

A Christian's Driving Passion

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

As we live out our lives here on earth we face all kinds of decisions and we make those decisions based on a number of factors, but behind all of them is something that acts kind of like an engine that drives us to do what we do. The engine that governs our decisions is what our passion is – what we care most about, what's most important to us.

You can see what's most important to people by looking at the decisions they make and how they live their lives. For some it's notoriety that drives them – their passion is to make a name for themselves. For some it's comfort – they're governed by the desire to maintain a life of ease. For some it's duty – they owe it to someone or something. For some it's security, for others it's success, and the list goes on. These kinds of things are deep inside us and act as an engine to drive what we do.

What's the engine that drives you? What should it be as a Christian here on earth? What's most important? As people look at your life, what do they see?

We're studying the book of 1 Corinthians, which is a letter written by the apostle Paul, and Paul had a passion that drove him to do everything he did. It gave him direction for what to do and why to do it and it influenced all the decisions he made. It's a passion that I believe should ultimately govern the life of every Christian. So today, as we study a portion of this letter, we are going to see what that passion is and how it compares to ours.

We began to see last week that Paul was upset about what was happening in the church in Corinth. They had multiple problems and the first one he addresses was that they were devoting themselves to certain preachers and setting up camps by those distinctions. Some were saying, "I follow Paul!" Others, "I follow Apollos!" Others, "I follow Cephas! (or Peter)!" And it was very disturbing to Paul. We saw last week that it was dividing the church and leading to system failure and this week we're going to see another huge underlying reason it bothered him so much.

Paul is known for going on rabbit trails in his letters and the verses we're going to look at this week and next, which make up half of chapter 1 and all of chapter 2, are one of those divinely inspired rabbit trails. The passage I want us to look at

today shows us what Paul's passion was that drove him that also made him so upset because of what he saw happening in Corinth.

After pointing out the fact that they were dividing over their favorite preachers, he wrote about how he was relieved that he hadn't baptized very many of them because he didn't want them devoting themselves to him, and then he said this in **1 Corinthians 1:17**: *"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."* For the next chapter and a half he expounds on that statement. He purposefully didn't use words of eloquent wisdom when he preached the gospel among them because he didn't want the cross of Christ to be emptied of its power. That's an interesting statement and in the next several verses he unpacks why he said that. He uses linear reasoning, so one idea builds upon the next and eventually ends in his main point, so I want to try to clarify his thought process and then point out the main point. Let's begin with the first two verses.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-19.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Paul begins by pointing out two very different responses to the gospel and that God was behind why that was happening. Paul had already been around the block a few times; he had preached the gospel in many places where it had never been heard before, so he had seen how people responded to it on multiple occasions.

Prior to going to Corinth he had spent time in Athens, preaching the gospel to a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. After preaching among them, it says this in **Acts 17:32-34**: *"Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."*

This was a similar response to a lot of places. To some, the "word of the cross" (the gospel) was folly – it was foolishness to them and they mocked him. To others it was the power of God – they received it with openness and believed. There was no other characteristic that set the believers apart from the unbelievers – nothing that gave anyone a particular advantage or disadvantage.

Across the spectrum of the people Paul shared the gospel with, some considered it to be folly and others believed.

Paul points that out and then follows by quoting a prophecy from **Isaiah 29:14**: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” That’s what God said through Isaiah to point out that he would purposefully do things to carry out his plan of salvation that would dismantle the wisdom and discernment of mankind in their arrogance and pride. So Paul was linking the fulfillment of that prophecy with the message of the gospel – a gospel purposefully designed by God to destroy the wisdom and discernment of mankind in their arrogance and pride. He expounds further on that idea in the next few verses.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:20-21.

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

He points out that the people that were revered in their society for being so wise and philosophically brilliant could not, no matter how hard they tried, come to know God through their philosophy and wisdom. They came up with all kinds of whacky ideas to explain the purpose and meaning of life that seemed so impressive to them, but they could never figure out or land on the truth, and, when the truth was actually presented to them, they thought it so foolish that they rejected it in their human arrogance and pride – it was folly to them.

Paul points out that God purposefully designed the gospel to do that. He purposely chose to save human beings in a way that would seem utterly foolish to the natural wisdom of mankind. He purposely chose to save those who believe through a message that the scribes, philosophers, and debaters of this age think is absolutely absurd. He wanted to destroy the wisdom of the wise and thwart the discernment of the discerning. He wanted to save people in a way and with a message that no one would accept apart from the power of God. So he saved people through the “folly” of the message Paul preached. Apart from the power of God working in someone’s life, they wouldn’t believe. They would think it folly. But with the power of God at work, they would believe and be saved. Paul had seen those responses a thousand times, which he points out next...

Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-25.

²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Hundreds of Jews had heard Paul preach the gospel and rejected it – even after Paul proved from their very own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ and that he had to be crucified. But they would not have it. The same thing had happened with hundreds of Greeks, or Gentiles that had listened to him preach – a crucified and risen Savior was just too ridiculous to them and they wouldn't believe. They stuck with their own wisdom and philosophy.

But there were a few from among both groups who believed – those who were called by God. To them Christ wasn't folly. To them, Christ was the power of God and the wisdom of God. The eyes of their hearts were opened by God as they heard the gospel. The lights turned on in their spirit and they believed. Paul had seen it happen everywhere he went. God's wisdom and power overcame everything in their human nature that prevented others from believing, and they believed.

Paul actually wrote to them about that later on in **2 Cor. 4:1-6**: *“Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* God has to turn the lights on in order for anyone to believe, otherwise they will think the gospel is foolish, and he designed it that way for a reason.

That's Paul's perspective of what was happening in every city where he preached the gospel, including Corinth, which is what he points out to them next.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-28.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are...

So they could see by the very things that happened in them when they believed, that God was purposefully saving people in a way that was contrary to the wisdom and power of man and even more so, in a way that would shame the arrogance and pride of mankind. God was very intentional about doing that, and I want us to think about why? Why would he purposefully save people in such a way? Paul gives the answer in the next few verses, and here is where we get to his main point.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:29-31.

[God did what he did...] ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

When it comes to our salvation, all the glory belongs to Jesus, and none of it belongs to human beings. God has saved us entirely through Jesus. Paul points out that Jesus is our wisdom from God – it is through him that our minds are enlightened to the truth. Jesus is our righteousness – all our sins are washed away by his sacrifice and we have been clothed with his righteousness. Jesus is our sanctification – he is the one that empowers us so that we are being transformed into his image. And he is our redemption – he is the price that was paid so that we were set free from our bondage to sin.

Who is worthy of all glory and boasting when it comes to our salvation? Jesus is! That's why God did what he did and saves us through a gospel that seems foolish to mankind. He wants all glory to go to Jesus. And that's what Paul wanted too. The burning passion in Paul's heart that drove him to do what he did was that Christ would receive all the glory that he deserved.

He wanted Christ to receive the glory he deserved in Corinth. Christ was worthy of all glory – not Paul, or Apollos, or Peter. That’s why Paul was relieved that he hadn’t baptized any more of them. He didn’t want to gain a following for himself that would detract from the glory of Christ. That’s why he didn’t preach the gospel with eloquent words of human wisdom that would draw attention to him. He didn’t want the cross of Christ to be emptied of its power. He didn’t want to take any glory away from the only One who deserved it.

So for the Corinthian believers to devote themselves to him, or Apollos, or Peter was very disturbing. Not only was it foolish and divisive, but it was robbing Jesus of the glory that only he deserved! That’s what I think Paul is trying to say in this passage, which reiterates the importance of what I said last week that we too need to be careful to not become enthralled with modern day celebrity preachers. They don’t deserve our devotion – only Christ does!

But what I want us to ask ourselves today is this: “Is my burning passion that Christ would be glorified in everything I do?” Is that on your radar? Does it play a part in what motivates you to do what you do? Does that influence how you treat your spouse? How you act at work or at school? How you do your job? What you watch on TV? What you post on Facebook? What you spend your money on? How you do ministry?

That’s what Paul’s passion was, and I believe God wants us to have the same passion. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 10:31**: *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

If you see something else in your life that ultimately drives you, I encourage you to make it a matter of prayer. Confess it to God and yield your passion to him. Christ is able to transform the innermost parts of our hearts and he will do so in a way that is good and life-giving for you and will result in his glory.

Pray.

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25