

PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
September 11, 2005 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

One of the weightier duties of the pastor is to lead the flock. I stand here in this pulpit each week and, from God's Word, proclaim how you are to be and what you are to do as created by God. This is exactly what Paul has done in 1 Corinthians 1 as we have seen over the past few weeks in exhorting these brothers to make Christ the center of their life and duty, both individually and corporately. Paul's message in chapter 1 is two-fold: (1) only the gospel saves, and (2) God saves for his glory alone.

In our text this morning Paul interjects these five verses to remind the Corinthians that he too must live according to the standards that he set forth to them. Paul begins this passage with an emphatic in the Greek, *kagō*, “**And I**” or “And when I.” It is a conjunction showing a close attachment with what preceded it, in this case Paul's argument that salvation was by God's power and wisdom and without the merits of human wisdom (1:30). Therefore, there is no place for boasting except in the Lord (1:31). “**And I**” identifies Paul's relationship to the same truth. As Leon Morris aptly points out, in all that he had reminded the Corinthians in chapter 1, Paul was not making an exception of himself. His preaching in Corinth had conformed to what he had just said [Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 50]. Or, as another writer puts it, *kagō* emphasizes the apostle's consistency with the principles laid down in the preceding verses [Brown, *Greek Key*, 350]. In other words, Paul did not proclaim one thing to the Corinthians and then live another way. Paul's emphatic *kagō* meant that he lived according to the same truths that he presented to those at Corinth. *Paul practiced what he preached.*

We would do well to learn from Paul's use of this unusual conjunction in the Greek. The contemporary church suffers today from pastors who say one thing in the pulpit and live another way out of the pulpit – as if there is some different set of standards for the clergy. We could mention the names of many who have stood in the pulpits of some of the largest churches in America and have fallen with a great fall. We could look at others who have run enormous parachurch ministries whose outcome was the same. As a result of these failures, pastors today are not highly thought of by those outside the church because the only thing the world knows about the pastorate, and by implication, the church, is what is shown on the 6:00 news. This does not even take into account the numerous accounts of moral improprieties in small town pulpits all across not only this country but around the globe. The pastorate is viewed as scandalous by many because of these that failed to practice what they preached.

In these verses we have what I believe to be a warning as well as a roadmap for the pastorate. Paul sets forth what the pastorate is to look like, how ministers ought to be. Paul reminds these at Corinth how he practiced the work of the ministry while he was with them for eighteen months. He describes the *mindset* he had when he came to them, the *manner* in which he came to them, the *message* that he proclaimed to them, and his *motive* in coming to them and proclaiming the gospel.

I. Mindset in which Paul came to them (v. 1-2a)

Paul has already noted that the gospel of God cannot be *obtained* through human wisdom (vv. 18-31). He now sets out to demonstrate that the gospel of God is not be *presented* or *proclaimed* in human wisdom either. In verse 2 we read that Paul, “**Determined to know nothing among you.**” Paul was self-conscious of his role and calling in bringing the untainted,

undiluted gospel to Corinth. He was **“determined,”** “resolute,” or “unyielding” that they receive **“the testimony of God”** and not of man. Paul did not come with his own words, but with the words of God. His message was God’s message. So we see Paul’s mindset, his determination, to speak the very words of God to those at Corinth. The pastor’s goal is to proclaim God’s message in God’s way in God’s power so that it is received as such and God alone gets the glory. As Luther said, “When the preacher speaks God speaks and whoever cannot boast like that should leave preaching alone for he surely denies and blasphemes God.” Luther had a way of cutting to the chase! Does this mean the pastor is always right? No. What it means is that when he errs, it is not God speaking.

1. Not eloquently – Presentation of the message

Illus: seminary training – Volume, pitch, intonation, projection. Pulpit skills

Paul does not totally discount oratorical and rhetorical devices. There is nothing worse than a boring preacher! Martyn Lloyd-Jones believed that one of the primary reasons for the decline in church attendance in his day was that there was not enough attention paid by the preacher to these oratorical skills. I suspect Paul would agree. Paul is not saying here that oratorical skills or rhetorical skills are unimportant. However, Paul is very careful that he does not fall into a trap of cheapening the gospel by dressing it up or adorning it so that it might be more understandable and more widely accepted. He had already mentioned this in 1:17. To present the gospel in “cleverness of speech” or **“superiority of speech”** would be to rob the gospel of its power; it would be a man-centered gospel and not a God-centered gospel. This to Paul was unthinkable.

Some of you might have seen the article about *Soul Magazine* in Friday’s Religion section of *The Birmingham News*. *Soul Magazine* is an attempt to meld the secular and the spiritual in a single publication. The magazine’s creator was quoted as follows,

“If you continue to make people feel that their lifestyles are going to make them go to hell, without showing any love, then you’ll lose this generation. The church as a whole has come to the revelation that the old ways of trying to get the gospel out don’t work for the young generation. If you want people to hear the good news, *you have to make it really good news.*”

Paul would fail in what one well-known writer and seminary professor called “Marketplace Preaching.” To be an effective “Marketplace Preacher” one must be careful not to use the word “sin” because people do not like to be told that they are sinners. You should not use words like “bloody” in regards to the cross or the sacrificial death of Christ because this might be gory to some. And you certainly should not use words like “judgment” or “wrath” because this would probably not be popular with most. So this writer spends an enormous amount of time, energy and pages trying to show how one can preach the gospel in our culture using words that are not quite as offensive. Needless to say, Paul would probably flunk this professor’s class. However, this approach to gospel preaching and attempts to meld the secular and the spiritual in our churches are more popular than you might think.

2. Not philosophically – Facts of the message

Paul’s gospel was not simply His opinion, but the **“testimony of God,”** the very words of God, God’s truth. He was not simply presenting the facts according to human wisdom; he was presenting the revelation of God. Again, Paul is not here discounting the importance of the intellect as it relates to the gospel. The gospel must be comprehended. The pastor is to preach to

the mind as well as the heart. A gospel that bypasses the mind can have no objective reality and is a gospel based entirely upon feelings. The gospel must be understood, grasped by the mind. However, Paul understood that the gospel is more than simply a mind thing, something simply to be contemplated and discussed.

Consider something with me for a moment. Paul knew of the Corinthians boasted of their learning, their wisdom and philosophy that excelled that of even Rome and Athens. Paul had just proclaimed a straightforward gospel message to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at Athens before coming to Corinth (Acts 17:16-34) with little or no success. If ever there were a time for Paul to change his approach, it would have been in the time between Athens and Corinth. If ever there were a time for him to adapt his message to the intellectual climate of the day, it was then. But he persistently, steadfastly, determinately continues to consider the exclusivity of the gospel message.

We must be careful we do not misunderstand Paul here. He is not discounting a cross-cultural approach to evangelism. He is not saying that we are not to contextualize the gospel. It was Paul himself who said to these same Corinthians, “I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). However, while our *method* in presenting the gospel may be adapted from culture-to-culture, the *message* must never change. The gospel must stay in tact. It is **“the testimony of God.”**

II. Message which Paul brought to them (v.2)

Paul describes the content of the gospel message as **“Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”** This is **“the testimony of God.”** Paul elsewhere identified **“the testimony of God”** with the gospel in 2 Timothy 1:8 where he exhorts his young Timothy, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.” It was that **“testimony of God, “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”** that Paul sought not only to preach (1:17, 23), but, as he writes here **“to know.”** These at Corinth, who had become enamored with the wisdom of the world, needed to remember Paul’s message of true knowledge and wisdom found in the gospel alone. Paul’s determination **“to know nothing”** was not a statement of anti-intellectualism but a reaffirmation of what alone mattered, to know **“Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”** It is to know, as D. A. Carson wrote, “What God has done in Christ Jesus” [Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 37].

(1) Person (“Jesus Christ”) Deity and humanity

(2) Work (“Him crucified”) birth, perfect life, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, session

Now at this point, some of you might contend that Paul preached about other things than the gospel. Paul taught about the Law and sin; he dealt with eschatological things, things concerning the end of time; he preached the fruit of sanctification in the life of the believer; he taught on marriage and divorce; he mentored young preachers; and many other things. But what we recognize, in reading Paul on all of these and other issues, is that he always makes a beeline to the Cross. And so, when he deals with divisions in the church, the solution is Christ. In chapter 5 when he deals with sexual immorality, immoral temptations and church discipline—Christ. He follows in chapter 6 in dealing with lawsuits among brothers—Christ. In teaching on how to live in our homes—Christ. In dealing with forgiveness—Christ. Spiritual giftedness—Christ.

Generous giving—Christ. Need I go on? There must be the scarlet thread of the blood of Christ interwoven in all of our preaching and teaching. It must be **“Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”**

Spurgeon put it so well when, after preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle for 15 years, he told his theological students:

I have been preaching nothing but this name of Christ. That, brethren, is the magnet. He will draw His own to Himself. If we cry out to see conversion, this must be our preaching, more constant preaching of Christ. He must be in every sermon. He must be the top and bottom of all the theology we preach. [Quoted by Joel Beeke, audio sermon, *Paul’s Model for Ministry*, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, www.sermonaudio.com]

Given this message that is to be Christ-centered, you as the congregation should know what to expect when we come together. Christ must be the top and bottom off all the theology we preach. If we are dealing with evangelism, we bring Christ. If we are dealing with salvation, we bring Christ. If we are dealing with sanctification, we bring Christ. If we are dealing with glorification, we bring Christ. If we are dealing with the Church and her leadership, we bring Christ. If we are dealing with heaven and hell, we bring Christ. You name the doctrine, we bring Christ!

This is also the center of Christian living. If you are struggling with sin, run to the only one who can forgive that sin. If you are struggling with prayerlessness, turn to the great High Priest and perfect intercessor. If you are struggling with love, turn to Him who loved Himself and gave Himself up for us. If you are struggling with holiness, run to Him who is perfectly holy. If you have an overwhelming burden, cast it upon Him whose burden and yoke is light.

This is what it means **“to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”** As Joel Beeke put it, “All of your religion stops short if you don’t have Christ” [above audio message]. He goes on, “Every problem you have is designed by God to drive you to Christ.” Let that sink in! Do I really preach as if Christ is sufficient? Do I live as if Christ is sufficient? Do you live as if Christ is sufficient?

“He cannot long talk about Christian joy, or Christian ethics, or Christian fellowship, or the Christian doctrine of God, or anything else, without finally tying it to the cross. Paul is gospel-centered; he is cross-centered.

That is more than a credal commitment; it sets out Paul’s priorities, his lifestyle, and, in its context, his style of ministry.” [D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 38]

III. Manner in which Paul came to them (vv. 3-4)

1. Frame of mind (v. 3)

Prior to Acts 18; imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:22-24), beaten and/or run out of Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:10, 13-14) and scoffed at by the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at Athens (Acts 17:32). And when he does come to Corinth and is able to completely devote himself to the preaching and teaching of the word, he was resisted and blasphemed by the Jews (Acts 18:5-6).

If ever one had what seemed to be a valid reason to quit, it was Paul. But he continues on **“in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.”**

“weakness” - 1 Cor. 1:25, 27

“**Fear and with much trembling**” refers to Paul’s overwhelming concern with his inadequacy to present the enormous truth of the gospel. (**Read Acts 18:4-11**) Paul understood that eternal consequences were at stake. So, when Paul says that he came to them “**in weakness and in fear and in much trembling**” it is simply a statement of his humility and his absolute dependence upon the power and presence of God to perform his task.

2. Frame of spirit (v. 4)

Paul wrote that his message and preaching “**were not in persuasive words of wisdom.**” Paul does not discount all persuasion out-of-hand. To do so would be to contradict himself in **2 Cor. 5:11** – “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.” But he avoids persuasion that is manipulative. A manipulative gospel according to human wisdom has no place in Paul’s ministry of the gospel. Paul’s desire, and that which caused him to approach his preaching in weakness and fear and with trembling, was that the power of God might be demonstrated in his preaching so that there could be no argument against the power of the Spirit in his message. This is what “**in demonstration**” means. It is a legal term that brings forth the strongest evidence. So Paul’s preaching was “**in demonstration of the Spirit and power of God, not in the persuasive words of wisdom**” or man-centered manipulation. Paul’s concern was that others might see and hear Christ – not him! He would agree with the statement that the preacher is to simply preach the message and get out of the way.

For me, this is one of the most taxing jobs in sermon preparation.

We are to set forth the truth as “logic on fire” as Lloyd-Jones wrote.

We are to be convincing and persuasive without coercing or manipulating.

We are to be serious and passionate at the same time.

We are to be simple but not cheap.

We are to be forceful and confrontational, yet not exasperating.

How can one do this? It is impossible without the work and power of the Spirit. The preacher walks a fine line between presenting the message in the demonstration of the Spirit and in presenting it in the persuasive words of men. The preacher must remember the great danger that comes with lapsing into manipulation: If you can talk someone into something, someone else more convincing than you can talk them out of it. The gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). The preacher is simply to herald the good news of Scripture (contrary to *Soul Magazine*) and allow the Spirit of God to do the rest. He doesn’t need our help.

“Because Paul’s preaching was so simple and unpretentious, its astounding results demonstrated convincingly the power of God.” [Vaughan, *1 Corinthians*, 32]

IV. Motive for coming to them with this message (v. 5)

Paul’s singular motive for coming to Corinth with the power of the gospel of “**Jesus Christ, and Him crucified**” was that their faith would be established upon, rooted in Jesus Christ alone! Paul knew that this type of faith would be the only faith that would last, the only faith that would endure all for the sake of Christ. What is faith?

4 Types of Faith (from Phil Newton’s *Way of Faith*):

1. Historical faith, which means that a person believes what the Bible says because they have been culturally conditioned to believe it. In communities where the Christian faith is strong or there is a strong sense of divine authority, a person who does not believe the Bible's message about Christ might become an outcast. This happens due to the strong social and cultural influences which often have roots in Christianity. The only problem is that this kind of faith cannot save. The demons of hell exercise this kind of faith...and they certainly are not saved! You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder (James 2:19).

2. Temporary faith, which lasts for a while, then fades away because it does not have any roots. Jesus describes this in the parable of the sower in which the Word of God is sown upon a heart with shallow soil. Just like a little seed which germinates in shallow soil, there springs up what appears to be life. But because of the shallow soil the life is only temporary and quickly withers. And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away (Matthew 13:20-21). Some people have a religious experience or even have great excitement about the Christian life, possibly even making a public profession of Christ. But if the Word of God does not take firm root in his life by its saving power, this kind of person quickly fades away when the demands of the Christian life confront him. This kind of faith cannot save.

3. Miraculous faith, which describes those individuals who through some means or another are able to perform miraculous works and because of this they believe themselves to be saved. Judas Iscariot followed Jesus Christ for three years and was even involved in doing miraculous works. Yet he perished in hell! Pharaoh's magicians imitated the miracles of Moses for a time, yet they were by no means believers! Jesus warned against this kind of false faith in Matthew 7:21-23: Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you: Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

4. Justifying faith or saving faith, which is a gift of God given to us that we might believe the Person and Work of Christ on our behalf. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and *that* not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). Let's clarify this wonderful gift of saving faith.