

## **The Demonstration of the Spirit's Power**

### **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

**March 7, 2010**

*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*

*Countryside Bible Church*

This morning I'd like for you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. If you are a part of our church you know that we're going through Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus and we will return to that next Sunday. We've enjoyed now being there for a couple of years and looking at really a strategic part of that letter. But this morning I've decided to take you to the passage that was on my heart and that I spoke to the men at Shepherd's Conference about, because this section of 1 Corinthians was not addressed primarily to pastors and teachers. It was addressed to the people of the church and so its application is for us all.

Paul had come to Corinth on his second missionary journey in the year 51 AD. He ended up staying there for some eighteen months. Three years after he left Corinth, Paul was in Ephesus when he heard about something in Corinth that deeply troubled him. A prominent member of the Corinthian church, a man named Chloe, either wrote to Paul in Ephesus or came across the Aegean Sea to visit him there. And this member reported that there were serious divisions in the church in Corinth. Notice verse 12 of chapter 1: "Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul' and 'I of Apollos' and 'I of Cephas' and 'I of Christ.'" In verse 17 Paul introduces us to the issue that divided them. The issue was about cleverness of speech. The problem in Corinth was not primarily about doctrine but rather style. The problem there was not an outright rejection of the gospel, although certainly they were tempted to sort of downplay that part of the gospel that was the most foreign to their culture and that is the message of a crucified God. And by the time Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, there were false apostles in the church. But there's no false teachers here. The primary issue that divided the factions listed in verse 12 was not what their heroes preached but how. Ultimately what divided the Corinthian church was something that they had embraced from their culture.

A number of scholars have researched the specific circumstances in first century Corinth and they discovered that Corinth was home to a particular school of Greek rhetoric called the "Sophists." Now, you need to understand a little bit about these men to understand what Paul tells us here. The Sophists were itinerant intellectuals who taught rhetoric for a fee. They traveled from city to city

trying to impress people with their style and ultimately trying to attract paying students. Philosophically these men were relativists. That is, they were not convinced that truth is certain and if truth is certain we're not sure that we can know it. So you can imagine then they were far more interested in style than they were in substance, which set them even against the fathers of Greek rhetoric, Plato and Aristotle. Because they were relativists they were also pragmatists. They contextualized their message, they massaged it to get whatever results they wanted. They were primarily after their own personal advancement and the applause and the status and the wealth that came with that.

And so they intentionally chose then, both their content and their form that would most please whatever audience they were speaking to. The issue is what will draw a crowd, what will keep the audience engaged, what will invite applause for the speaker, keep the money coming in and build their personal prestige. If that sounds familiar, it is. Their greatest concern was results, not the truth. Duane Litfin in a book entitled, St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation in which he discusses the situation in Corinth, describes these men and their priority. Listen to him:

The orator began by determining what results he wanted to achieve and then he shaped his message accordingly. The message was the manipulated variable and it was up to the orator by the sheer power of his rhetorical gifts, his training, his experience, to create a message that would produce those results.

Anthony Thiselton describes what was going on in Corinth as “applause generating, consumer oriented rhetoric.” Tragically the Corinthian believers played right into the hands of these teachers. Because nothing was more important in Greek culture than the ability to speak well, to speak in a way that persuaded. If you could speak with some measure of eloquence in that culture, and really until just over a hundred years ago, you were considered to be cultured, educated, high class. In fact the English word “sophisticated” comes from the Greek word “sophos”. You were sophisticated. The ultimate expression of intelligence in culture and cleverness was an ability to speak well on any subject. And so the Corinthians, even in the church, were attracted to those who could speak well. Some of the Corinthian Christians especially liked the teaching of Apollos. Acts describes Apollos as a man of words, that is a man of remarkable eloquence. Others were impressed by Paul's ability to speak and their slogan was “I am of Paul.” Still others like Peter, or

some of Christ. They lined up behind these men as their orator extraordinaire. Paul explains to these people that they are all wrong. They shouldn't be enamored by any one's style. Because in chapter one of this letter Paul explains that God intentionally wanted to save us in a way that would destroy all human wisdom. Let me say that again because this is crucial to your understanding of the gospel, of Christ, of the New Testament, of everything else. God intentionally wanted to save us in a way that would destroy all human wisdom. And so to accomplish that God chose a foolish message, the gospel. He chose a foolish method, preaching. And He chose a foolish people. As the rest of chapter 1 unfolds He calls us, are you ready for this?, nothings and nobodies. God's ultimate goal was to demolish all human pride and instead to center all boasting in Himself. That's how chapter 1 ends.

The Greek text of 1 Corinthians 2:1 begins "and I." Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that when he had come to preach to them he had done so in a way that complemented God's ultimate goal of destroying all human pride and centering all boasting in Himself. It wasn't his own cleverness. The success he had in Corinth had nothing to do with him, had nothing to do with his technique; it was the work of the Spirit. And as he begins chapter 2, Paul sets out to contrast his own teaching and preaching with the sort of wrongheaded ideas of rhetoric that the Corinthians had embraced. In chapter 2 verses 1 to 5, Paul provides us the clearest statement of his own philosophy of preaching found anywhere in all of his letters. Let me read it for you. First Corinthians 2:1-5:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Now Paul's theme in these five verses is very direct, very clear. It is this: preaching that exalts God must always be in the demonstration of the Spirit and His power. The question is how does that happen? Well, Paul here explains the personal commitments he made in his own preaching that enabled him to rely completely on the power of the Spirit and not on his own personality or

some human technique. And as he explains his own personal commitments he teaches all of us here this morning who are teachers and preachers the crucial commitments each of us must make if we want to preach in a way that demonstrates the Spirit's presence and power.

But this passage is not written just to the teachers in Corinth. It is written to the entire congregation. Paul wants to remind us all what a legitimate ministry of the word looks like. So that as a church and as individuals we will demand these things from our shepherds. That we will look for and love these things in our leaders and in our elders and our teachers. And he sets himself up as the ultimate model. The first commitment that teachers and preachers must make if we're going to teach and preach in the demonstration of the Spirit's power; the first commitment we must make, all of us who are teachers, is this: Focus on God's message and not personal glory. Focus on God's message and not personal glory. Look at verse 1: "And when I came to you brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom proclaiming to you the testimony of God." I did not come with superiority. The word superiority literally means a projection or something that rises above. The verb means to stand out, to rise above, to outdo, to excel. Paul says I didn't come to Corinth trying to make my speaking, my wisdom, stand out. I wasn't trying to outdo all the other speakers. Paul deliberately did not preach in any way to distinguish himself. It's like what he says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake."

James Denney, the great Scottish pastor, understood that and he had these words framed and fastened to the wall of his church. "No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save." Paul refused to promote his own cleverness in his speech, that is in his form or style of speaking; and in his wisdom, that is in his content, in his skill of argument in his own cleverness. Paul here is using the very terms the orators loved. And he's saying I had nothing to do with that. Notice how different his ministry was. He says in verse 1, I didn't come promoting myself, my superiority. Instead my focus was on God and His message. I came proclaiming to you the testimony of God. The Greek word "proclaiming" here is a very interesting word. It's a word that was often used in the first century of an official authoritative announcement. It's like what the president's press secretary does when he comes out and speaks authoritatively on the president's behalf.

Preachers and teachers of God's Word are not called to share the Word, they're not called to discuss the Word, to have a conversation about the Word; we are to be called to proclaim or announce the Word with authority. Not our own authority; I have no authority. But with the authority of God as I am accurate with His Word. What is it we're to announce authoritatively? Well, notice how verse 1 ends, "the testimony of God." Like Paul we are to announce God's own testimony. And in verse 2 Paul tells us what that testimony is and was. Notice verse 2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Now, there are those who think Paul is here announcing a change in his whole ministry approach. They say something like this: when Paul was in Athens, where he was before he went to Corinth, and he made that famous speech on Mars Hill it was way too filled with philosophy. And it frankly was a failure. And so, when Paul came to Corinth he decided to change his whole approach and from this time forward he would preach nothing but Christ. Well, there is absolutely no evidence of that in Acts 17, Acts 18, or here in 1 Corinthians. Preaching Christ and Him crucified was Paul's normal practice and always had been. If you go back to his very first New Testament letter, the letter written to the churches in Galatia, in Galatians 3:1 he says, "Before your eyes I publicly portrayed Jesus Christ as crucified." This has always been his approach. But what does it mean? Let me tell you what it doesn't mean.

It does not mean that all Paul taught was about Jesus and His cross. Acts 18:11 tells us that Paul settled in Corinth for a year and six months teaching the Word of God among them. All the Old Testament Scriptures. And certainly his approach in Corinth was the same as it was in Ephesus. And do you remember what he told the Ephesian elders? He said, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God, the full counsel of God. No, Paul taught all the Scripture. So, it doesn't mean he just taught about Jesus and the cross. Nor does it mean that we as teachers and preachers are merely to present a simple gospel message every Sunday. I don't know about you but I grew up in churches where that happened; every Sunday. Just a simple gospel message. You know I love the gospel, but if we do that we have misunderstood the purpose of the corporate gathering of the church which is worship and instruction, and we will starve the saints to death.

What does he mean? Paul means this. If you're a teacher, if you teach at any level in our church, if you teach in your home to your family, if you're a teacher at any level, everything we teach and preach must ultimately be rooted in and founded upon the truth that Jesus was the Messiah and the truth of His substitutionary death. Paul's teaching and preaching found its center in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Twenty years ago I was diagnosed with glaucoma. And every year since at least once a year I've had a visual field test to determine if I've had any additional damage to my optic nerve and to my peripheral vision. Perhaps you've had the test as well. The technician props your head in this little half globe and you look in that globe and the technician says 'now I want you to keep your eye pointed straight ahead at that little red laser dot. Don't let your eye move from that.' And then as you watch that dot a series of pinpoints of little light begin to go in various places across that globe. And as you see another light you're to push the button that you hold in your hand indicating that out of your peripheral vision you caught a glimpse of that little light. I don't know about you but I hate that test. It is very intense. You're there and for the first thirty seconds it seems like there's a light going off somewhere in that little half globe every second and so you're sitting on that button every second you're pushing it. And then all of a sudden there's a gap. Two seconds, three seconds, five seconds. And I start thinking, am I missing them? Are there lights there that I haven't seen? And so I just start hitting the button just in case. Because you know I was taught you don't want to fail a test, so. And while you're taking that test maybe this has never happened to you, it has to me, if you let your eye and its focus move off of that little red center laser light a buzzer goes off. The technician says, I'm sorry sir you're going to have to keep your focus on that light. You have to stay focused on the center and look at the other lights only through your peripheral vision. That's what Paul means when he says that teachers and preachers must keep their preaching centered on Christ. Whatever subject, whatever passage we may be preaching and teaching we have to keep our eyes centered on Him and on His cross. I don't mean we distort the meaning of a text; you know that. I don't mean spiritualize it. But the great theme of the Bible is that God is redeeming a people, by His Son, for His Son, to His own glory. That means whatever text you and I turn to as teachers, somehow it's developing that great theme. And our job as teachers is to help people see how.

Spurgeon loved to tell his students the story of a young preacher who happened to be preaching one Sunday when there was an older more experienced preacher that he knew and respected sitting out in the congregation. And so he preached his heart out and after the message was done he went down and found that old preacher and they sat down together and he said, “You know I just want to ask you what did you think of my message?” And this older more experienced preacher said to him, he said, “You know it was a very poor sermon indeed.” And of course the young preacher was devastated. He said, “Well I don’t understand. You know I studied long and hard to understand the text. I thought I explained it well. I thought my illustrations were appropriate, I thought my arguments were strong.” And the older preacher said “No, there was nothing wrong with any of that. It was all fine.” Well, exasperated, the young preacher said, “Well if there wasn’t any of that, please tell me why did you think my message was so poor?” And he said, “Because there was no Christ in it.” The young man responded, “Christ wasn’t in the text. You’re supposed to teach and preach the text.” Here’s what the old preacher told him. Spurgeon loved to quote this. “Don’t you know, young man, that from every town and village in England there is a road to London. And so, from every text in Scripture there is a road to Christ and your business when you get to a text is to say, ‘What is the road to Christ?’ and make sure your sermon follows that road.”

Every sermon we preach, every lesson we teach, must ultimately be rooted in Christ and Him crucified. That expression by the way, Christ and Him crucified, is shorthand. It’s shorthand for the historical fact of Jesus’ death but more than that for the meaning of His death. For the nature of the atonement. You see throughout his letters, Paul explains the death of Christ. It wasn’t just a death. People died constantly. Every second people die. It was the nature of Christ’s death that mattered. And he explains that in rich theological concepts which seem foreign to many Christians. As you work your way through Paul’s letters he talks about concepts like substitution. That Jesus died as a substitute in the place of others, the innocent one in the place of the guilty. Imputation. That is on the cross God credited the sins of those who would believe to Jesus. And He credits the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner. Propitiation. That while Jesus hung on that cross with my sins credited to Him, God for those six hours, poured out on Him all the wrath, the eternal wrath that my sins deserve and He fully satisfied that wrath in Christ. Justification. That He credited the righteousness of Jesus’ life to me. Those who believe get a right standing before God

based solely on the righteousness of another, Jesus Christ. That's how he explains the death of Christ. The heart of Paul's ministry of the Word was the person of Jesus Christ and the ramifications, the nature of His atonement. Paul didn't try to craft his message to fit the Corinthian context. In fact, his preaching there was emphasizing the one element that was most in conflict with the Corinthian culture. The one element that they thought was absolute foolishness. A crucified God.

Folks, it's true as you look around us that the evangelical church in America has allowed its focus to drift. Today all the things that should be in our peripheral vision occupy the center. Paul wants us to know that the center of all of our teaching and preaching must be the person of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the atonement. That means that pastors and churches shouldn't choose their next series based on what they think will draw the largest crowd. Paul's preaching didn't focus on, didn't center on how to have better relationships or better communication or as a pastor in our city recently taught, how to have seven days of better sex. We have to preach all the Scripture without ever letting our eyes off the center, Christ and Him crucified. That also helps determine the boundaries of our fellowship. The truth of the gospel ought to be more important to us than even other very important issues like abortion or the sanctity of marriage or social justice. We should be more concerned about protecting our gospel than our planet. About defending the atonement than the environment. We cannot allow any cause to be more important to us as believers than Christ and His atonement. D.A. Carson was right. "When the periphery is in danger of displacing the center we are not far removed from idolatry". If we want our teaching and preaching to put the power of God's spirit on display then we have to make a commitment Paul had. Focus on God's message and not on personal glory.

There's a second commitment we must make and it's this: depend on God's grace and not on personal ability. Depend on God's grace and not on personal ability. Paul now moves from the content of his preaching to the content of his heart. Look at verse 3. "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." Now there's two ways to understand this verse. Paul may be referring to his physical circumstances. It's possible that he was physically ill when he arrived in Corinth and therefore he was physically weak. Or perhaps he was afraid for his own safety while he was there. Read Acts 18 and you'll understand there was good reason for him to. There were



many enemies there in Corinth. So, in verse 3 Paul may be describing his physical weakness and his fear of his circumstances. But in the context it's best here to see Paul again contrasting himself with the sophist. So it's more likely in verse 3 that Paul is referring to his own attitude about preaching. He preached to them in weakness and with fear and much trembling. Paul uses those last two words, "fear and trembling", together in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 5 where he tells first century slaves to serve their masters with fear and trembling. That is with anxious anxiety. A sort of conscientious anxiety to serve them. In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul is saying that's how he approached preaching; with a conscientious anxiety. It wasn't a fear of personal danger that made Paul tremble. It was the weight of the responsibility he shouldered. As one commentator, Gordon Fee, writes, "Paul seems overwhelmed by the task." When Paul preached he was painfully aware of his own weakness. He had a deep sense of his own inadequacy to do what God had called him to do. And inwardly he was filled with fear and trembling from the reminder that he was speaking on behalf of the living eternal God. By the way, when Paul describes himself as being among the Corinthians in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, he had already been a preacher of the gospel as an apostle for more than 20 years. Paul's attitude was exactly the opposite of the attitude of the speakers the Corinthians had come to admire.

One of the distinguishing qualities of the sophist was their supreme self-confidence. Duane Litfin says, "Self assurance was the sine qua non of the effective orator." One ancient writer describes the attitude of one of the sophists like this. Listen to this, "He appeared before his audience as one who was entering to win glory for himself and was confident that he could not fail." Paul on the other hand, felt inadequate, incapable of proclaiming the testimony of God and he comes back to this theme often. Look at 1 Corinthians 15. First Corinthians 15 verse 10. He says, "By the grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me did not prove vain but I labored even more than all of them", that is all of the apostles, "yet, not I, but the grace of God with me." Paul says, I was incapable of laboring for God, the grace of God had to make me capable. Look over at 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14. He describes his ministry this way. He says, "Thanks be to God who manifests through us", the end of verse 14, "the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." God manifests Himself through us in this sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him. Verse 16, "For some that means that we're an aroma of death, that leads to death; to others an aroma that leads to life. Who is adequate for these things for we are not like many peddling the word of God." If you're

just peddling the word of God you can be self-confident. “But instead we are as from sincerity as from God we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” How can you do that? Look down at chapter 3 verse 4: “such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves but our adequacy is from God who made us adequate.” Paul says listen I needed God’s grace because I can’t, I can’t reach inside somebody’s heart and change their thinking, change who they are. I can’t do this. Like Paul, every teacher here is utterly inadequate to do what God has called us to do. Our only hope is His grace.

In May of 1532 Martin Luther was trying to encourage his friend, a man named Lauterbach, who had just been called as the pastor of the Castle Church there in Wittenberg. And to encourage this man, this friend of his, he explained his own early experience. Listen to what Luther told him. “How I feared the pulpit. I advanced more than 15 arguments to Dr. Staupitz”, that was his superior, “with them I declined my call. But they did me no good. When I finally said ‘Dr. Staupitz you are taking my life, I shall not live a quarter year if you make me preach.’ He replied, ‘God needs wise people in heaven, too.’” Paul came to the pulpit with that same sense of fear and humility. My question to you is if you are a teacher here this morning, when you come to open God’s Word, is that your attitude? If we’re honest with ourselves we’re all tempted to believe that we can teach in our own ability. That we have the capacity in and of our own minds to understand the depth of the word of God. We actually convince ourselves that we can take that truth and explain it in such a way that it changes people. We need to repent. John Calvin writes “Those who intrude themselves confidently or who discharge the ministry of the Word with an easy mind as though they were fully equal to the task are ignorant both of themselves and of the task.” Self-confidence is deadly in anyone who handles the Word. It’s like the story maybe you’ve heard of the preacher who was full of self-confidence and he entered the pulpit with this great sense of self confidence. When he was done it was obvious to everybody that the sermon was an absolute dud. I’ve had that awareness. I’ve walked out of here and realized that and sat down. He came out of the pulpit greatly humbled. Later an elder in the church came to him and gave him this very wise advice. He said to him, “Son, if you had entered the pulpit the way you left it, then you would have left the pulpit the way you entered it.”

Our confidence can't be in ourselves, it can't be in our own ability to communicate the truth. We don't have that power. Our confidence is in ourselves when we rely on our personality instead of our careful study. When we rely on our ability to communicate; to make people laugh or cry at just the right times to just sort of bring them along. When we rely on our intellect, our experience, our education. To teach and preach in a way that demonstrate the Spirit's power we must depend on God's grace and not on personal ability. We must surrender every shred of self-confidence. And like Paul we must cultivate a true sense of our own weakness and inadequacy. We must approach our ministry of the Word with fear and trembling with a conscientious anxiety that we are taking it upon ourselves by Christ's appointment to speak on behalf of God. Because when we are weak, when we know we are weak, God manifests His power through us because only then does He get all the glory. He won't share His glory with us. It's like Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "We have this great a treasure in earthly vessels." Even that sounds a little too stately. You know what the Greek text says? We have this treasure in clay pots. That's all we are. We're clay pots. "So that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not of ourselves." If we want to teach and preach in the demonstration of the Spirit and His power, we have to make the same commitments that Paul made. One, we must focus on God's message and not on personal glory. Number two, we must depend on God's grace and not our personal ability.

There's a third commitment we have to make here. It's trust in the Spirit's power and not any human method or technique. Trust in the Spirit's power and not any human method or technique. Look at verse 4, "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." You know what Paul is saying? He's saying that he intentionally, deliberately, structured his preaching to ensure that the power did not rest in his own person or his form or his delivery. Notice what he says in verse 4, "My message", that's literally my logos, my word, probably here referring to the content of his preaching, "and my preaching", that is the form of his delivery; the style in which he presented his message. Now it's possible that Paul intends those two words as a figure of speech called a "hendiadys." A hendiadys is when you combine two words with a conjunction and together those two words unite to form one new idea. It's like the English expression "sick and tired." You've heard me use that before. When you say that you're not sick and you're not tired; you're sick and tired. Those are pretty different things. It may be what he's saying here. If so, he's saying something like this: Absolutely nothing about my

teaching was in persuasive words of wisdom. Now that doesn't shock you. But let me tell you if you'd been sitting among the congregation that first heard this letter read from Paul in Corinth those words would have shocked you because that "persuasive words of wisdom" was the primary goal of all of the sophists. That's what they wanted to do. They wanted to use the wisdom of their words, the skills of their delivery to be persuasive. All kinds of techniques. And Paul says I didn't use any of their methods. Instead notice what marked Paul's ministry of the word: "My message and my preaching were in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The Greek word here for demonstration is a word the sophists loved. It occurs only here in the New Testament, but in Greek rhetoric it was a technical term for compelling evidence or proof. Paul says the compelling evidence, the compelling proof of my message was not my amazing power to persuade you. It wasn't in my technique. But rather the evidence was the obvious work and power of the Spirit through my message. Listen folks, when we teach the Scripture the compelling factor in our teaching and preaching is not our personal powers of persuasion. It's not the brilliance of our argument. It doesn't lie in the structure of our lesson or in the power of our delivery. The compelling demonstration of all true teaching and preaching must be the Spirit and His power. The real power never lies in the person of the speaker, thank God. It lies in the work of the Spirit.

Now, none of us here this morning are tempted to use the techniques of first century Greek rhetoric that were common to the sophists. None of us here are tempted to go to churches where the person speaking is using those methods. But we are still faced with the same type of temptation today. We are still tempted to substitute human methods of persuasion for the power of the Spirit. We're just tempted by different methods, different techniques. We have to search our own souls and ask ourselves: what are we tempted to rely on? What human methods or techniques? Or when we teach, what do we really believe persuades the people who listen to us? Or what do we look for in churches and teachers and preachers? What are we drawn to?

You know we can be tempted to think that the power of persuasion lies in the style of delivery. I don't know about where you guys came from but I grew up in the South. And I grew up in churches where pastors had a great deal of confidence in their style. It was clear that they believed that if you expend a lot of energy, if you ramp up the volume, if you sweat through a couple of handkerchiefs, if you use a lot of aphorisms and sort of catchy sayings and then close the service

with an emotional story, that'll work. Now, fortunately that style is out of vogue today mostly. What's popular today is different techniques. Somebody who comes out cool and catchy. Entertaining. Makes you laugh, makes you cry. And you leave feeling good about having been in church. Or there's the sort of quiet, intense, sincerity. We just need to be transparent with each other. We need to have a conversation just like it was you and me talking. But regardless of what style it is ultimately by the way, the style that a person uses should simply be a reflection, a natural reflection of who they are. If the person is pretending to be something in teaching and preaching that they aren't, that's hypocrisy. The way they teach, the way they preach should be an overflow of who they are, should be an enlargement of who they are. What you see up here today is not different than what you would see in my office. It's just a little bigger.

But regardless of what style the person may speak in, we can never think the style is the key, that that's where the power is. Other churches and pastors are tempted to put their confidence of persuading people in the visual arts. In properties put on the platform, in drama, in the right lighting or in something else that's visual and experiential. You got to set the right mood with music, and lighting and volume. Their confidence is in some kind of atmosphere. Either contemporary or traditional. It goes both ways. Our church is committed, and other churches like ours, committed to biblical exposition at all levels. We're not exempt from putting our trust in other things than the power of the Spirit either. Sadly, our confidence can also become easily misplaced. In our hours of study, in our careful exegesis, in our homiletics skills, our plural noun propositions and our parallel outline points and our passionate delivery and our alliteration. You know Lloyd-Jones in his excellent book On Preaching and Preachers said, "It's easy for preachers to become pulpiteers rather than preachers." In other words, entertainers rather than those who deliver God's message. When the message is all about them. Henry Ward Beecher described messages designed to put the skills of the preacher on display as "Nebuchadnezzar sermons." "Is this not Babylon the great which I myself have built by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" Beecher went on to say that would to God that these preachers and Nebuchadnezzar go to grass for a time if like him they would return sane and humble. Listen, when we teach, careful exegesis, diligent preparation are essential. God never blesses laziness. But if our confidence of persuading people is anywhere but in the power of the Spirit we will never know His power in our teaching and preaching. Charles Spurgeon understood that, that great preacher of England. We're told that as

he mounted the fifteen steps up to that massive pulpit in the Metropolitan Tabernacle preaching to thousands of people. And as he mounted each step lifting his heavy frame to the next step he would repeat to himself, “I believe in the Spirit. I believe in the Spirit.”

But what exactly is the teaching and preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit’s power? I think there’s a lot of misunderstanding here. Many men whom I respect in the history of the church have thought that it was some kind of special experience that the teacher or preacher should seek. A sort of special anointing. Well, Scripture does speak as we learned recently of two kinds of filling of the Spirit, two different Greek word groups. One of them in Ephesians 5:18 speaks of a condition or state of the soul, “be under the influence of the Spirit.” The other word group describes a special empowering, a divine enablement to fulfill a specific task for a specific time. God sometimes does that. There are times when I’m preaching when I seem to be especially outside of myself delivering the message, I get carried away with the message. But we’re never commanded to seek that. And that’s not what he’s talking about here. Because the context makes it clear that’s not what he’s talking about. As soon as he mentions that his message was in demonstration of the Spirit’s power, guess what he immediately begins to talk about in the rest of this chapter? The Word of God. The rest of chapter 2 flows out of verse 4, and in the rest of this chapter Paul explains that it was the Spirit who revealed the Word, it’s the Spirit who inspired the Word with the very specific words he wanted to use, and it’s the Spirit who illumines our understanding to grasp the Word when it’s taught or read or preached.

His point is that it’s the Spirit’s power that is demonstrated through the Word. The Spirit always speaks in and through the Word. When he was writing to the church in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 5 he said “our gospel did not come to you in word only”, it had to come in words but not in words only, “also in the power of the Holy Spirit.” In other words, the Spirit manifested His power through the words Paul preached. How can you and I teach and preach in the demonstration of the Spirit and His power? Not by seeking some experience. Not by using our own giftedness, by our own strength, by our own ability, but by using the giftedness the Spirit has given us to preach the truth He revealed in the words He inspired and to do so in complete dependence on Him. Then the Spirit does what you and I as teachers can never do. He takes that

word into the heart of the person and He turns on the light where they understand it, they see it, they grasp it, and it changes their thinking, it changes their hearts.

That's what it means to speak in the demonstration of the Spirit and His power. Listen to how John Calvin described it. He said, "When the minister executes his commission faithfully by speaking only what God put into his mouth", that is God's Word, "the inward power of the Holy Spirit is joined with his outward voice." We have to understand that the power is not in us; it's not some experience that happens to us as teachers or preachers. It's not some technique that we use. The power is in the Word of God energized by the Spirit through our teaching. Paul's point in these first two chapters is that God has a great eternal plan to redeem sinners. And He created and structured that plan so that no human being would be able to boast before Him. God chose a message that undermines all human wisdom. And God chose a method, preaching, that cuts across human wisdom in every age.

What I'm doing this morning has never been looked on with great excitement. Why? Well, God determined the message and God determined the method He would use so that in the end no human could get any credit, only He would. He alone would get the glory. And when we as individual teachers or when whole churches try to change the emphasis of the message away from Christ crucified and exalted as Lord, or we try to change the method, the form of delivering that message, bad things happen. Look back at chapter 1 verse 17. First Corinthians 1:17. Look at the end of the verse. When that happens "the cross of Christ is made void." That is, it is emptied of its power. The end of chapter one we're told that when everything works the way God designed it God alone gets the glory. When it doesn't it robs Him of His glory.

But there's another terrible result in verse 5 of chapter 2. Look at it. Paul says the reason that neither my message nor my preaching were with human technique persuasive words of wisdom, is verse 5, "so that", in order that "your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God." When we substitute for God's message or method then we cause the faith of those who hear us to rest on human wisdom and not on God's power. When a teacher or preacher elevates himself or herself rather than God's message, when he depends on his own abilities rather than God's grace, when he trusts in human methods and techniques rather than in the Spirit's power, to

use what Luther called “the bare Word of God”, it builds people’s faith in man rather than in God, in human wisdom rather than in God’s wisdom and in cleverness rather than in the Spirit’s power.

Now, what are we to do with this text? Let me for a moment address those of you who are teachers at some level. Whether it’s your family, whether it’s here in ministry in the church, listen to Gordon Fee:

Paul’s point needs a fresh hearing. What he is rejecting is not preaching, not even persuasive preaching and teaching; rather it is the real danger in all preaching: self-reliance. The danger always lies in letting the form and content get in the way of what should be the single concern: the gospel proclaimed through human weakness but accompanied by the powerful work of the Spirit so that lives are changed. That’s hard to teach in a course in homiletics but it still stands as the true need in all genuinely Christian teaching and preaching.

Listen, we live in a culture that’s almost identical to Corinth. And we are still faced with the same decisions that confronted Paul when he came to Corinth. We need to focus as teachers on God’s message and not on our own glory. To depend on His grace and not on our personal ability. Let Him make us adequate and to trust in the Spirit’s power and not any human technique or method. And that means teaching the Word of God in dependence on the Spirit of God. Because when we do our message and our preaching will be in the demonstration of the Spirit and His power and not our own.

But what about the rest of you? What about all of us? What are the implications of this text if you’re not a teacher or preacher? Perhaps that’s best answered by an article that appeared in *Christianity Today* posted on its website back in November. The article was entitled “Yawning at the Word.” The author, Mark Galli, was expressing concern about the current expectations placed on those who teach the Word by those people who listen. Listen to what he writes. And remember now *Christianity Today* is no paragon of biblical theology or preaching. He writes,

It is well and good for the preacher to base his sermon on the Bible but he better get to something relevant pretty quickly or we start mentally to check out. ‘Don’t spend a lot of time in the Bible,’ we tell our preachers. ‘But be sure to get to personal



illustrations, examples from daily life and most importantly an application that we can use.' It's easy, he says, to see how this culture has profoundly reshaped the dynamics of preaching and teaching. No longer are listeners asked to listen humbly to the proclamation of God's word in all its mystery and glory. To be sure we want the preacher to begin with the Word; we're Christians after all. But only as a starting point. And only as long as he moves on fairly quickly to things that really interest us.

The question for you, for all of us is this. Are you embracing and contributing to that kind of mindset among the people of God? Or are you fighting it? Like the Corinthians, have you allowed yourself and your perspective of what good teaching and preaching is to be shaped by the style of the culture? Paul said there would be times that would come like this. He warned his son in the faith in 2 Timothy chapter 4. He says, I want you to preach the word and I want you to do it whether it's popular or it's not because it won't always be. He says in 2 Timothy 4:3, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." The question for you as those who hear the Word of God is have you, like the Corinthians, allowed yourself to be shaped by the culture around you so that you want what the culture wants? Or instead are you willing to respond to the biblical message and the biblical method so that God alone gets the glory? Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word. We thank You for how it warns us and confronts us and teaches us. How the power of Your Spirit rests within it and for those of us who are in Christ it's as if You Yourself are speaking to us through Your Word. It comes alive and Lord we thank You. We pray, Father, that for those of us who teach and preach that You would help us to focus on Your message. To rely on Your grace and on Your Spirit's power. Help us not to do it for our own glory relying in our own ability or some human method or technique so that You alone get the glory. And Father I pray for all of those who hear and listen to the word of God, give them open receptive hearts. Give them a love for Your truth. May they desire it like babies long for milk. Father may this church be a place where we love Your word most of all. We thank You, oh God, for the challenge.

Help us not to be shaped by the culture around us but instead shaped by Your very words. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.