

1. Biblical Preaching is Cruciform Preaching

a. Weak preachers glorify God - “And I”

- i. He is alluding to himself as another example, alongside of the Corinthians, of God’s sovereign election and powerful strategy of the humiliation of the cross
- ii. Just as they were examples of God’s choice of nobodies, so is Paul as preacher an example of nothing to boast in

b. He didn’t come with “superior” wisdom words

i. Literally “superior words of wisdom”

1. In the Greco-Roman world, rhetorical polish was greatly admired, even if the argument was weaker
2. One could make a name for themselves by their use of wit, flourish, emotional power, charisma, and loquacious verbiage.

- a. We still see this today in advertising, political spin, late-night talk show monologues, news shows which can fill up an hour and say nothing “new”, with nothing to say but can say it in a way which keeps us watching and listening, of comedians as gatekeepers of truth
- b. We are moved by beautiful words, smooth-sounding words, emotional appeals, but we may also be moved towards empty value

ii. In fact, according to Acts 17:16ff Paul tried to argue to the Athenians, on the Areopagus, one of the greatest places of Greek wisdom, that Jesus was acceptable in their worldview.

1. He quoted their poets, alluded to their wise men’s words, tried to fit Christ into their altar systems

2. This was not merely contextualization, but an appeal to their wisdom as *sufficient to judge* the gospel’s veracity

a. The Athenians by and large rejected the gospel – no church planted

b. Then, he went to Corinth – having learned that “superior words of wisdom” are not the power of God, but only the gospel is the power of God – “I know nothing but Christ and this one crucified.”

c. God’s church isn’t built upon the genius of man, or the stratagems of man, or the powerful marketing principles of man, or the amazing rhetoric of man, or the decisions of man

i. The problem of such foundations is not the use of careful, articulate, beautiful words (Paul was such a speaker and writer, learned and fascinating) but rather the dependence upon *methodology* more than *the Holy Spirit*

ii. The apostle knew the difference between preaching Christ and attracting a following; between proclaiming the gospel and branding a movement; between growing a group built on slogan and tickled ears and building a church built by the crucified Christ, the power of God; between the Spirit and the Flesh; between an orator and a preacher; between being humbly True and “humbly” cool; between humility and hipster

d. His words and reasoning were not built upon an argument that held “superior” within the words themselves, as though they were winsome/valued by the world

i. How can the eternal work of God be built upon such sophistry?

1. We, the Church, have tried for too long to be winsome to the world, to attempt to persuade the world *according to its own values*; making the gospel

out to be a therapy to grant them the happiness that they long for, when they don't long for God, but for self-rule; a morality of self-love where God exists to serve their desires rather than we existing to serve His glory; a gospel of self-image whereby God is just a larger version of their idealized self – Me writ large with greater power

2. Then, we packed this anti-gospel and its false promises in the garb of Madison Avenue: flashy images, from hippy pow-wows to hipster coffee bars, all trying to attract and persuade the world *on its own terms*.
- ii. Look at how we market the gospel like the world would market its own products
 1. “God has a wonderful plan for your life.”
 - a. Do we mention that this wonderful plan involves a cross, dying to your own desires and needs, and absolute submission to the beautiful King?
 - b. How do we presume the world will define “wonderful plan”? Are we being honest here, or are we attempting the “bait and switch” of “words of wisdom”?
 - i. Thus, what are we proclaiming is the power of God – A person's choice or Christ's cross?
 2. “I'm lovin' it!” – the danger of the personal testimony gone awry
 - a. We make Christ Jesus, the supreme King with authority over heaven and earth, to be equitable to a nice afternoon at the lake, or a really good steak, or a really cool party that Budweiser actors would feel at home in – a *feeling that we get from Him* rather than the historical Truth, which is true whether I feel like it today or not
 - i. Feelings come and go, but the gospel is unchanged
 - ii. Your heart shifts and fades, from sorrow to joy, grief to delight – a “testimony” of your personal feelings will, too
 - iii. Let's be honest: If you ask me how I felt this morning, you would have gotten a very different eyeful and earful than what you expect a pastor to feel like on a Sunday morning!
 - iv. I don't always feel like God is great. I don't always feel like God is glorious. I don't always feel like I desperately need Him, but these things are objectively true. **Ask me what is true, not how I feel! I need to hear and know the TRUTH not how I feel when it comes to preaching.**
 - b. While our testimonies are true and valuable, we don't testify of our own hearts, affections, or joys, but we testify of the historical certainties and works of the historical King Jesus!
 - i. It is the “testimony of God”, not “my testimony” or “testimony of my heart, affections, or joy”
 - ii. The testimony of God is the power of God is the gospel of the crucified Christ
 - iii. It is an announcement of what God has objectively done, the interpretation of what He has done, and the call to entrust yourself to Him in the light of what He has done in Christ
 3. **Meme of Luke 4:7**

- a. How many times have we presented the gospel as a “God will give you your heart’s desires” without the call to holy desires the cross proclaims?
- 4. Even “God loves you” is dangerous when preached as a half-gospel!
 - a. Our society has few problems believing that God loves them: “of course He does, I’m awesome, and a good God doesn’t condemn anyone!”
 - i. We view God’s love as powerless to resist me, thus resistant to condemn me
 - ii. Love, today, means approval and seeking another’s *happiness*
 - iii. Love, biblically, means pouring out your strength to build up another’s *holiness* – to see and savor God, for which you were made (think of God’s Trinitarian love – self-giving; other-glorying; rejoicing in truth and holiness, etc).
 - b. God’s love goes way deeper than the world’s view of love: it hates sin; it destroys it, it consumes it, it annihilates it
 - i. And God is opposed to those who stake their claim upon their own power, wisdom, righteousness
 - 1. He is an enemy of sinners
 - ii. So, what does it mean that “while we were enemies, Christ died for us”?
 - iii. It means that God loves His enemies and sent His Son to die to redeem them from His own just wrath against them.
 - iv. It means that His love says “no!” all the way to the Cross
 - c. The world rejects a God whose love involves holiness *on His terms* and the only thing that alters a person’s heart on this is the Holy Spirit
- e. Biblical Christianity in the world today is an ongoing miracle of God’s gracious power, and if that is so, then Christian preaching can and must be dependent upon divine power
 - i. Thus Paul recognized that transformational, power-of-God, preaching came with the Spirit of God and power
 - ii. The Spirit must *prove* the Truth of the gospel to the hearts of man
 - 1. We seek to persuade hearts, to move men to action, but the *certainty* that the gospel is True comes only from the Holy Spirit – and this *certainty of conviction* is His power
 - 2. “Demonstration” here means “to prove” – Paul knew that His words weren’t even able to make the gospel “plausible” to anyone! Only God convinces men.
 - 3. The change of heart that sees the folly of the cross as the wisdom of God is a complete miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.
 - iii. I must confess that I have leaned too lightly upon the Holy Spirit through prayer in our proclamation of the gospel, fearing preaching it because I was relying upon the perception of the wisdom of my words and not upon His miraculous power
 - 1. Francis Schaeffer - "I wonder what would happen to most of our churches and Christian work if we woke up tomorrow morning and everything concerning the reality and work of the Holy Spirit, and everything concerning prayer were removed from the Bible? I don't mean just ignored, but actually cut out—disappeared. I wonder how much difference it would make?"

2. We Must Choose to Preach a Cruciform Gospel in a Cruciform Way
 - a. Paul “decided” – He chose something for himself
 - i. There is a conscious choice in how we preach
 1. In weakness (in the eyes of the world)?
 2. In strength (in the eyes of the world)?
 3. Are we content to be weighed and found to be uncool, uncouth, unkind?
 - ii. To know nothing
 1. This is in the context of “superior words of wisdom”
 - a. That is, it is not that the words of Paul’s preaching did not have meaning or referent, but rather that he recognized that he could not convince someone of the *value* of the gospel
 - b. Thus, it is the *valuation* of the gospel truth that is rejected by the world, not a lack of intellectual grasp
 - i. This is how Paul can say in Romans 1 that though the world “knew God, they did not honor Him or give Him thanks” (v21)
 - ii. That is, we suppressed the truth because we didn’t value it as sufficient for life, instead “exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for the futile images of created things”
 - c. To “know nothing”, then, is to stop relying on trying to make the gospel valuable to a world which does not value God by the means of smooth-sounding speech intending to persuade a change of *opinion*
 2. He did not try and elucidate the strength of the world, the wisdom of the world, or the somebodies of the world
 3. He came in last place, as a fool to the world, a dolt, a bigot, an ignoramus, a “know-nothing”
 - a. Are you and I willing to be uncool to the world?
 - b. Are we willing to be seen as “haters” or “ignorant” (know-nothing)?
 - c. The gospel compels it!
 - iii. Paul made a choice on how to preach because he believed the following:
 1. Only the crucified Christ is powerful enough to redeem the Universe
 - a. This is the paradox of Christ: He IS the paradox –
 - b. You look at Him crucified and you see a bloody, tortured, weak, dying, condemned, humiliated man – and the gospel says that this is life, redemption, sanctification, righteousness, and triumph to renew the world
 - c. Paul revered this foolishness of God which is wiser than man; this weakness of God which is stronger than man
 2. Not with words of eloquent wisdom as the power of transformation, we will fail
 - a. It is worse than a lost opportunity, it is an erroneous preaching which empties the cross of its power
 - b. It is possible to empty out the cross by the way in which we preach, in what we depend upon to transform people (wisdom or gospel), and create hollow churches, empty of power, with shallow unity around slogan and pamphlets, billboards and bumper stickers.
 - b. He decided to come in weakness preaching Jesus Christ and this one crucified
 - i. “except Jesus Christ, and this one crucified”

1. The major characteristic of the Christ, both His nature and His work, which Paul emphasizes here is that of His humiliation, which is also His heroic triumph
 - a. Vicarious – 1 John 4:10
 - b. Humility – Philippians 2:4-9
 - c. Foolish – John 3:19
 - d. Raised – 2 Cor 13:4; Rom 1:4
2. The Cross reveals a Hero whom the world cannot accept because it implies three things: judgment, weakness, and humiliation
 - a. Not only is the Christ weak and humiliated – a loser
 - b. But to come to Him for salvation from judgement you must become powerless and humiliated – a loser with no power, worth, or wisdom
 - c. This is the essence of repentance: coming “undone”, rather than doing
- c. In like manner, preachers must be *cruciform* as well
 - i. That is, in the same shape and manner as Christ Jesus crucified, risen, and going to renew all things
 1. Humble – downward unto death
 2. Vicarious – downward to death for the sake of others
 3. Foolish – downward to death for the sake of others while devalued and despised by those for whom you are going downward to death
 4. Raised – Just as God vindicated Christ in the resurrection, so He will vindicate His people, raise up to the eternal glory which cannot compare to the cross we bear here and now
 - ii. Our preaching must not come in the power of the world, on the world’s terms, trying to appropriate the world’s values in order to present Christ
 - iii. It must come in our weakness, as sinners saved by grace, who *needed* the atoning work of Christ and who presently need the sovereign rule of Christ
 1. We preach as those who have no wisdom to rule ourselves, no desires which would bring life, no affections which would delight our hearts, *except for Christ...crucified for us*
 2. We choose to come as those without power in ourselves, without wisdom of our own, without rank or merit or name, nobodies of our own making – but redeemed by God’s sovereign grace through the cross of Christ
- d. Cruciform preaching produces supernatural (God’s power) Churches
 - i. From the beginning to the end Christianity is supernatural, and cannot be explained by anything else
 - ii. If our churches can be explained by the powers and privilege of the world, then they aren’t built on the cruciform frame, that is, they are not built by the power of God
 - iii. In this manner, the only boasting can go to the work of the Holy Spirit (supernatural) and not to the eloquence or privilege of Man, and God alone gets the glory for the building of His Church in such an inglorious manner – gospel irony
 1. It is a message of weakness and foolishness preached by a weak and foolish messenger and those whom He calls are filled with the certainty of its Truth by the Spirit of God alone
 2. This is how God builds His kingdom – “that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”
 3. Valley of Vision – Puritan Prayer

Conclusion:

You have a decision to make today. The Bible is clear. The gospel is true. Let us not be intimidated and let's not be depressed by our ordinariness and inadequacy and unimpressiveness. We feel inadequate because we are! God did not fail to perceive this. It is OK with Him, and He wants to give HIS power to you in order to proclaim His story of His Son. The sacred mission is the story of the cross, which the Holy Spirit empowers through proclaiming it through people marked by the cross...cruciform.

Let's not disembowel the gospel by trying to make it palatable to a world who loves the darkness more than the light. Let us trust the strategy which God has revealed; the strategy which God took upon Himself when He sent His Son to be a worthless nobody from Nazareth and who was crucified by this brilliant world. And now He sends us out to preach His message by His power. You are fully equipped in every essential with the testimony of God, the message of Christ crucified and the power of the Holy Spirit. Choose today to stake your entire life here! If you will, God's power will be upon you, even in your weakness. He has promised, and He will make it so.