying that God's word is what a man needs. And human opinion only tends to divide rather than unify. So Paul writes this section to contrast human wisdom with divine wisdom and take every avenue he can to show them they can dump human wisdom.

Now as we have seen, and you have an outline that you might want to follow, it'll help you to stay along, we have seen that there are five ways in which Paul shows his point. There are five ways in which God's wisdom is superior to man's. Number one, and we'll review the first three, because we've already done them. Number one, God's wisdom is superior is because of its permanence. He shows this by contrast in verses 19 and 20. Look at them. "For it is written," he quotes Isaiah 29:14, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Now he says that human wisdom is very impermanent. He is going to destroy it himself. He is going to set it aside. It is unnecessary to him.

It is wrong. Doesn't have ultimate answers. In verse 20, he says, when the chips are down and the issue's really there where is the wise? That's the philosopher. "Where is the scribe?" That's the writer. "Where is the disputer?" That's the speaker. Where is philosophy, literature, and rhetoric when you them? Hasn't God shown that the wisdom of this age or this world is foolishness. The best of philosophers, the best of writers, and the best of orators haven't been able to solve any of man's problems. It's impermanent. It's inconsequential. It's go nowhere. And so he says God's wisdom by contrast to this is permanent, because it's implied in the fact that he deals with the impermanence of human wisdom. God's wisdom lasts. God will destroy human wisdom.

All right, the second thing, and we're reviewing quickly, the second thing that shows the superiority of God's wisdom is not only it's permanence, but it's power. It can do that which human wisdom couldn't do. It can save. And human wisdom couldn't save, verse 21. "For since in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God." Human wisdom could not bring about the knowledge of God. But it pleased God by something as seemingly foolish as preaching to save them that believe. In other words, the wisdom of God exhibited in the cross which to the world looks like foolishness could do what all of the world's wisdom couldn't do. That is it could grant to a man the knowledge of God and it could save a man from hell, from sin, from Satan.

You say yes, but verse 22 says that the Jews are required a sign and the Greeks who sought after wisdom, verse 23, rejected it. To the Jews it was a stumbling block. And to the Gentiles something like the cross was moronic. That's the Greek word. You say, what good does it do for God to show how wise He is and He brings along this thing and they all rejected it. Yeah, they did for the most part, but verse 24 says "unto them who are called Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." And the summary, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, the weakness of God is stronger than men."

And you see Paul is taking in these verses this approach. He's saying God's wisdom is superior because of its power. The world by all of its own wisdom couldn't know God, couldn't do anything about sin, couldn't transform men. And that's why, you know, you can work in politics or economics or you can work in education, you can work anywhere you want and ultimately, you never really affect the change because you can't change people. And the world at the best levels of its understanding cannot do what must be done. It cannot bring men to know God and to be redeemed out of their sin. But God's cross did do that and even though it was rejected by Jews and rejected by Greeks there was some who believed and to them it did become power and it did become wisdom. And that just goes to prove that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, 25, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. What that means is the lowest most simple thing God ever did is greater than the greatest things men have ever done. Human effort at its best can't come up to the very base level of God's power and wisdom.

All right, a third thing, God's wisdom is superior not only because of its permanence and power, but because of its paradox. God states the superiority of His wisdom to man's wisdom by redeeming simple humble people. Verse 26, "For you see your calling brethren," look around we saw this, "not many wise men after the flesh," and that literally means not many sophia, not many philosophers, "not many mighty," that is not many influential powerful people. There are a few, but not many. "Not many noble," that's high born. The world looks at three things to determine greatness. Number one wisdom, education, brains. Number two, power and influence, popularity, fame. Number three, high rank.

But God didn't choose very many of these, verse 27, "God's chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. He's chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty." The world confound means to put to shame. "And the low born things," verse 28, "and the things which are despised hath God chosen things which are not." In other words, in man's estimation they're nothing to bring to nothing the things that think they're something. You see here's the paradox, here's apparent contradiction, God wants to demonstrate that He does not need human wisdom. In order to do that, He grants His salvation to humble simple people. And they stand as a living testimonial to the world that God doesn't need human wisdom.

Those things, philosophy, literature, oratory all of that, the high ranking things, the influential, powerful, the intelligentsia, that is irrelevant to God. And to show you how irrelevant, God contradicted human wisdom by choosing the simple and the humble. Most of God's people, most of them, are just plain folks. Just simple people. James 2:5 says, "Hearken my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith." The poor, the uneducated, simple people for the most part have always in history constituted the makeup of the church. The reason is they stand then collectively as a testimonial as a rebuke against the world. As the Gentiles stand to make Israel jealous so do the foolish, the simple stand as redeemed people to make the wise of this world jealous.

As we saw last time the simplest person without any education who knows God knows more than the greatest philosopher in the world who doesn't know God. And what a rebuke that is to human wisdom. And of course, Ephesians 3:10 says that God wants to take the church and put it on display before principalities and powers that they may see in the church His wisdom. There's no place for human wisdom. Now that leads us to the next point in verse 29. This is where we begin. Here is a further reason for the supremacy of God's wisdom. It's purpose. God's wisdom has a far more superior...far superior purpose.

Verse 29, "That no flesh should glory before God." The best manuscripts instead of in his presence say before God. Now notice. Here God removes all human boasting. Nobody can say well, you know, I tell you, I'm a Christian. I was smart enough to believe that. Have you ever thought that? You look at some guy and say how can he be dumb enough not to accept this? And what you're saying is I was smart enough. It had nothing to do with you being smart and him being dumb. You say wait a minute.

Let me show you something. Go back to verse 24. Let's see who gets saved, the smart? Verse 24, "But unto them who are called, elected." God elected people. All right, let's look at verse 26. "For you look around and you see your election." Verse 27, "But God hath chosen," middle of the verse, "and God hath chosen." Verse 28, middle of the verse, "hath God chosen." Why'd you get saved? Because you were smart? Because why? God chose you. You say wait a minute. I had to do something. That's verse 21 at the end of the verse. Yes. "He saved them that," what, "believed." Believed, that was your faith response. God's part was choosing. But just remember you're saved not because you're smart. You say well, I listen to all the logical arguments and made my conclusion. No, you were saved because you were chosen of God in His marvelous grace. And the result of that is verse 29, "That no flesh can glory before God." You can't say here I am God. Remember me, I'm the smart one.

That's ludicrous. In fact, the Bible says God said "My glory will I not give to another." So don't mess around with it. Ephesians 2:8-9, "By grace are you saved through faith that not of yourselves." It is a gift of God, not of works, lest and that's what would happen. Everybody would go around boasting. No, now let's see the purpose in the wisdom of God, verse 30. "But of Him," capital H, God, "are you in Christ Jesus." Listen, the only reason you're in Christ Jesus is because of Him. Did human wisdom get you here? No.

What Paul is simply saying to them is look the purpose in salvation was that God may be glorified. And so in order for God to get the most glory, He made sure that you had the least to do with your salvation. You see? You say yeah, I got saved because of God's wisdom. That's right. The best that man can do at the highest level of his wisdom is nothing. To change his heart or to know God.

Now let me add this. Once you become a Christian, you don't stay ignorant anymore. You don't stay just humble, you know, very long, in terms of not knowing anything. Watch verse 30, this is terrific. "But of Him are you in Christ." The reason you're in Christ Jesus because of God. "Who of God is made unto us," what's the next word, "wisdom." As soon as you became Christian, the first thing you received was wisdom. Who are the truly wise in this world but those who know God. Who are the truly wise in this world but those who know salvation. We're the wise, and we stand as a testimony for all time that God took simple, humble people who didn't know enough to do anything to redeem themselves, to transform themselves, who didn't even have the mind and the mental abilities of the

best of the world and He made us the wisest in existence. And His is the glory, and that's why it says in verse 31, if you're going to glory then you better glory in the Lord.

The purpose for which God's wisdom was granted was that He might receive the glory. And God chose simple, humble people in order that there might not be any question about the fact that salvation is not an issue of intelligence. It's not an issue of man's wisdom, but of His. You know, the moment you became a Christian you really learn something. The Bible even says Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." You receive the truth. You shall know the truth. The truth shall make you free. Let me show you what you learned as a Christian, this is interesting.

This is the instant education you have. And it's a progressive thing as well, but 2 Corinthians 4:6 and I'll show you something, give you a little sequence of verses here. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 it says, "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," and God's in the business of doing that. He did it when He created the world physically, but He also was able to do it spiritually. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shown in our hearts," when we were redeemed God turned the light on. "And he gave us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." Do you see it there? The first thing indicated here that a believer learns when he becomes a believer is the glory of God.

Now when we say the glory of God what do we mean? All that God is. All of his attributes and all of his nature. First thing that happens when you become a Christian is you know God. You know His nature, you know His essence. Before you were a Christian, you did not know God. Now that's an exciting knowledge, isn't it? I mean to not know God the generator of the universe, the source of all light. That's a handicap not to know Him. When you become a Christian you know Him. He shines, he turns the switch on, flips on the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. And it comes through Christ. Let me show you something else you know. You not only know God, Ephesians 1:9, this is something else you know. "Having made known unto us," and this is talking about our salvation, "when we were redeemed, forgiven by grace, He abounded to us in all wisdom," and what does that mean? "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself."

Now mark this, God not only reveals Himself to us, but His will to us. Now this isn't whether you ought to marry Sally or Mary or whatever or whether you ought to work at Lockheed or somewhere else. That's not what it's talking about. What it's talking about is the sweep of God's plan. And that's indicated in the next verse. The dispensation of the fullness of times. Now mark this, when you became a Christian you began to know God, then also you began the knowledge of His will. Boy that's exciting. Now I want to go down to verse 17 and show you something.

Ephesians 1, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of Him." You know Him. Here's something else to know. "That the eyes of our understanding be enlightened that you may know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance." Now both hope, now watch it, and inheritance have a future aspect. Right? We are hoping for the fullness of redemption. We are hoping for the inheritance which is reserved for us, laid aside for us. Now we know this. "The eyes of our understanding are open." Now watch it, when you were saved, you came to know God, God's plan, and your destiny. A Christian then knows where he came from, what he's doing, and where he's going.

Do you see that? Now that is the fullness of knowledge. It comes at salvation. Now that's nice to know, right? You know, the people in this world they go around one, they haven't got any idea where they came from. Unless it's an ape. They haven't got the faintest idea what they're doing here. That's why they become an existentialist. They live for the moment. And least of anything do they have any idea where they're going. Let me tell you, if I only wanted to know three things in this world, those would be three I'd want to know. Where did I come from? What am I doing? And where am I going? And God says in Christ you get those three things. Now that's having wisdom, isn't it?

That's why I say the simplest, humblest Christian person who doesn't know anything in terms of the world is wiser about what matters than the philosophers and sages of all the ages. And the glory in all of it, now you can go back to 1 Corinthians. I don't know, we got a little off there for a while. The great thing about all of it is the glory is God's because we didn't do anything. God gave us this wisdom. If I know where I came from, if I know why I'm here, and if I know where I'm going is that cause to boast? What did I do? All of a sudden I didn't have the knowledge. The next day I did. God gave it to me.

But of Him, of God, are you in Christ. It was an act of God. It wasn't because of you. You're in Christ and Christ is made unto you wisdom. And wisdom is the key to that verse. But in addition to that, Paul can't resist throwing in some other things. You not only received wisdom, but you received righteousness. You say what is righteousness. Shorten it up. Take off the ness, righteous. Then take off the eous, right. Righteousness means before God you stand right as opposed to wrong. Good as opposed to bad, sin less as opposed to sinful.

You say, you mean when I responded to Jesus Christ when God called me and I believed that I stood right before God? That's correct. You see, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says "That Christ was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." So He took our sin and gave us His righteousness. When God looks down at Christian from heaven, He sees him with a cloak over him and it says the righteousness of Christ on it, and it covers the sin. And God declares him righteous. That's because of Christ.

There's a great verse in Philippians 3:9, I'll just read it to you. You don't need to look it up. It says, "And be found in Him not having mine own righteousness but that which is through the faith of Christ. The righteousness which is of God by faith." You don't have any of your own. Paul says, I want to be found having His righteousness. You know, it's a wonderful thing to realize that when you're saved you not only get wisdom, but you also get absolute and total righteousness before God. Your sin is done away.

You say how can God do that? Because Christ took your sin and bore it on the cross, paid the penalty. God is satisfied. Another thing, and we could spend a sermon series on everyone of these, but let's go. Another one, sanctification. That means to be set apart or holy. We'll use the word holy. He not only declared you righteous, but He began an inside work of making you holy. You know, the moment you believed in Christ, the principle of the incorruptible seed was planted in you and as John says, "you cannot continue to commit habitual sin." Why? Because God's holy seed is in you. When you became a Christian, the first thing you began to see was something was going on in your life that never went on there before and that was holiness.

Before you are a Christian, evil all the time. Just sin all the time. When you became a Christian, all of a sudden holiness with intermittent sin. And maturity is the decreasing frequency of those sins as you

eliminate them walking in the Spirit. But you see holiness is something God has done in us isn't it? Paul said to the Corinthians, "now are you holy." Now are you sanctified. And so we not only are right before God and that's a judicial thing, but we actually are made holy and that's an experiential thing. We began to walk in the Spirit. Romans 8 says "We're taken out of the flesh and we are in the Spirit." If so be it the Spirit of Christ dwells in us and He does. Galatians 5 says "The Spirit begins to produce fruit of holiness."

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "The Holy Spirit begins to conform us into the image of Christ. Ephesians 2:10 says "We were created unto good works." Holiness, then he adds another great word in the Christians vocabulary, redemption. You all know about redemption because of Green Stamps and Blue Chip Stamps. You know the Blue Chip Redemption Center can't do a thing for your soul? But that's the idea. You take something in there and you purchase them. You buy back. To redeem means to purchase. And God by Christ has purchased us from the power of sin. Redeemed.

And so we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, Ephesians 1 says. What a promise. And Peter...I love what Peter says, "we're redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the lamb without spot and without blemish." All that is ours in Christ. Look at it. Wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. And what did you do to earn wisdom? You're not smart enough to have known that on your own. What did you do to earn righteousness? "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be made righteous." You didn't do anything. What did you do to be made holy? You couldn't make yourself holy. What did you do to redeem yourself? You couldn't pay the price.

The point is verse 31, "According as it is written, he that glories let him glory in the Lord." You see all that you are, wise, righteous, holy, redeemed is due to the wisdom of God. You did nothing. The philosophy of man, what part does it play. Does it play any part in that? Do you see it there in 30 or 29? No. The philosophy of man cannot grant true wisdom. It can't pay the price for sin. It can't make you holy. And it can't deliver you from sin's grasp, but it will do this, if you let infiltrate the church it'll divide you.

And boy believe me, there are churches that are split all over this country over political issues. There is no need for that. There's no place for that. That won't do what has to be done. It won't give you true wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption. All it'll do is polarize you at points that don't really matter. If you're going to glory and here he quotes Jeremiah 9:23-24, "glory in the Lord." He's the one who has done it all. Just to give you an illustration of this, go to Galatians 6:13. Whenever the church gets involved in politics or any of those things, economics or anything else, it gets into problems, because then you're dividing on nonessentials. Now here, Paul says if you're going to glory, glory in the Lord. That's all. If you're going to boast, just boast in Him. You didn't do anything to do deserve anything.

Verse 13, "Neither they themselves," Galatians 6, "who are circumcised keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised that may glory in your flesh." The Judaisers came into Galatia, they took the Galatian Christians and they confused them by telling them they had to get circumcised and become Jews. And Paul says, they don't care about your souls, all they care about is racking up some more converts. They want to glory in your flesh that you're now a Jew.

Verse 14, "But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, he says there's nothing to glory in but the cross. There's nothing for me to boast about. Another

occasion, I think it's Romans, he says, "I will not speak of anything that Christ has not wrought in me." He says there are two reasons I boast in the Lord. One, "it changed by relation to the world by whom the world has been crucified to me and I unto the world." Two, "It made me a new creation." Verse 15 at the end of the verse, a new creature.

So Paul says it was the cross that changed my relation to the world. It was the cross that recreated me and I will give the honor to the cross. I put no glory in humankind. So all that happens when you do is you cause division. Now let me take you a step further. Go back to 1 Corinthians 1, let's look at Chapter 2, verses 1-5. Paul says then that the party spirit at Corinth is a result of human philosophy. You're divided over different opinions. There's no need for that at all, because all you need is God's wisdom. Number one, God's wisdom is superior in its permanence. It's, secondly, superior in its power. Thirdly, it's paradox. Fourthly, it's purpose. Lastly, God's wisdom is superior by virtue of its presentation. And this isn't really so much a point as it is an illustration of a point.

It illustrates all the former points. Paul says, if you're confused, if you're confused about the issue remember this, verse 1. "And I brethren when I came to you," and here he's getting into historical facts, "I didn't come with excellency of speech or wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God." Stop right there. Now remember my presentation to you? My presentation is an illustration of everything I've just said. When I came to you did I come talking fancy words and human philosophies? And what's the answer? No.

So let my coming to you be the illustration of how human philosophy fits. It doesn't. Doesn't have a place. God had determined to save men not by human wisdom, but by the gospel. So when Paul came to Corinth, he didn't come as an orator and he didn't come as a philosopher. He came as a witness. He came declaring the witness of God. And that's the word from martureis, the testimony, the witness of God. Now witness is somebody that sees something objective, something actual, something historical. He says I am here to report to you the testimony of God's objective facts, not to speculate.

I'm here to give you God's revelation. You know, that's all we're to do. And there's no place in the church for philosophy. Now let me just give you an illustration, maybe this might be one that you can relate to. Some of you have been in the church five, six years. Some of you three, four. Some of you one, some of you six months. Now if I were to ask you to tell me what my view is on economics and what my view is on education, what my view is on social issues, what my view is on politics, what my view is on pending bills and legislation before the State Congress or the United States Congress, I dare say there aren't any of you who could answer what my view is. You know why? Because I never told you. You know why I never told you? You didn't come here to hear that. You could go somewhere and have that. You don't have to drive to Panorama City.

When people say to me is John where can I go and hear the word of God, I don't...there's not one week that doesn't pass that our staff doesn't get phone calls and letters saying do you know of a church in such and such a city where they teach the word of God. You can find people giving opinions all over the place. Just try to find some place teaching the word. Look, I have one task. Here is the testimony of God. I come here to declare it to you. You're not interest in my opinions. Somebody said, you know, you ought to warn the people about the economic situation. I said, no, I can't do that. They said why? I said two reasons, number one I don't understand it. Number two, I don't care about it. I am not an expert on it. I just want to teach them the word of God. They can make up their own opinions.

What's going to happen is going to happen because this is God's world and this God's plan unfolding and every new day is just a different adventure. And you don't come here to hear platitudes. And you don't come here to hear, look at it, he says, "I came not with excellency," or that is supremacy or superiority of speech and philosophy, logos and sophia. I didn't come with all the flowery words and human philosophy. Boy but I'll tell you, you'll hear it a lot of places wouldn't you.

My dad and I were talking about this. He's here this morning, we were talking about this this week, how you turn on your television and there's a guy on there who smiles all the time. And he's smiles and says flowery, flowery things. Words and happy thoughts and nothing. Absolute zero. And it's all very positive. And you can do it, whatever it is, you can do it. And the truth is, most of them can't do it. You can't do everything. And we were talking about the fact that kind of positive bologna that gets pumped out on that deal denies one-half of the whole revelation of God. And that is it denies sin. You don't ever talk about sin. You'll never him talk about it, because it's a negative. And you can't talk about negatives in positive thinking. That's just...that's human philosophy, who needs it.

If you think the Bible is full of positive thinking, you better read it again. I sometimes read the Bible and feel like I just had a wrestling match. I'm so beaten down I can't take it. No, we don't need all that. We don't need all kinds of flowery words that mean nothing. Paul says, I didn't come just offering you a whole lot of human verbiage and a whole lot of human philosophy. I told you the testimony of God. You don't want opinions.

I wrote in the preface of my book, I think I've written it in two of them, that the material is not original. When I start writing material that's original you can throw my books away. Who wants my opinion? God has called me to do one thing and that is declare His testimony. Sometimes I say to myself, MacArthur why are you so dumb. And then I say, I know, that way you never have enough opinions to get in the way of Scripture. I just stick to this and I feel that this is what God has set as the priority. You can only really know maybe one or two things well, and I'd just soon spend my time here. So he says, I didn't come giving you human speech and wisdom, but I came with God's word. That's the first thing. With God's word. The testimony of God. What is the testimony of God? The Testimony of God is, listen to this, it's Jesus Christ. Who does the Father testify to in John 15:26? He testifies to the Son.

The testimony of God is Christ, the gospel. I declare unto you the marturion, the witness of God concerning Christ. "This is my beloved Son, hear Him." Paul says, I'm not coming giving you my opinions and my speculations and my vagaries. I'm coming telling you this is what God said. God says. Isn't that much better? We come together on the Lord's day and whenever we meet together and we say the first thing, let's open our Bibles. Let's look at what God says, not politics, economics, social issues, viewpoints, opinions, human ideas.

Let me give you a further illustration. 2 Corinthians, go back to that 4thChapter again and verse 1. "Therefore seeing we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we faint not." We know our ministry and we stay at it. And here's how it should go. "We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty." Nothing worst than dishonesty in the ministry. There's a lot of it. "Not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully." Being hucksters of the word of God. Using it for our ends, bilking people with it. "But by manifestation of the truth. That phrase ought to be outlined in your Bible, underlined. The primary tasks, the only tasks of the ministry is to manifest the truth of God. That's all. "And therefore commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of

God." We have a clear conscience. And they can have one about us. We have a task, simple task. There it is, manifest the truth, God's truth.

Paul said to Timothy some important things about his ministry and what the priorities were. In 1 Timothy 4 he said this, I like it, verse 13. He said, "Til I come," in other words, here's what you do and you just keep doing it, "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Now that's pretty simple, right? Read, exhort, and doctrine is a synonym for teach. Now let me give you three things that'll tell you what you're suppose to do as a minister.

Number one, read the Bible. Number two, explain it, that's teaching. Number three, apply it. You know what I endeavor to do with every text I ever teach? Read the text, explain the meaning of it, and apply it to your life. That's what he said to Timothy to do. He didn't say read the text, explain the text, apply the text, and then give a few opinions. No, he said in verse 15, "Give yourself totally to that." That's it Timothy, beginning, middle, and end. Read it, explain it, apply it, and then shut it and go home. That's it.

Now later on in 2 Timothy he just reminded him of it again, Chapter 4 again. 2 Timothy 4, verse 2, this is a solemn obligation. He uses DMR turemi in the first verse. He really lays it on him. He's to be challenged to do this. Verse 2, 2 Timothy 4, "Preach the word." Not your own opinion, the word. I cannot for the life of me, I cannot comprehend how any man can call himself a minister of God and do anything but teach the word of God. I mean, what else is there. "Preach the word. Be on standby in season and out of season." In other words, you are ready to fire out when the call comes.

Verse 3, "But the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." Has that time come? Believe me, we can hardly find it. People don't want a sound doctrine. "But after their own epithumia, their own lusts, desires, they will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears." Now the itching ears belong to the hearers not the teachers. They want their ears tickled with beautiful sermons. You see? Nice flowery words. And they'll turn away their ears from the truth and "they'll be turned unto fables."

You know, certain kind of biblical preaching, any kind of biblical preaching that is really biblical preaching is not popular, but there are all kinds of people who want to have sort of a God feeling and they want to go to church. So they'll find one where they get their ears tickled by nice sermons. They go where they can hear what they want to hear. Vincent says this, "In periods of unsettled faith, skepticism, and mere curious speculation and matters of religion, teachers of all kinds swarm like the flies in Egypt. The demand creates the supply. The hearers invite and shape their own preachers. If the people desire a calf to worship, a ministerial calf maker is readily found." He's right.

Paul says, my testimony is this. "I will speak the testimony of God." Not tickle the people's ears by giving them what they want to hear. Believe me, that's what people get. Don't want to bother them. Don't want to upset them. And so people will gravitate from place to place until they find a guy who says what they want to hear. Or else they'll create the need for one and some guy will see the need and jump on the bandwagon and make a mint out of it.

All right, back to Chapter 2, verse 2. Here was Paul saying, "I determine not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." I just zeroed in on the cross. My only design was to preach Christ. Not as a teacher, not as an example, not as perfect man, but Christ crucified,

Redeemer, the Savior. I didn't give opinion, that's revelation. I didn't give speculation. That's fact, right? That's fact. Now he's not saying there that he denied the rest of the Scripture because in Acts 18 it says that he for 18 months declared unto them the word of God. But his emphasis was the cross. And he means by that God's redemptive plan. God's revelation as opposed to human speculation. That was Paul's message.

In fact, it was so much a dominant message in the early church that people thought that the Christians worshiped the dead man. Celsus said, "Christians worship a dead man." And the Palatine Hill in Rome there's some archaeological digging some years back and they found a picture that somebody had drawn to caricature Christians and they had a Christian kneeling at the foot of the cross with a crucified donkey on it. And the bottom of the picture said Alexio Minosworships his God. Now you see that's what Paul meant when he said in Corinthians that to the Gentiles the cross was foolishness.

But be it foolishness or not, Paul never changed his message to accommodate the people, did he? Never. Never. You say yeah and that's why they all stumbled at it. Yes, but for those that were called there was redemption. So number one, now mark it, when he preached, he preached God's words. Number two, verses 3 and 4, when he preached, he preached with God's power. Verse 3, "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling." Now that isn't like him, is it? Usually the earthquakes, but not Paul. Usually everybody in town shakes, but not him. What's he doing shaky?

When he came to Corinth, he was really shook. The fear and trembling here I don't think means physical illness. Some have said that, but I don't think there's any indication of that. I just get a little look at the terms that are used here and the idea of fear and trembling is used in several other passages. It is used for example in 2 Corinthians 7:15, Philippians 2:12, and Ephesians 6:5 and each of those times it has to do with mental anxiety over an important issue.

For example, in Philippians 2:12, "It's work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." It's an anxiety that comes with something that's very urgent. And so Paul says I was in such urgency over you and Corinth was the vanity fair of the world. It was a corrupt city. In fact, it got to be when a person was so debauched that their life was one steady stream of gross immorality. They were said to Corinthianize. That was synonymous with filth. That became the verb for continual prostitution.

And he was in this city and he'd been thrown out of Philippi and had to run for his life. He was thrown out of Thessalonica, he had to run for his life. The Thessalonians traced him to Berea and he had to leave there. He got to Athens and he was about at the end of his rope. Finally he got to Mars Hill and preached and there wasn't a great response. He hustled off to Corinth. He lands here all alone and he's very, very discouraged. He sees a city just dominated by sinfulness, just a filthy place, all alone and he's afraid. He has a terrible mental anxiety over the lostness of the city and he knows that he's hopeless in himself. And so in verse 4 he says, "My speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

He didn't come with his own words and he didn't come in his own power. Believe it. He came in the power of the Holy Spirit. He said, I didn't want to come in my own power, because if I had then you would have identified with me and not Christ. Verse 5, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." I didn't want you to buy a philosophy. I wanted you to be new creatures. I didn't want you to put faith in my speculative ideas. I didn't want you to put faith in my opinions. I wanted you to put your faith in God whose power can transform you.

So he says, I didn't come with logos and karigma, and those are almost synonymous terms. Maybe speech refers to personal contact and preaching to public preaching. But I didn't come with persuasive words. Enticing means persuasive. Didn't come to persuade you to use the right words, to exact the right responses, to draw you over to my opinions. I just came and let the Spirit flow and let His power flow and He and His power were able to change lives. He said the same thing in 1 Thessalonians when reminded the Thessalonians of how it had been with them.

He said, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power and the Holy Spirit." And only that can mean there's a change in a life. Paul was a man with great natural abilities, but he didn't use them. Spurgeon said, "The power that is the gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher. Otherwise men would be the converters of souls. Nor does it lie in the preachers' learning. Otherwise it consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach til our tongues rotted, til 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."

Now you see that is precisely what Paul is saying. I came to you not with a human message, no, no. The testimony of God, the cross, I gave you. And not with human power, with divine power. The reason that your faith should not be standing in philosophy but in the power of God. I'll never forget a pastor said to me one time pointed to a guy after a service. He said, "See that fellow, he's one of my converts?" I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah, not the Lord's, mine." Boy that stuck with me. He made his point. Stott said this, "It seems that only preaching God honors through which His wisdom and power are expressed is the preaching of a man who is willing in himself to be both a weakling and a fool."

You see, God not only chooses weak and foolish to save, but weak and foolish to preach. And the weaker and more foolish you are, the more God's word and God's power can be expressed. So now you know the truth. And hopefully the result is you don't have converts of John MacArthur, but to Jesus Christ. Paul makes his case, don't you think? He makes his case for the fact God's wisdom doesn't need human wisdom. The Corinthians didn't need to bring human wisdom into their church and neither do we. It'll only bring division. May it be that we always unite around God's word and God's Spirit. Let's pray.

Thank You Father for a clear message this morning from Your word. While your heads are bowed for just a minute as we close, there are for every different life here several particular needs I'm sure. Some of you have never met Christ. You're standing hopefully in the wisdom of the world, philosophy of man, but there is no hope there. Maybe this morning you feel like you'd like to put your hope in Jesus Christ and you'd like to have Him made unto you wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. If that's your desire, you can do that right now by just putting your faith in Christ and asking Him to take your life. Transform it. You can do it silently in your heart. Others of you as Christians maybe you've been leaning too much to your own understanding and not in all your ways acknowledging His wisdom. Maybe you need to make a commitment in that area. Others of you know this church stands for the declaration of the word of God and maybe you're saying to yourself this is where I ought to be. Where God's word is honored and human opinions are not given.

Thank You Father for our time together, for the blessing that Your word has been to our hearts. Confirm it to us, use it through us this week to Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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