

1 Corinthians 1:22-31

We learned last Wednesday night the Corinthian church was a church full of issues, so we're looking at a church that's got lots of problems. I'll develop them as we go, but the first problem that Paul is dealing with, and he kind of does it in more of a subtle way and then gets into the questions that they ask about issues that he answers. The first problem he's dealing with in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is the problem of division. They were dividing over their ministers. One was saying, "I'm of Paul," another was saying, verse 12, "I'm of Apollos," another said, "I'm of Peter," the others said, "I'm of Christ." Paul wants them to know that Christ is not divided and wants them to come back to the fact that they were baptized into Jesus Christ and that the focus needs to be Jesus Christ, so he moves into the subject of the cross of Christ. Tonight he's going to move into the subject of how he preached Christ and Christ alone, Christ crucified.

If a church is focusing on Christ, it's not going to be divided and arguing and debating over leaders in the church. It's not going to be a personality cult, but we're going to be following Jesus Christ. We always want to make sure that our eyes are on the Lord. Amen? That He's the Chief Shepherd. Our ministers are undershepherds, and a true pastor should always be pointing people to Jesus Christ.

Paul says in verse 17, let's start there in chapter one. He said, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." That word "power" is the Greek word *dýnamis*, where we get our word dynamic or dynamite. It's the power of God. See how he's focusing them on Jesus and the preaching of the cross?

Verse 19, he said, "For it is written,"—and he's quoting from Isaiah 29:14—"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe?"—he's saying verse 20 with a little sarcasm. Believe it or not, the Bible actually has sarcasm in it, and he's kind of chiding them saying, 'Where's the smart, wise guy?—"Where's the scribe?"—where's the philosopher, the wise man, the Jewish scholar that studies the Word of God?—"where is the disputer"—the one that wants to debate—"of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

I wanted to backup a little bit to kind of get a running start as I said, and we find here verse 18. I'm going to give you an outline, if you want to write it down. Verses 18-25, Paul wants them to understand the difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom. He wants to contrast human wisdom with divine wisdom, and divine wisdom is found in Christ and in the cross of Jesus Christ. From verses 18-25, we're going to be looking at the understanding of the difference between human and divine wisdom. It's so very important. Verses 18-20, human wisdom is foolish. Human wisdom compared to God's divine wisdom is foolish. He says, "For

the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

We talked about this last week, so I won't tarry on it, but the word “preaching” is an interesting word. It's actually the Greek word *lógos*, which means word. Some translations have, “the word of the cross.” He's not actually talking so much here yet about the act of preaching before a group of people, he's actually talking about the content—the word of the cross, the essence of the cross. “For the preaching of the cross,”—or the word, the *lógos*—“is to them that perish foolishness.” Those “that perish,” verse 18, again in the Greek it is actually in the present tense perishing, so they're already perishing. They're not just perishing because they don't believe in Christ, they're perishing because they are sinners fallen in Adam and they are perishing. They reject the Christ of the cross and the crucifixion. That's one class of people, and to them it's foolishness.

Every time in this text when it uses the word “foolishness,” it's actually the word *moronic*. We get our word “*moron*” from it. I'm a little hesitant to even use that word, but it's in the Bible. You might say they're morons. They're not thinking, they're fools. They're silly ones. They're moronic in their thinking. Their understanding is darkened, and we won't get there tonight, but I can't wait to get a little further into chapter two and we talk about revelation and illumination of the Spirit of God using the Word of God to reveal to us the things of God. But there's the category of those who perish, verse 18, and there's those which are saved to have put their faith and trust in Christ and believed in the Christ of the cross, and to them “ . . . it is the power of God.”

those who are perishing, those who are lost; and those who are saved. When God looks down on the human race, He literally sees everyone in those two categories, that's why sometimes as Christians we're thinking, “I wonder if they're saved,” or “I wonder if they know the Lord. I wonder if they're born again,” or “I wonder if they're saved.” Everyone is either saved or he's not saved. We sometimes jokingly say, “You're either a saint or you ain't,” so you're either a child of God because you have put your faith in Jesus Christ and the cross is the power of God, which is again, I said the word *dýnamis* which means the dynamic power of God to save, and then he quotes verse 19 from Isaiah 29:14, that God would make the, “ . . . the wisdom of the wise,”—to nothing—“and . . . the understanding of the prudent,”—he would bring to nothing. He mockingly says, “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?”—notice the question marks—“hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” It's so true. God has made foolish the wisdom of this world, verse 20.

Now we see in verses 21-23, human wisdom cannot save. Human wisdom is foolish. You go to our Sunday school class tonight and get a five, six, or seven-year-old who knows the Word of God or believes in Jesus Christ. They have more wisdom than even the greatest minds at our universities and colleges in this land. They know that God created them in His image and likeness. They know that God created the whole universe by the word of His power, which a lot of scientists have not a clue. They have all this wisdom, but it's just empty. They know that Jesus actually was God, born of a virgin, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and that He's

the Son of God who can save us from sin. I mean just think about this little child, in just a childlike faith, can have a greater wisdom than even the greatest learned individuals of the land.

Verse 19, “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” It focuses all on the cross in the wisdom of God in that cross.

Beginning in verse 21, down to verse 23, human wisdom cannot bring about salvation. You can't be saved by your own strength or ability. Verse 21, “For after that in the wisdom of God,”—I love this statement. You should underline it in your Bible, if you're into underlining. It says there, “the world by wisdom knew not God,”—the natural man, Paul's going to go on to say, cannot understand or comprehend or receive the things of the Spirit of God. Verse 21, “. . . it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

What does it mean there that God saves those by believing the foolishness of preaching? It doesn't say preaching of foolishness. He's not talking about preaching foolishness. The foolishness isn't the preaching, the foolishness is to them who are lost, the doctrine of the cross, the idea of the cross, that a man can die on a Roman cross and be crucified and buried in a grave and still be the Savior of the world. That's what's foolishness to them, that they could be saved by simply believing and trusting in Jesus Christ, and notice the emphasis in verse 21 on believe, “. . . to save them that believe,”—not behave. “For by grace are ye saved through faith,”—that's believing—“and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.” John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,”—believe.

How often do we talk to unbelievers that say, “Aww, you can't just believe in Jesus. You've got to be a good person or work hard. You've got to do it yourself. You Christians think you can just believe in Jesus or trust in Jesus and you get to go to heaven.” The Bible is so clear that we are saved by trusting Christ, and Christ alone, putting our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. It's not behaving, it's believing in Jesus Christ.

Verse 22, “For the Jews require a sign,”—remember they were always asking Jesus, ‘Show us a sign, and we'll believe in You,’ after He did all the miracles that He did. I mean, think about that. He raises Lazarus from the dead and they're like, “Duh, show us a sign.” Where were you a few minutes ago? He takes bread, prays over it, a few fish, and breaks it and feeds over five thousand people, “Show us a sign.” A man's covered with leprosy and Jesus says, “Be clean,” and he's healed immediately, “Show us a sign.” What more do you want? A man's blind, and Jesus heals his eyes, and they want to see a sign.

So, “the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom,”—which is *sophía*, which is where we get our word philosophy from. It's the love of wisdom. Someone said a philosopher is a blind man looking for a black cat in a dark room that isn't even there. You know, philosophy...if you find the truth, your class is over, right? You don't need the philosophy professor anymore because you've come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free as it's found in Jesus Christ.

So, “. . . the Jews require a sign,” they stumble over the cross, and the Greeks want wisdom. They want the wisdom of man. Too many of the Corinthian believers were being influenced—listen carefully—by the wisdom of the Greek culture. This is always the danger, even as Christians. Again, fine for the church to be in Corinth, but not good for Corinth to be in the church. It's fine for us to be in the world, but not for the world to be in us. They were being influenced by this Greek philosophy, and it was in danger of spoiling their relationship to Christ. So, Paul says, “But we preach Christ crucified,”—we proclaim Christ crucified. It's interesting that Paul makes it very clear what the minister's message is to center on, not only preaching the cross, but primarily preaching the cross—centrally preaching the cross. “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks”—it is—“foolishness.”

The word “stumblingblock,” for the Jews as they looked at the cross, is the Greek word skándalon, which means to stumble. It's a trip stick for a trap. A fowler's trap had a little stick that tripped that would catch the bird, so they stumbled over that. The Jews were looking for what we know was the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when the Christ Messiah would come in power, set up His Kingdom, sit on the throne of David, and reign forever and ever. That's still what the Jews are looking for, they just don't realize that Jesus came the first time to die on the cross to atone for our sin. He'll come the second time to reign on the throne of David. The first time He came, He came as the Lamb of God to be crucified, to take away the sin of the world. The second time He comes, He's coming as the Lion of the tribe of Judah to sit on the throne of David and to reign forever and ever. They were stumbled over the cross.

Again, even today, one of the biggest issues to a Jew is, “Jesus can't be our Messiah,” so they say, “because He was crucified. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures actually say, ‘Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree,’ so how can a cursed Man, hanging on a cross, save us from our sin? And, if He was the Messiah, then why didn't He conquer the Romans and set up His Kingdom?” So, they stumble over the cross of Jesus Christ.

During this time of Israel's temporarily being blind and set aside that God's saving Jews and Gentiles and making them one in the Church, the body of Christ. I believe that we live in that period of time when God is saving Jew and Gentile, and He's made us one in the body of Christ. If you want to look at it from a prophetic, dispensational aspect, which I believe we should, when the Church is complete, it will be caught up, raptured—harpáz Ūw6æ F6†V@ up “. . . to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” And, then on earth, there'll be a man of sin called the Antichrist, who will make a covenant with Israel for seven years to bring peace to them. That is the last seven years of man's existence on earth, and the tribulation will be that period of time. It's the seventieth week of Daniel. It all kind of fits together that God's now working in the Church, which is Jew and Gentile, we're all one in Christ, but the Church will be caught up and then God will begin to work with the nation of Israel as He promised He would there in Romans 11 in the Bible.

In verses 24 and 25 we have divine wisdom can save. Human wisdom cannot save, they stumble over that, they think it's foolishness; but divine wisdom, which is the cross of Christ, the central focus of that cross, can save. “But unto them which are called, both Jews and

Greeks,”—that phrase is conveying what I just alluded to, the idea of the Church, Jews and Gentiles one in Christ. He says, “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ”—is—“the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” This is what we have in the Church, “Christ the power of God,”—to save—“and the wisdom God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” Verse 25 is also taken from the book of Isaiah 55:8-9, so it has its roots in Isaiah 55:8-9.

Beginning in verse 26, down to the end of the chapter, verse 31, we have the importance of understanding the nature of God’s calling. First of all we need to understand the difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom, now Paul wants them to know that God has called them, and who God called is a humbling concept because we see He called, “. . . not many mighty, not many noble . . . But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world,”—and he’s again trying to deal with them not getting along and dividing, and he wants them to be humble.

In verses 26-31, the understanding of the nature of our call as believers in the body of Christ, “For ye see your calling,”—you’re going to see a repeated phrase—calling, called, chosen, hath chosen, God hath chosen—in this section. He says, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen”—again, the idea of calling and being chosen are kind of working together. If you’re a Christian, He called you because He chose you. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised,”—lest I forget, the word “base things” doesn’t mean evil, it means humble or lowly, so the ‘base things’ are lowly things of this world. “. . . and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

God calls us by His grace, He saves us by His grace, He sustains us by grace, and we can’t glory in ourselves. “That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31 That, according as it is written,”—he’s quoting from the Old Testament, Jeremiah 9:23-24—“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

This closing of chapter one is marvelous when Paul wants us to understand the nature of our calling. Again, keep in mind that he kind of very subtly, not openly or plainly, is still dealing with the subject of division. He wants them to understand that God called them by His grace, and if they’re going to get divided over pastors and ministers, “I’m of Paul,” “I’m of Apollos,” we’re not to be glorying in man, God calls foolish things, God calls weak things, God calls base things. This is a section of Scripture that should humble our hearts before God. It should fill us with gratitude and thanksgiving that God would choose me and call me by His marvelous grace.

Let me give you five important points from verses 26-31 about our calling. First, it is not based on man’s position. I don’t have these points on the screen, but they are worthy of writing down, if you’re taking notes. Verse 26 teaches us that God calls us not based on our position. Now, if

I were picking my team, if I were God, and I were picking my people, I would pick the elites. I would pick the powerful. I would pick the knowledgeable. I'd pick the capable. I wouldn't pick the down and outs.

Do you remember when you were maybe younger elementary school or grade school when we used to pick teams? I don't know if they even do that anymore because they don't want people's self-esteem to get crushed. But remember we used to pick teams, and maybe you were always the last person standing there, and the captain said, "Okay, we'll take 'em. Come on, you can play on our team." You were never one of the first persons taken for a sporting event, you were always one of the last, and then they said, "Okay, you're going to play third base, not the position, the base. Just lie on the ground and be the base. If the ball comes to you, don't touch it. Don't do anything. Someone else will grab it and throw the ball in." You just felt so rejected.

So, to think that God would choose me? That God would call me? We should never ever, ever, ever have the slightest thought that God called me and saved me because of who I am or what I've done. There's nothing in me for which God should love me or save me by His grace. Grace is undeserved, unearned, unmerited favor. Write that down, verse 26, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh."

I want to point out, and you maybe have seen this before, too, that it doesn't say, "not any," it says, "not many." There are some very intelligent, smart people that God saves by His grace. Frank Turek's going to be here this Sunday, and he's very smart and very intelligent. Some of you right now are going, Yeah, that's me, Pastor John. I'm one of the smart ones. It says, "not many." Generally speaking, they're just common, average, everyday ordinary people. ". . . not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty,"—which means powerful or influential—"not many noble,"—they are people of nobility—"are called." What an awesome thought. Just a motley crew of God's people. Think about the twelve apostles, a bunch of smelly fishermen. God comes to earth and grabs His apostles, disciples become apostles, and who does He pick? A bunch of ragtag fishermen and a couple of zealots, and it's pretty amazing the people that He picked.

In Acts 4:13, when Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin for preaching the gospel of Christ, it says that the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders of the Jews, took notice, ". . . that they were unlearned and ignorant men." It just means they hadn't gone to their universities. They hadn't gone to their college. They hadn't gone to their schools. But these are the men that God chose to be the apostles. Someone said, "This is God's tool chest," and I love that concept.

There's the story of a woman by the name of Lady Huntington, and she was of nobility, a very wealthy, affluent woman. She came to faith under the ministry of the Wesley's, John and Charles Wesley. She used to say that she was saved by an M, the letter M, in the Bible. She would point out that she was one of the "not many," that are called or chosen, that she was chosen by God even though she was a woman of nobility.

Look at verse 27. In verse 27 we learn the lesson that God saves us and calls us in a way that magnifies or manifests God's divine grace and love, some say God's interest in us. But God's call is evident of God's divine grace and God's love, that we don't earn, merit, or deserve but God just places upon us. Look at verse 27, "But God hath chosen,"—again, in my Bible, I've underlined that phrase "chosen." It's the same word used in Ephesians 1:4, that God chose us " . . . before the foundation of the world." I believe in the doctrine of election. I believe God chooses us, and He chooses us by His sovereign grace. "But God hath chosen"—what? Here's God's tool chest, " . . . foolish things of the world to confound the wise." God just wants to blow people's minds. He takes great pleasure in doing just things that are contrary to the way the world works. Then, it says, " . . . and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." That's God's tool chest. How marvelous that is.

Look at the first part of verse 28. It says, "And base things . . . despised . . . things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." God uses ordinary people. God can use you. You and I are candidates for the glory of God. God used Moses. God used Gideon. God used David. God used John the Baptist. I mean, he was just dressed in camel skin living in the wilderness, biting grasshopper heads off saying, "Repent," and Jesus said there's not anyone born of women that's greater than John the Baptist. God used David and his sling, and he became king. God also used D.L. Moody, Billy Graham—common ordinary individuals that God used for His glory. Don't get into little cliques and groups, "I'm of Paul," "I'm of Apollos," "I'm of Peter," "I'm of Christ." God calls humble, ordinary people so "That no flesh should glory in his presence."

In verse 28, he tells us, "And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." God's choosing is contrary to the expectations of men. That's the third, if you're taking notes. First, it's not based on man's position. Secondly, it manifests divine grace and love. Thirdly, it's contrary to the expectations of men.

Here's the fourth, verse 29, it removes the basis for human boasting, "That no flesh should glory in his presence." That's a theme that runs all through the Bible. Everything God does is for His glory, "That no flesh should glory in his presence."

Fifthly, in closing, verses 30-31, God's choosing us brings great glory to God. He says, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus,"—he's speaking about what we are in Christ—"who of God is made unto us wisdom." If you're a Christian, and you're in Christ, and you are in Christ, if you're a Christian, you have the wisdom of God in Christ. Secondly, you have the righteousness of God in Christ; thirdly, you have sanctification in Christ; and fourthly, you have redemption. I want you to see all those words, " . . . wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." In Him are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom of God. In Colossians it says if you're a Christian, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."

You've heard me say many times that salvation has three tenses—that we have been saved, we're being saved, and we will be saved. I believe that's reflected in this first thirty.

Righteousness in Christ is the moment we are saved and we put our faith in Jesus, God imputes to the believing sinner the righteousness of Jesus Christ and we are declared righteous or justified. Then, God begins to do a work in us as believers through the Spirit in sanctification. That's a lifelong process of making us more like Jesus, setting us apart. The longer you're a Christian through the study of God's Word, the yielding to the Holy Spirit, trials and troubles, and He's working in our lives to make us more like Jesus, we're being, being sanctified, present tense. The third phase is redemption. When we go to heaven, we get new bodies, we're with Jesus face to face. In Ephesians it says, ". . . ye were sealed with that holy Spirit . . . until the redemption." This is the third phase which is called glorification. So, justification, I've been saved; sanctification, I'm being saved; glorification, I will be saved.

Again, what starts with God's grace ends in glory. I love that. Whatever starts with God's grace, ends in God's glory. Read Romans 8, it starts with grace, ends with glory. Starts with, "There is therefore now no condemnation," and ends with you in Christ, no separation. What begins with grace, ends in glory. How marvelous that is.

Verse 30, a marvelous text, that we are righteous, sanctified and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Verse 31, "That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." It brings great glory to God. Through all of this, Paul is basically telling them, because he wants them to stop fighting over pastors and ministers and following the personality cults and getting their little groups together and divisions and following individuals.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5, I'm just going to touch on it. We'll get our feet wet because it's tying together what we've covered, and then we'll go into it more next week. In verses 1-5, we have divine wisdom seen in Paul's preaching. We saw, first of all, human wisdom and divine wisdom contrasted. Secondly, we saw the understanding of the nature of God's calling, that God's called us by His grace. Thirdly, we saw the divine wisdom seen in Paul's preaching, verses 1-5. Follow with me. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God." Remember, some of them were following Apollos; and Apollos, it's believed, because he had a Greek background, was really smart, really persuasive in his speech, had great oratory skill and ability, and so people said, "I am of Apollos. I like Apollos. That dude's a dynamite preacher. He's so amazing." Paul's trying to show them that it's not the personality or the characteristics of the preacher, it's the message that's being preached.

So often in churches today, the focus is the pastor's personality and whether people like him or not. People watch who they like. They don't always watch or like people or follow people who basically preach the truth of God's Word, they want their ear tickled, or they want to be entertained, or they like someone that's dynamic and captivating and gets their attention. They're not really focusing on the content of what is being preached, and that's a very dangerous kind of idea. It's very common today in the church.

Paul begins to breakdown his ministry among them in Corinth when he came to them and preached to them. I love it, verse 1, he says, ". . . when I came to you, came not with

excellency of speech or of wisdom,”—again, that’s *sophía*, the philosophy, the wisdom of the Greeks love—“declaring unto you the testimony of God”—when I was preaching the cross of Jesus Christ. He said, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” That needs to be the center of our preaching.

He says, “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear,”—he just talked about God’s call on foolish things, weak things, base things, despised things “ . . . hath God chosen . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence.” God actually uses weak people because He knows He will get the glory. He uses people who are humble and dependent on Him because He knows He will get the glory. Paul says, “When I came to you . . . I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” Think about this. How many preachers on television today would say that? How many preachers would get up and say, “I’m with you in my weakness. I’m with you in my fear. I’m with you in much trembling.” They’re usually real dynamic and really polished and really good-looking, really funny. They smile all the time. They’re really eloquent in the way they speak, really captivating. People will say, “Oh, isn’t it awesome? Isn’t he . . .” “Well, what did he preach?” “I don’t know what he preached, but whatever it was, it was really good.” It’s like a pep talk. It’s like a TED talk. It’s like a pep rally—personality cults marketing themselves, getting people to follow them.

Paul says in his humility—this is amazing, this is the Apostle Paul—“And I was with you in weakness,”—most Greek scholars believe that Paul’s referring to his bodily weakness. “ . . . and in fear,”—he had phobias, he was fearful—“and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom.” Can you see that as an advertisement to come to my church? “Come hear our pastor—he’s weak, he’s fearful, he’s trembling. He can’t speak very well, but he preaches Christ crucified. Amen?” That should be our focus. Paul says, “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” I’m going to go back over these verses for a second.

Verse 4, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom,”—so many times preaching is that. It shouldn’t be. “ . . . but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” I love those words. I love those words.

Let me say something about Paul’s preaching. First of all, his method is in verse 1. If you want to outline these five verses, his method in verse 1 was that he didn’t come with excellence of speech or the wisdom of the world, declaring the testimony of God, he simply preached Christ and Him crucified. He kept it simple.

There’s a theory, and I think it’s fascinating—again, it’s just a theory, we can’t be sure about it—but if you studied the second missionary journey of Paul the apostle, remember I said to read Acts 18 where the church at Corinth was founded? Guess where Paul was just before he preached and came to Corinth? Athens, about thirty, forty miles due east of Corinth. When he came to Athens, and I’ve had the privilege twice being in Athens, and the last time I was there I got to do a Bible study on Paul’s message to the Athenians there right on Mars Hill. When he

preached in Athens, it said that he stood on Mars Hill and spoke to the Stoicks and the philosophers there in Mars Hill—the Greek wise men, the Greek philosophers—and he very eloquently spoke to them. He talked about the god of the unknown God, or the altar that you have. He talked about creation, philosophy, and he quoted their philosophers. He did touch on Christ's death and resurrection at the end of his sermon, but the minute they heard the word "resurrection," they started mocking him. They started laughing at him. Hardly anyone got saved, and there was no real revival or real fruit there in Athens, so he left Athens and went to Corinth. It's very possible that you're getting commentary by Paul on what he just learned by the way he preached in Athens.

Now, I'm careful to share this with you because when I get to heaven, I don't want Paul to call me on the carpet and say, "You got it all wrong, buckaroo. That wasn't the situation at all." I think Peter's going to call a lot of preachers to, "Hey, you bashed me. You need to ask me for forgiveness." It could be that Paul learned not to try to impress people with our intellect, with our vocabulary, with our learning. Sometimes I have to look up a word that I plan on using in a sermon, and then I remind myself, If I don't know what the word means, then why should I use it. No one else is going to know it, at least a very few people will. So, keep it simple, and that's what Paul might've learned.

Paul came from Athens to Corinth, and this is the description. It's interesting, write it down, Acts 18:9-10. It says, "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee," so Paul the apostle was in Corinth after Athens, and he was afraid. God wouldn't actually say to him, "Be not afraid," if he's not afraid; and he was weak, and he was trembling, and he just basically said, "I'm just going to preach Jesus Christ. I'm just going to preach the cross. I'm going to keep it simple, and I'm not going to speak with, verse 4, ' . . . enticing words of man's wisdom.'"

So, his method, verse 1; his message, verse 2, Christ and Him crucified; and in verse 3, his manner, he was there " . . . in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." In 2 Corinthians 12, he said, " . . . there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me . . . For this I"—prayed and asked God to take it away, and God—" . . . said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Remember that? So Paul says, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong." Remember that. It's not about you. It's not about your ability. It's not about your talents. It's not about your charisma. It's not about your intellect. It's not about your oratory skills. It's about God calling you by His grace, using a " . . . foolish thing . . . to confound the wise . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence." Our part is just to be faithful to what God calls us to do, to trust in Him, to be obedient to Him, to be ready to do what He calls us to do, and God will use as weak things, despised things, base things that we are, for His glory.

In verse 4 we have his means, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom." It's actually believed that Paul was actually not physically attractive. Again,

who knows, but the tradition is he was short, bald, had a big crooked nose, and he had bow legs. He couldn't speak very eloquently. So, you think, How could he be so effective in the ministry? God uses weak things. God uses weak things to prove Himself strong on our behalf. The motive is in verse 5, in closing, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Amen?

We need to be careful that we don't try to manipulate people into believing in Jesus or try to argue them into the Kingdom. The only way a person can be saved is when the Spirit of God convicts the heart and convinces them of sin and draws them to Jesus the Savior, and they see their need, and they turn to Christ, they believe in Jesus Christ, they trust in Christ, they're regenerated by the Holy Spirit, born again, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and sealed by the Spirit until the day of redemption. You know, you may not be a preacher, per se, but we're all to share the good news. Amen? We're all to tell other people about Jesus, and whether we're speaking or preaching or witnessing, the power is in the cross of Jesus Christ. It's so important that when we get to the cross—why Jesus died, who He was, why He died—it's the Person and the work of Christ—who Jesus is, what Jesus has done. Make that your focus, and God will use you to be effective in evangelism and winning other people to Jesus Christ. Let's pray.