

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (NIV 84)

Theme: It is the Message the Matters: Christ and him crucified

What makes a good pastor? What makes one pastor better than the other? Is there something that a pastor does or doesn't do that makes him better than someone else? Is it how funny he is, how good of a story-teller, or how well he is able to relate to today's youth? Or what about how smart he is or how well he speaks, or how engaging his sermons are? Is there something that makes a pastor message more effective than another?

There certainly is a tendency for us to think so; they figure that some pastors find success while others struggle and how can that be if not for differences in the gifts of the pastor? We like to think that if the pastor is more relatable than he'll reach more people; or if he is a smart guy, and I'm not talking about how much he knows of God's Word, then somehow the message of the gospel comes out better out of his mouth than someone else's. Or if the worship services have upbeat music or maybe even some guitars and drums then somehow it will be more enticing.

Paul wrote this letter to the congregation in Corinth; at the time it was the largest city in Greece, even bigger than Athens, some 40 miles to the east. While Corinth did not have the reputation or culture of education and philosophy as Athens did (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and many more philosophers all hailed from Athens centuries earlier), the influence of Greek education and philosophy ruled the thinking in Corinth. For many of the educated in the big city of Corinth, Christianity was too simple and didn't make enough sense. They wanted something that was rational and that could challenge their intellect.

There are many today who think the same way—Christianity is a religion for the simple-minded and gullible. Because there are many things in the Bible that don't make sense or can't be explained they pass them off as mere fables. And since much of the Bible is just a made-up story in their minds, then the rest must be rejected as false as well.

And there, then, is a tendency to try to make Christianity something that it isn't by trying to match the educated on an intellectual level. You get some who come up with long, complicated arguments for Christ and the Bible. They are well-done and well-thought out. But they think that if they make a long-complicated case for Christ, then they might be able to convince someone to believe. They may be well-intentioned; but it's impossible to argue someone into believing. Others will take the teachings of the Bible and turn them into a philosophy; and as a result Christ and his cross get pushed aside for some sort of Christian philosophy about loving each other and always doing what is right.

At times you see pastors who preach long complicated sermons, not necessarily to communicate God's Word in a clear way, but to prove how learned they are, how much they know, what books they've read, or what topics they've studied. They think that by showing how smart there are and how educated, people will be impressed with him and that could cover over the fact that much of the Bible is contrary to reason, logic, and science, "well if he thinks it's good, then it must be fine, because he is so wise and educated."

Now it is true that and as you closely examine certain doctrines and read certain passages and see how they compare with other passages and then match it up with theological jargon and examine some of the false teachings in the past and present, things can get a bit complicated. But the message of the gospel is simple in and of itself. And you don't need to match someone intellectually or make some elaborate case for Christ so that you can convince someone to believe. That is why Paul says, **when I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.** Paul simply preached Christ! He simply told them about the one who is both God and man, who came down from heaven and lived a perfect life in order

to save us. Paul simply preached Christ crucified. Which means that Paul pointed out the reason why Christ was crucified—for our sins and our offenses, not shying away from the law or downplaying our guilt. Christ crucified means that means that our sins have been removed and paid for by Christ and that we are pure and innocent in the eyes of the Lord. And no doubt Paul not only preached Christ Crucified, but also Christ resurrected from the dead. For this is the message of Christianity, this is the gospel—Christ crucified for me and raised to life for my justification!

During my time with you, I've tried to let these words of Paul guide me. Like Paul I didn't come to you and preach with superior wisdom or much eloquence—even if I had any, which I don't. I'm not all that smart, and I've stumbled over my own words time and time again. My preaching is not one of wisdom or eloquence. I simply came to preach Christ and him crucified. There is a reason why we go back to Christ and his crucifixion again and again in every sermon: by it he saved us, and through faith in him and his work we receive everything he has done for us; and so in the end, nothing else matters.

So there is no reason to be overly complicated or to use big words and elaborate messages. The gospel, the simple and sweet message of forgiveness because of Christ is simply enough. There is no need to add to it, subtract from it; and we can't make it more palatable or attractive to unbelievers. Nothing we do can any power to the gospel or make it more effective. Now, we can certainly get in the way of the gospel, by not sharing it when we should, by misspeaking, by using the Word incorrectly, doing something to distract from its message, and so on; but we can't do anything to make it better. Nothing a pastor does makes him a better pastor than the other, or makes his message more effective than the other person preaching; and different kinds of music don't have any abilities to bring more people to faith.

Christ is enough. He alone has saved you, he alone died and rose from the dead, and it is his gospel which is the power of salvation! The power of the gospel comes from the Holy Spirit who works through the gospel and brings people to faith and keeps them in the one true faith. The power does not come from the person preaching, but from the Lord. Your faith does not depend on my wisdom or how eloquent I am. If it did, your salvation would be more than in jeopardy; and you

would have absolutely no comfort. Your faith depends on the Holy Spirit who works through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

None of you believe because of me—who I am, or my words. All of you believe because of Christ. All we need is the gospel—Christ and him crucified. That is where the power lies! As long as Christ is preached, that is truly all that matters. Now, this is not saying that all of God's Word is not important, as if the gospel is the only thing that matters. No, God clearly commands us to teach everything he has commanded us. So we do preach all of God's Word, while keeping Christ and him crucified front and center.

Not that we are making excuses—this is not an excuse for hard work on the Pastor's part, for the study of God's Word, or striving to communicate God's Word in the clearest and most precise way we can. And this also isn't excuse for you in the pew to think that you are done learning God's Word—the message of the cross is basic in and of itself, it's simple, you know enough to be saved; but that doesn't mean that you know everything, you only know the surface. Dig down into the depths of God's Word; don't be satisfied with the milk of infants, but eat the solid food of God's Word!

So this is not an excuse not to try our best or to strive to eat and digest the meat of God's Word—again and again Paul displayed his deep understanding of God's Word and at times would make elaborate arguments for Christ. But this does mean that God's Word doesn't have to be complicated. Christ and him crucified is a simple message. It's one that's powerful, living and active. So I've always tried my best to preach the simple gospel of Jesus Christ: him and him crucified, without getting in the way of that power.

Paul says in verse three, **I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.** Paul didn't have much success at his previous stop at Athens. How could preaching the foolishness that is the gospel to such a wise and learned people actual work? Who was equal to the task of making believers out of unbelievers? Paul knew his weaknesses; he was afraid that he wouldn't do a good job and that not many would believe his message.

Anyone who preaches the gospel might feel the same way. Who is equal to the task of making believers out of unbelievers—who can convince an enemy of God to reject everything that is natural to him and believe in Christ? A pastor thinks, "I'm not even worthy to be

called a child of God, how can I be worthy of preaching his Word?
What if I'm not good enough and no one believes."

But in the end, none of that matters. The power of the gospel does not depend on the person preaching but on Christ—the message is what is important. The gospel isn't any more or less effective based on the pastor who preaches it; and you are living proof of that—you still believe even though you have been listening to me for 6 and a half years! The gospel is still powerful and effective despite me, despite my lack of wisdom and my stumbling and bumbling.

I can't make the gospel any more powerful or effective—no one can. No pastor can bring anyone to faith, he can only get in the way of the gospel. So I have strived to follow Paul's lead. My preaching style has been simple and straight-forward. I have not dazzled you one bit with my preaching, and that is fine; as long as you have seen Christ and him crucified, then I did my job!

So what makes a good pastor? It's not his personality, his wisdom, or his eloquence. In the end it doesn't matter how funny he is or whether or not he is a good story-teller. Does he preach Christ and him crucified? If so, then he is a good pastor. May you love him and cherish him. For he points you to your Savior, Jesus Christ who will work through his message and bless you for eternity. Amen.