

Series: 1 Corinthians

Title: What Christ Sends Preachers to Do

Text: 1 Cor 1: 14-18

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Our subject is “What Christ Sends Preachers to Do?” As Paul dealt with this first problem of contention within the church at Corinth, over preachers, he said,

1 Corinthians 1: 13: Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? 14: I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; 15: Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. 16: And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

Paul “thanked God.” He attributed it to the providence of God that he only baptized a few believers at Corinth. Under Paul’s preaching, the Spirit of God only regenerated and called a few at Corinth to faith in Christ. Therefore, Paul only baptized a few. Paul was thankful for this. Why? He said, “Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.”

1 Corinthians 1: 17: 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.

The main point of this message is that the chief charge of every preacher, sent by Christ, is to preach the gospel of Christ.

WHAT NOT TO DO AND WHAT TO DO

There are things Christ sends his preacher not to do and things Christ sends his preacher to do, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” (1 Cor 1: 17)

Christ does not send his preachers to baptize. Paul is not making light of believer’s baptism. Men always take things to the extreme. Some read this statement and say, “Baptism is not important.” That is not Paul’s point. Baptism is important. In baptism, the believer publicly professes Christ’s name, as the only name whereby we are saved, by whom we are now governed.

Nor is Paul saying that he personally was not sent by Christ to baptize. Christ did not mention baptizing when he called Paul. Yet, Paul just said that he did baptize some. So that is not what he means.

Paul is not saying that he did not care if sinners were converted to Christ. This is the same man who said, “I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” (Ro 9:3) Paul had a great desire to see God regenerate sinners and give them faith in Christ.

So what is Paul saying? Paul is saying that the primary, chief goal of the preacher sent by Christ is not to seek conversions and baptisms. Our chief goal is not to fill the pews with people, not to gain a following, not to build up a church.

The chief priority of the preacher Christ sends is to preach the gospel, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” (1 Cor 1: 17) The chief mission Christ sends his preacher with is to declare the good news of the gospel. The declaration—the proclamation—the preaching of the gospel of Christ is the means God has chosen to save his people from the first hour of our conversion until the last. We read in verse 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.”

If you ask most preachers today—or their church members—what their mission is, most will say it is to make disciples for Christ, to bring sinners to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Be sure no one misunderstand. Indeed, Christ’s preacher and Christ’s people want to see men made into disciples for Christ, we want to see sinners brought to faith in Christ. Paul said, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” (Rom 10: 1) But that is not chief charge that Christ gives his preachers, “For Christ sent [us] not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.”

Why is it so important to understand this? It is important because Christ alone has ability to give the sinner a new heart; Christ alone has ability to give the sinner a true understanding; Christ alone has the ability to grant repentance and faith to the sinner. And God is pleased to do so through one means—the preaching of Christ alone! So our number one charge from Christ is to preach the gospel of Christ and him crucified.

The preacher and people who think their chief charge is to bring sinners to faith, will alter the word preached in order to make it happen. Most, turn to other means, as well.

HOW NOT TO PREACH

So secondly, Paul says Christ taught us how not to preach the gospel. We are sent “to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” (1 Cor 1: 17) There is a way of preaching, called here “wisdom of words”, which makes the word preached of none effect. “Wisdom of words” includes several things.

One, to veil or leave out doctrine is to preach with wisdom of words. That which they speak may be true, according to the scriptures. But it is what they leave out that makes it of none effect because it ceases to be the gospel of Christ.

They will not plainly declare that God is sovereign over all—in heaven and in earth. It is God’s sovereign right to choose whom he will and pass by whom he will. (Rom 9: 13-18; Dan 4: 35; Job 23: 13; Ps 33: 10-11; 115: 3; 135: 6; Is 14: 24-27; 46: 10-11; Mt 11: 25-26; Eph 1: 11; 2 Thess 2: 13-14)

They will not plainly declare that Christ accomplished the redemption of his particular people. Christ laid down his life for the sheep and only for the sheep and accomplished our redemption. (Jn 10: 14-16, 24-29; Mt 1: 21; Heb 1: 3; 9: 12; 10: 14)

Men hide back the truth of the necessity and certainty of the Holy Spirit’s work in his people. Our flesh is totally sinful and profits nothing. Each sinner God saves must be regenerated and shall be. This work of God the Holy Spirit is irresistible by the grace of the Holy Spirit. (Jn 3: 3-8; Job 14: 4; 15: 14-16; Eph 2: 1-9; 4: 24; Col 2: 13; Rom 2: 28-29; Titus 3: 3-5; Ja 1: 17-18)

Some hide back the truth concerning God’s preservation of his people. God keeps his people in faith in Christ to the end and will lose none. (Ps 138: 8; Php 1: 6; Rom 8: 28-29; 1 Thess 5: 23; 1 Pet 1: 3-5; 5: 10)

Especially, men keep back the truth concerning good works. Every good work is foreordained by God and that is the reason believers perform them. They are all by God’s grace, to the praise of God’s glory. When believers do anything honoring to the cause of Christ it is God who gets the glory. (Is 26: 12; Eph 2: 10; Php 2: 13; Heb 13: 20-21)

Chiefly, in all, men will not boldly declare that Christ is All and in all his people. Christ is our Wisdom, and our Righteousness, and our Sanctification and our Redemption. Therefore, all his children glory only in our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Col 3: 11; 1 Cor 1: 30-31; Col 2: 10; Gal 6: 14; Php 3: 7-9_

Yet, preachers vainly imagine they are making disciples for Christ. How can you make a disciple for someone you will not preach? They are comforting sinners in their rejection of the one and only Propitiation for sin. Such preachers will be found guilty of the blood of souls. (Gen 9: 5; Eze 3: 18-21)

Two, “wisdom of words” explains the gospel away. Intellectuals dissect the Rose of Sharon till the sweet-smelling savor of Christ’s is gone! They apologize for Christ till there is no gospel. They adorn the gospel when it needs no adorning. With what will you adorn silver and gold? What light will you shine to make men see the brilliance of the sun? Simply declare the scriptures:

Galatians 4: 4: When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

2 Corinthians 5: 21: He hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Galatians 3: 13: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree:

Hebrews 7:26: For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

1 Peter 3:22: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

Three, “wisdom of words” is to establish the sinners’ supremacy and authority. In 1 Corinthians 2: 1, Paul said, “I came not unto you with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.” “Excellency” means supremacy and authority. This kind of wisdom of words makes man the supreme authority. Either the preacher exalts himself to make converts or exalts sinners to convert themselves. He puts the focus on man and man’s works. But listen to what Paul said, “For I determined not to know any thing among you,” it means I determined not to turn your eyes, your attention, your hearts to anything among you, “save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (1 Cor 2: 2) But what does 99% of this world’s preaching do? It gives man supreme authority by turning the sinner’s focus to his own person and to his own works. On the contrary, true preaching turns all attention to Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross. We declare man’s total inability and God’s sovereign ability to save without fail.

Brethren, especially you men who preach from this pulpit, remember, nobody ever made the cross of Christ of none effect by using great plainness of speech. The gospel of Christ does not need man’s logic, rhetoric or reasoning, Christ must simply be declared!

THE PRINCE OF PREACHERS

Let’s hear Christ preach himself in John 6. “Christ is the Rock of offense.” (Rom 9: 33) Everything Christ himself preached offended someone because he preached himself!

In his very first sermon, Christ preached that he is the Messiah. When they did not believe, he preached the reason they did not believe by preaching the doctrine of election. He said, “Many widows were in

Israel...but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, unto Sidon, unto a woman, a widow...and there were many lepers in Israel...but none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman, the Syrian.” (Lu 4: 25-27) Christ essentially told them what he told the Pharisee’s, “You believe not because ye are not of my sheep.” (Jn 10: 26) They were filled with wrath and tried to throw him off a cliff.

In John 6, Christ did the same thing. They asked the Master what work they must do. Christ declared, “This is the work of God that you believe on him whom he hath sent.” He preached with great plainness, declaring, “I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (Jn 6: 29, 35)

And Christ was obedient to the Father who sent him. When they did not believe, Christ did not use “wisdom of words” to make converts. Notice what he told those who did not believe on him, “But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (Joh 6:36-37) He told them plainly why they did not believe on him, “Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” (Joh 6:43-45 AV) Christ told them plainly, that the reason they did not believe on him is because they could not, of their own will, come to him and rest in him. All God’s people must and shall be taught of God. Those who come to Christ come because they “have heard, and have learned of the Father.”

The more trouble they had believing the more plainly, Christ declared the truth. He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” (Joh 6:53) He told them it matters not how religious you are or how many religious works you have done. Until the Father draws you, until the Father teaches you, until the Father gives you life and faith in Christ, you have no life in you.

The longer he preached the madder they got because the gospel gives all the glory to God and gives the sinner no room to boast. Then Christ got very plain, “When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?” Does it offend you that God the Father receives the glory of choosing and teaching his child the gospel? Does it offend you that Christ receives all the glory for saving his people from our sins? Does it offend you that the Holy Spirit receives all the glory for giving life and faith to his child? Christ said, “*What* and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.”

They heard and understood exactly what Christ preached. “From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (Joh 6:61-69) He was telling them what he told Peter on another occasion, “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Mt 16:17)

Do you see, brethren, how Christ preached the gospel plainly? Many were offended and walked no more with him. Some tried to throw him off a cliff. Others picked up stones to stone him. Finally, they nailed him to a cross. So how do preachers expect to get along with unregenerate sinners when they hated Christ so much that they nailed him to a cross? This is one reason so many preachers use “wisdom of words.” Paul

said, “only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.” (Gal 6: 13) But Paul was a faithful, Christ-sent preacher. He said, “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.”

WHY?

Why do many not preach the gospel while some preach only Christ and him crucified? The answer is in verse 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.” (1Co 1:18)

Many do not preach the gospel because “the preaching of the cross is to them that [are perishing] foolishness.” Notice, the word “preaching” is the word “Logos.” It means “The Word.” It does not mean “words” but it means “THE WORD of the cross.” True preachers preach Christ who is “the Word of the cross.”

John 1: 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... 14: And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

But our text says that some preach with “wisdom of words”—plural. They do so because “The Word”—singular—“of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness.” To declare Christ the Word and only Christ the Word, to declare Christ crucified on a bloody cross and to only use this means of preaching is to them that are perishing, foolishness.

Be sure you understand what the verse says. Not only do they deem it foolishness to preach only Christ and him crucified, not only do they deem preaching as foolishness, but they deem Christ of the cross foolishness. A man can make his excuses but this is God’s word on why he will not boldly, plainly preach Christ and him crucified, “The Word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness.”

So then why do some preach only Christ and him crucified and do so with great plainness of speech? It is declared in the second half of verse 18, “but unto us which are saved it”—the Word, Christ of the cross—“is the power of God.” (1Co 1:18) Notice, verses 23 & 24, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (1Co 1:22-24)

Christ’s preachers and Christ’s people have been called/saved by Christ. We have experienced this call through the preaching of the gospel, through the preaching of the Word of the cross. Therefore, we know “the Word” of the cross. We know Christ himself. We know Christ is the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God. Christ has taught us that by his death on the cross, he perfected us forever, he made us the righteousness of God, and he declared God just and our Justifier.

Therefore, “unto us which are [being] saved”—the Word of the cross is the power of God. Christ himself is the power of God and the wisdom of God. And now we know, that this means of preaching is the means Christ uses. The preaching of the cross is the Power of God. We know it because we have experienced Christ’s Power and Wisdom in calling us.

Now, read the rest of the chapter. Through the preaching of Christ and him crucified God made our wisdom foolish and made Christ to be Wisdom in our hearts. Through the simple declaration of the Word of the cross, God made our power utter weakness and made Christ Power in our hearts. Now we know that God chose to save us by the means this world despises: by sending his Son to take the form of a servant, by Christ dying on a bloody cross and by calling and continuing to saving us through the foolishness of preaching.

Now, we know the reason it pleased God to save us through the foolishness of preaching is “That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Cor 1: 29-31)

Therefore, when we preach, we glory only in the Lord Jesus Christ. We preach Christ and him crucified because Christ is the Power and Wisdom of God unto us and the means of preaching is how we experienced his Power and Wisdom. Through the preaching of the cross, we received this ministry from Christ. It is how we received Christ’s mercy. So we only preach the Word of the cross and we wait on God to work the same power in his people.

That is exactly what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God...For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power”—that the supreme authority—“may be of God, and not of us.” (2Co 4:5-7)

It is only when a sinner experiences the Power and Wisdom of Christ through the preaching of the gospel that Christ and the means of preaching will become the Power and Wisdom of God unto him. Only then will he and can he, turn from his vain wisdom of works and preach Christ of the cross and wait on God to make true disciples by making Christ their All!

Amen!