

## **Don't Let the Experts Handle It** **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

I bought a Ford F-150 about 6 years ago and within the first few days of driving it I noticed that when I drove around in a parking lot at idle speed, the engine would make a chugging noise until I gave it more gas. Then one day, as I was leaving the bank, it almost died. So I took it back to the dealer and to my surprise they decided I needed a new engine! It had low oil pressure which was affecting the timing chain and components and instead of tearing it apart to try and figure out the problem they were planning to buy a used engine with fewer miles and swap them out. Thankfully it was still under warranty!

As I was reading up on what was happening, one of the things I learned was that those engines often have problems with the timing chain and related parts. They wear out and need to be replaced. So even though I was getting a different engine, it seemed likely that at some point I would have to replace those parts. So I looked into it and I kept running into the same warning: unless you are a trained mechanic, don't attempt to do this on your own. Take it to a professional or you could ruin your engine. Let the experts handle it...

There are some things in life where we should just let the experts handle it... What about when it comes to sharing the gospel? Sharing the gospel can feel pretty daunting at times. Everyone is so different. They have different backgrounds, different circumstances, and different reasons for why they aren't Christians. Some have never really considered it, others think they already are, and some have had bad experiences and want nothing to do with it. You never know what you're going to get, and you can't be fully prepared for every situation you run into. It can feel awkward and uncomfortable. Sometimes it feels like you're a salesperson trying to close a deal and for most of us it's not something we get too excited about.

So when it comes to sharing the gospel, it can easily become something we avoid and just let the experts handle it. We think they'll do a much better job – people like pastors and church leaders – people with an outgoing personality, lots of courage and boldness, people who are really smart when it comes to the Bible and good at convincing people to follow Jesus. They should be the ones out there

sharing the gospel. If we try to do it and say something wrong, we could really mess things up. Let the experts do it... Is that what we should do?

I think all of us know the right answer: No, we shouldn't just let the experts do it. God has called all of us to be witnesses for Christ and to share our faith and it's an important part of living the Christian life. But that doesn't make it any easier. We still feel like letting the experts do it, and that's why it often happens. But this morning I want to give us a different perspective. I want us to see how Paul went about sharing the gospel in Corinth so we can see why we really don't need to leave it to the experts and why we can have hope and encouragement that God can use us – no matter how good or bad we do it.

When Paul went into a city like Corinth, he had a goal in mind – to preach the gospel, win people to Christ, and start a church. Quite a daunting task. He was going into difficult if not hostile territory. The gospel message he had to share about Jesus dying on the cross to save us from our sins was a big hindrance to almost everybody. We saw last week how it was a stumbling block to Jews folly to Gentiles.

So you would assume that when Paul came into a city like Corinth, he would be really careful about how to present the gospel in a way that would be acceptable to them. There were certain parts that he should emphasize and other parts that he should hold off on. You would also think that he would put his best foot forward when it came to the delivery of the message. He was a brilliant thinker; he knew a lot of theology; he could stand up to any philosopher in a debate. You'd think he'd come in with both guns blazing and blow them off their feet – amaze them with his boldness and give them no choice but to follow Jesus.

Paul was an expert and that's how an expert should handle the preaching of the gospel in a place like Corinth. So now let's read his description of what actually happened. First we're going to look at how he carefully crafted his message.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-2.

*And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

Hold on a minute... that seems a little counter-productive. Paul says he actually didn't use lofty speech or wisdom when he shared with them. He didn't blow them away with his masterful theology and mind-bending philosophy. He didn't impress them with everything he knew. In fact he focused his thoughts on only one main thing: Jesus Christ and him crucified – Jesus dying on a cross. Bad move in that situation.

It's hard for us to imagine what people thought of those who died on crosses back in that time. In our day and age, crosses are respected and honored. People wear them as jewelry, they get them tattooed on their bodies. They hang them up as artwork in their houses. We have them on greeting cards, church signs, and gravestones, and put them on top of steeples. The cross is actually revered in our culture today.

But back in Paul's time, and in the city of Corinth, it was exactly the opposite. Crosses were revolting. Crosses were placed of anguish, torture, and death. Crosses were where criminals were executed on. They were a curse. They symbolized humiliation, punishment, and rebellion. Thieves and enemies of the state died on crosses, not heroes. Not gods. Paul pointed out in chapter 1 that Christ crucified – or the message of the cross – was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. So preaching a message that centered on Christ crucified was the worst evangelism technique you could use. Yet Paul used it. He purposefully decided to know nothing among the Corinthians besides Jesus Christ and him crucified. If someone was to really mess up with how they shared the gospel, it was Paul. He really blew it.

So that was his message, now let's look at his method. Maybe he makes up for it by dynamic preaching and the bold proclamation of the gospel that would overcome people's problems with crosses and win them over to Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:3-5.

*And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Now hold on a minute... Did we read that correctly? It sounds like Paul was really nervous when he preached to them. It sounds like he was so anxious he was trembling – weak in the knees. Barely able to preach. He didn't blow people away with plausible, or persuasive, words of wisdom. In fact, it sounds like his delivery was really unimpressive.

Let's say we were looking for a speaker to come to Amery to share the gospel at a big community outreach event. If we read this about Paul, we'd never invite him to come! We'd look for a confident, dynamic speaker – someone who preached with power and boldness. Someone who could really win over a crowd. Not someone known for weakness, fear, and much trembling!

A gifted human speaker can work a crowd in a very effective way. If they know what they're doing, they can get people angry, excited, scared, sad, and even remorseful. They can get people to do all kinds of things and make all kinds of decisions – even decisions for Christ. If you can tell a good story and bring up some frightening realities about hell and demons, you can get impressionable people to turn to Jesus and pray a prayer for salvation.

So Paul really messed things up again – he shared a message that people would find offensive and he delivered it in a way that wouldn't even win over the most impressionable person in the crowd. I could have probably done as good, if not better than him, and I bet you could too.

And that's the point...

God doesn't need experts to share the gospel. In fact sometimes they can be the problem. God wants you.

Why did Paul do what he did?.. because it actually seems like he knew what he was doing and he purposefully did what he did. It doesn't seem like an accident that he preached the way he did when he was in Corinth. It seems deliberate.

Paul says he did what he did so that their faith would not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. It's as if he's saying he could have blown them away with his courage and boldness, and his deep theology and philosophy. He could have said what they wanted to hear and convinced a lot of people to follow him

and become Christians. In his own ability he could have produced decisions for Christ. But he didn't. He knew that kind of faith would be empty. He didn't want an empty emotional response based on his ability as a speaker that would be void of true spiritual transformation.

He wanted whatever happened in their hearts to be because of the power of God, not because of him. He knew, from what we saw last week at the end of chapter 1, that the only way anyone would receive and believe the message of Christ crucified was if the power of God was working in them. The message of the cross had power for those who were called and being saved. They received it as wisdom from God, not folly. It wasn't a stumbling block for them; it was life. That's how God designed it to work.

Paul didn't want to interfere with that by avoiding the offensive parts of the gospel or by wow'ing them with his powerful and persuasive speaking ability. So he didn't. He preached Christ crucified and he did it with humility and transparency. And guess what? The majority of people that heard his message, rejected it. He knew that would happen. But guess what? Some people believed – not everyone, not the majority, but a lot of them ended up turning to Christ, even with the way he presented the gospel. Those who were called by God – those who were being saved – they were the ones who believed.

There are a whole bunch of implications from this passage for our lives today, but I want us to focus on our own role in sharing Jesus with the people around us.

Do we need to be experts?

Do we need to know everything?

Do we need to have all the answers?

Do we need to avoid talking about the offensive parts of the gospel?

Do we need to wow people with our theology?

Do we need to persuade or convince them to follow Jesus?

Do we need to pretend we're not nervous or afraid?

No. But do we need to share Jesus with people? Yes. That's the part we play. We don't have to be experts. We don't have to know everything or say exactly the right things. We don't have to wow people with our theology. We don't have to

persuade them to follow Jesus. We don't have to feel confident and pretend we're not afraid.

But we do have to share. That's how God has chosen to reach the world. That's how God has chosen to reach your family and your neighbors and friends. And the wonderful reality is that we don't have to be experts. We need to know who Jesus is and what he's done in our lives, and we need to share it, and the Holy Spirit will remind us what to say in those situations, but we don't have to be experts. The pressure is off. God can use you and me. He can take our meager offerings and produce spiritual fruit. He used one person's question to change my life. He can use one statement, one example, one act of kindness. He has the power to change people's lives and he just wants us to be willing to share.