



Christ Crucified

Summary and Goal

To know Jesus is to come to the cross. In coming to the cross we die to ourselves, our abilities, and our own wisdom so that His power might be fully demonstrated through us.

Main Passages

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Session Outline

1. Only Christ and Him Crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)
2. His Power Perfected in Weakness (1 Corinthians 2:3-4)
3. God's Power, Not Human Wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:5)

Theological Theme

Our sin is fully atoned for and we are fully redeemed because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. This is the heart of the gospel message.

Christ Connection

The cross of Christ is the central point of our faith. We must continually come to the cross to die to our ourselves, seeking to live in faith.

Missional Application

Our calling as believers is to preach Christ and Him crucified. We are called to spend our lives ushering others to the cross of Jesus so they too can know the power of His resurrection.

Historical Context of 1 Corinthians

Purpose

In all of Paul's letters, except Galatians, the main theme of the letter can be identified by the content of the thanksgiving or by the stated reason for his giving thanks. The premise of each of his letters also is usually found in the salutation beginning the letter, as well as in the introductory prayers following the thanksgiving section. Within his prescript and thanksgiving of 1 Corinthians, true to his custom, Paul presented the main theme of his letter—that all believers belong to the Lord (1:2). Jesus is Lord; believers are his possession. For Paul, whatever issue was discussed, the answer to the issue was always addressed with a reminder of the Lord's authority over them (1:2,10). He used more than seventy-five idioms from first-century slavery to speak about believers' relationship to the Lord, their master. Those who call upon the name of the Lord (1:2) are those who call upon his name as a sign of submission. In 1 Corinthians, "name" (1:2,10,13; 5:4; 6:11) is almost always synonymous with "authority."

Paul's purpose in writing 1 Corinthians was to motivate the Corinthian church to acknowledge the Lord's ownership of them and the implications this had in their lives. Key topics Paul addressed in this overarching theme of the ownership and authority of the Lord include Christian unity, morality, the role of women, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection.

Author

First Corinthians ascribes Paul as its author (1:1; 16:21). Biblical scholars are almost unanimous that Paul wrote the letter. He wrote it during the last year of his three-year ministry at Ephesus, probably a few weeks before Pentecost in the spring of AD 56 (15:32; 16:8; Ac 20:31).

Setting

First Corinthians is the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. He had written them an earlier letter, of which no extant copy exists, that included an admonition not to mix with the sexually immoral (5:9). The writing of this second letter (1 Corinthians) was prompted by oral reports from Chloe's household about factional strife within the church (1:11). Paul had also received reports about an incestuous relationship among the membership (5:1), factions that arose during observance of the Lord's Supper (11:18), and confusion over the resurrection of the dead (15:12). As a result, Paul addressed these issues in 1 Corinthians. Apparently as he was writing the letter, he received a letter from the Corinthians asking his opinion on various issues (7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Therefore, he included his replies within this letter to the Corinthian believers.

Special Features

First Corinthians is the most literary of Paul's letters. With a variety of stylistic devices—irony, sarcasm, rhetorical questions, alliteration, antithesis, personification, framing devices, hyperbole, repetition, picturesque words (with local color), double meanings, and other wordplays—Paul attempted to persuade his readers. He wanted to communicate to the Corinthians the necessity of accepting the Lord's authority over their lives.

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Session Plan

Christ Crucified

Introduction

- ? What is the greatest demonstration of power you have ever witnessed? Was it physical strength or some other demonstration of power? What made it so powerful?
- ? What is the most spiritually powerful experience you have had? What made it powerful?

In our text today, Paul's words to the Corinthians remind us of the humility with which we should always approach the tasks God calls us to obey. Our abilities, wisdom, and human power are weak foundations for the kind of faith to which Jesus has called us. Our singular goal (as was Paul's) should remain to know Christ alone and Him crucified. If that remains the message of our faith, then we will boast in His power, not our wisdom, because we realize that our weaknesses become strength in Christ.

1. Only Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

Paul urged his readers not to leave the cross in the past. The cross issues a daily call to die to ourselves. This isn't something we move past as Christians; we won't ever outgrow this principle. When we stop dying to ourselves, we are no longer following Christ. It is no wonder that Paul wanted to bring the Corinthian believers back to this fact since they were boasting in themselves not dying to themselves. When we stop proclaiming Christ crucified, we won't know the power of His resurrection.

? For Further Discussion

Why do you think Paul emphasized the crucifixion of Christ specifically? Why not the resurrection? What does it look like to die to yourself daily? to crucify your old habits and sins so that you can better follow Jesus each day?

- ? Why do you think Paul emphasized the manner in which he came and preached to the Corinthians?
- ? What would have been the danger in speaking as the other teachers of the day did? Have you seen this kind of teaching in the church before? How does it affect how we hear and respond to the gospel?

2. His Power Perfected in Weakness (1 Corinthians 2:3-4)

Paul continued by reminding believers the manner in which he came to them: humility and weakness. He didn't come with guns blazing, but with a spirit of meekness. He even went as far to say that any strength and abilities he might have had were reserved so that people would only see the power of God. He didn't want anyone attributing life change to his abilities or convincing language. Paul's words indicate that he felt wholly unqualified for the task God gave him.

- ❓ Have you ever felt unqualified for something to which the Lord has called you? How did you respond? Did you approach the task with humility or try to lean on other strengths you have?
- ❓ Can you think of other biblical accounts in which God used unlikely people to lead and serve in His kingdom? What does this tell us about God's nature?

3. God's Power, Not Human Wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:5)

Paul had a greater hope for the Corinthian believers than how they were living at the time. Having reminded them how and why he came to them, he made clear what it was all for. He wanted more for them. He wanted them to live with the power of God working in and through them. He wanted their faith to be held up by something sturdier than human wisdom. Their own abilities and wisdom would only get them so far.

- ❓ What are some ways that we place our faith in the wisdom of men?
- ❓ Does your faith rest on the wisdom of the people around you? Does it rest on your pastor/mentor? Why will this ultimately fail you, even if you are depending on a trustworthy person who loves you and desires the best for you? Where are you most prone to rely on your own strength and wisdom?
- ❓ How have you seen God's power mightily demonstrated through your life? Through the lives of people around you? How did those experiences lift your eyes away from yourself and your abilities toward God who is fully able?

Conclusion

- ❓ What does it look like to keep the cross of Christ at the center of our lives? Do you come to the cross daily, or is it something that remains in the distant past for you?
- ❓ How have you seen your faith strengthened through weakness? How has God demonstrated His power in an area of your life where you are not naturally gifted?

❓ For Further Discussion

How are you challenged to rely more heavily on the power of God instead of your own wisdom or the wisdom of people around you?



Expanded Session Content

Christ Crucified

Introduction

- ? What is the greatest demonstration of power you have ever witnessed? Was it physical strength or some other demonstration of power? What made it so powerful?
- ? What is the most spiritually powerful experience you have had? What made it powerful?

Power can be displayed in many ways. Perhaps it is an incredible fireworks display or a building being demolished by a wrecking ball. Maybe it is a large animal that makes you feel small. Maybe it is a large group of people joined together for a cause. Maybe you have met powerful people or leaders. There are many ways the world would define strength and power.

Often, the most powerful spiritual moments are when we are at our weakest—when we come to the Lord in desperate need of healing; when we come in sin and shame in need of cleansing; when we come with no words or prayers in need of intercession; when we come with fear and trembling, in need of His peace. It is in these moments, when we have nothing of our own that will do, that we find the power of Christ, the all-sufficient one. The words of the famous hymn, Rock of Ages, are apt for the text we will study today:

*Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress,
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the Fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.¹*

Session Summary

In our text today, Paul's words to the Corinthians remind us of the humility with which we should always approach the tasks God calls us to obey. Our abilities, wisdom, and human power are weak foundations for

the kind of faith to which Jesus has called us. Our singular goal (as was Paul's) should remain to know Christ alone and Him crucified. If that remains the message of our faith, then we will boast in His power, not our wisdom, because we realize that our weaknesses become strength in Christ. Paul desired an audacious faith for the Corinthian believers. This too is the heart of Christ for His followers—to strengthen our faith as we humbly submit to His power and purpose in our lives.

1. Only Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

-  Why do you think Paul emphasized the manner in which he came and preached to the Corinthians?
-  What would have been the danger in speaking as the other teachers of the day did?

Paul certainly didn't fit the mold that the believers in Corinth expected in a leader. The historical Greek heritage valued rhetoric and elevated speech. The city had great wealth and a bustling flow of people in and out due to trading. But, the apostle Paul did not cater to these tendencies. He made clear in these first two verses that when he came to the believers in Corinth, he came in humility. He wasn't interested in "brilliance of speech or wisdom." He didn't seek to spruce up the mysteries of God to sound more appealing. He simply came with the truth.

It wouldn't have been out of the ordinary for Paul to present the teachings of Christ with refined rhetoric. He was, after all, an educated man. He had the tools. And this was the manner in which other teachers presented their ideas. Yet if we look a few verses back in 1:12-17, we see his reasoning. The believers were divided over who had baptized them. They were aligning themselves with specific teachers instead of Christ alone. Paul came with the mystery of God and let it bear the weight of his message. In other words, he didn't want to get in the way of the gospel message.

-  Have you seen this kind of teaching in the church before? How does it affect how we hear and respond to the gospel?

This is not to say that teachers and preachers should not hone their craft or present their message in the best way possible. It can take just as much work to stay out of the way of the message as it does to dress it up with eloquent rhetoric. Rhetoric and well-crafted messages are not bad in their own right. But when we elevate those features over and above the truth of God's message, then we have done the Word and the people a disservice.

-  Why do you think Paul emphasized the crucifixion of Christ specifically? Why not the resurrection?

Paul reiterated that his singular goal was to know nothing other than Christ and Him crucified. That was it. No pomp and circumstance, just Christ crucified. Paul's words remind us that the cross stands at the center of our faith, because it is at the heart of our call to follow Jesus. His call is to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him (Matt 16:24). Paul urged his readers not to leave the cross in the past.² The cross issues a daily call to die to ourselves. This isn't something we move past as Christians; we won't ever outgrow this principle. When we stop dying to ourselves, we are no longer following Christ. It is no wonder that Paul wanted to bring the Corinthian believers back to this fact since they were boasting in themselves not dying to themselves. When we stop proclaiming Christ crucified, we won't know the power of His resurrection.

-  What does it look like to die to yourself daily? to crucify your old habits and sins so that you can better follow Jesus each day?

2. His Power Perfected in Weakness (1 Corinthians 2:3-4)

Paul continued by reminding believers the manner in which he came to them: humility and weakness. He didn't come with guns blazing, but with a spirit of meekness. He even went as far to say that any strength and abilities he might have had were reserved so that people would only see the power of God. He didn't want anyone attributing life change to his abilities or convincing language. Paul's words indicate that he felt wholly unqualified for the task God gave him.

-  Have you ever felt unqualified for something to which the Lord has called you?
-  How did you respond? Did you approach the task with humility or try to lean on other strengths you have?

We often feel the need to prove ourselves and prove our worth to God. We look around in comparison and think we will only be useful in the kingdom of God with certain gifts and abilities. That certainly wasn't Paul's message and that isn't what we see throughout scripture. Instead we see again and again that God has a habit of calling unqualified people to serve and lead in His kingdom:

- Moses had a speech impediment. God used Him to call His people back to truth repeatedly as He ushered them into the Promised Land (Ex 4:10-12).
- Gideon was the least of leaders in the weakest tribe. God called him a “mighty man of valor” and used him to defeat a great enemy (Jdg 6-8).
- David was the runt shepherd boy—overlooked when Samuel went to choose one of Jesse’s sons. God would raise him to be the king over Israel and a man after His own heart (1 Sam 16).
- Mary was a poor teenage girl. By her culture’s standards, she was unqualified to serve God in a mighty way. Yet, she was the vessel through which God chose to send His Son in the flesh (Luke 1-2).

 Can you think of other biblical accounts in which God used unlikely people to lead and serve in His kingdom? What does this tell us about God’s nature?

We are reminded in Paul’s approach and through his words to the believers that leaning on our own strength and abilities is not the path to God’s power. When we look at the overall story of God, we see Him choosing the least among people to demonstrate His power. Just a few verses prior to this Paul emphasized this fact saying, “Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one may boast in his presence. (1 Cor 1:27-29)” God doesn’t need human power to accomplish the work of His Kingdom. Instead, He seeks willing and humble followers who are desperate for Him to demonstrate His power through them.

3. God’s Power, Not Human Wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:5)

Paul had a greater hope for the Corinthian believers than how they were living at the time. Having reminded them how and why he came to them, he made clear what it was all for. He wanted more for them. He wanted them to live with the power of God working in and through them. He wanted their faith to be held up by something sturdier than human wisdom. Their own abilities and wisdom would only get them so far.

 What are some ways that we place our faith in the wisdom of men?

Paul’s Thorn

Paul was very familiar with leading from weakness. He would say in his second letter to the Corinthian church that, in order to prevent his pride from overtaking him, God gave him a thorn in the flesh. We don’t know what that was specifically, but it was an impairment to be sure. He pleaded with God to take it away, but it wasn’t taken from him. Read his response in 2 Cor 12:9-10: “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

- ❓ Does your faith rest on the wisdom of the people around you? Does it rest on your pastor/mentor? Why will this ultimately fail you, even if you are depending on a trustworthy person who loves you and desires the best for you?
- ❓ Where are you most prone to rely on your own strength and wisdom?

Relying on the wisdom of people can go a few different ways. One of those is by relying on our own power and wisdom. The truth is, we can live a false version of the Christian life in our own power. We can say all the right things, serve in the right ways, be disciplined in study. We can attend every small group our church offers, we can go on every mission trip, we can give endless money to those in need. We can appear very Christian and never once depend on Christ. But is that the kind of faith that Jesus calls us to?

Another way this can go is by resting on the power and wisdom of people around you. This might be your friends or family. It might be your leaders and mentors. It may mean that we go to them with our needs and concerns before we go to the Lord. If we don't learn how to hear and discern the voice of God in our own lives, we will be prone to rely on the people around us.

This certainly isn't to say we don't leverage our faith for one another and leverage God-given wisdom for one another. As a family of believers, we do not—and should not—walk with Christ in isolation. We all have times and seasons when our faith is depleted, and we need others to come alongside us. We need brothers and sisters who can help hold us up in faith when we are weak. We need godly wisdom from the trusted voices in our lives. We need people who can help us discern the voice of God and how we are to be obedient. But those things are not the foundation of our faith. If we do not have a faith apart from another person or group, then our faith is not in Christ alone. If human wisdom is what we rely on, then the power demonstrated in our lives will only be as great as what humans can offer. God has endless power that He offers us through His Spirit. That is the power and wisdom we want to speak into each other's lives and leverage for the sake of those around us. This is the difference in faith that relies on the wisdom of people and faith that relies on the power of God.

- ❓ How have you seen God's power mightily demonstrated through your life? Through the lives of people around you?
- ❓ How did those experiences lift your eyes away from yourself and your abilities toward God who is fully able?

Conclusion

Paul was convinced that holding up anything except the cross of Christ was insufficient. Clearly the Corinthians had a pride problem that Paul wanted to address. What were they boasting about? They, like us, relied too much on their own abilities and wisdom. As a result, their faith suffered. Paul wanted more for them, and Christ wants more for us, His children.

Paul did not rely on his own ability as he presented the gospel message. Paul focused on the message of the cross, so that his audience would put their faith in Christ rather than the ability of a human messenger. He was determined to lift up only Christ and Him crucified. Gifted communicators and intellectual persuasion doesn't save lost people. In actuality, God's saving power is perfected in our own weakness. Saving faith happens through the power of the Holy Spirit as He convicts and transforms the hearts of those who hear the gospel. His power is infinitely greater than human wisdom.

- ❓ What does it look like to keep the cross of Christ at the center of our lives? Do you come to the cross daily, or is it something that remains in the distant past for you?
- ❓ How have you seen your faith strengthened through weakness? How has God demonstrated His power in an area of your life where you are not naturally gifted?
- ❓ How are you challenged to rely more heavily on the power of God instead of your own wisdom or the wisdom of people around you?

Prayer of Response

Close in prayer, thanking God that His power is made perfect in your weakness. Pray that He would guide you to rely on His strength and wisdom rather than your own.

Additional Resources

- *The Explicit Gospel* by Matt Chandler
- *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott
- *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* by Tullian Tchividjian

For Next Week

Session Title

- Night is Coming

Main Passages

- John 9:1-4

Session Outline

1. Don't Miss People (John 9:1-2)
2. Our Suffering Isn't Wasted (John 9:3)
3. Night is Coming(John 9:4)

Memorize

⁴ My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not be based on human wisdom but on God's power.

- 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 Peter 1:3-5
- Tuesday - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
- Wednesday - John 5:28-29
- Thursday - Hebrews 6:17-20
- Friday - Romans 6:5
- Saturday - John 11:25-26

Extended Commentary

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

2:1. Paul called the Corinthians brothers and reminded them that he had first come to them preaching without eloquence or superior wisdom. Earlier he had asserted that God had not sent him to preach “with words of human wisdom” (1:17). Here he affirmed that he had fulfilled this divine design.

Contrary to those who had divided the Corinthian church on the basis of human arrogance and eloquence, Paul had simply announced the testimony about God. He had testified to what God had done in Christ. In his view, to preach the gospel was to make plain what God had done in sending his Son into the world. If Paul had presented the gospel eloquently and with sophistication, converts might have been swayed by his rhetoric and sophistry and not by the Holy Spirit.

2:2. Paul explained how he avoided human wisdom and sophistication as he preached in Corinth. He had determined to know nothing. . . except Jesus Christ. He had decided to make Jesus the center of his teaching while at Corinth. He chose not to involve himself in the practices of sophistry so prevalent in the cities of Greece. He emphasized the simplicity of his message by adding and him crucified. The crucifixion as the way of salvation was the most offensive dimension of the gospel, and it opposed the human arrogance of Jews and Gentiles. But it was nevertheless the power of God for salvation.

Paul personalized his recollection for the Corinthians by the phrase while I was with you. The Corinthian church could not deny that they had come to Christ through a gospel that did not employ human wisdom.

2:3. Paul continued to focus on the manner of his prior ministry in Corinth. He had come with weakness, fear, and much trembling. In all likelihood, the weakness of which he spoke was his physical ailments. Paul had suffered physical abuse because of his faith in Christ (2 Cor. 12:7). He had also had difficulties with his sight (Gal. 6:11), and perhaps other illnesses (2 Cor. 12:7-10). The apostle had not come to Corinth asserting himself with human strength as the factions in the Corinthian church had begun to do. He had come as a weak person—and in his weakness he had brought the wisdom of God.

2:4. Paul’s proclamation of the gospel at Corinth had accorded with his physical and emotional state. He had not preached with wise and persuasive words. It was common in Greek cities of that day for

philosophers and pagan religious leaders to gather followers through powerful rhetoric. Paul's human weakness made it evident that he had relied on the demonstration of the Spirit's power. The term demonstration was a technical legal term describing irrefutable evidence offered in court (cf. Acts 25:7). Paul's preaching had the support of the Holy Spirit's transforming power in the Corinthians' lives. When the Corinthians believed in Christ, they received many powerful demonstrations of the Spirit's work among them (see 2:13-15; 12:7). Even though Paul's preaching lacked sophistication and human wisdom, the fact that the Spirit manifested himself through his preaching proved that it did not lack power.

2:5. Why did Paul come to Corinth in this manner? He came with the message of the cross, in human weakness and relying on the Spirit so the Corinthians' faith might not rest on men's wisdom. Greek culture tended to rely on the worldly wisdom of its philosophers and rhetoricians. At this time, the Corinthian believers had begun to return to this cultural standard by exerting themselves in the church through human wisdom. In response, Paul pointed out that one of his central goals in his earlier preaching had been that they would build their lives on a new foundation, not on men's wisdom, but on God's power. The power of the gospel, brought through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, was the foundation of the Corinthians' Christian faith.³

References

1. "Hymn: Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me." Hymnalnet RSS. Accessed June 27, 2019. <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/1058>.
2. "The Present Power of Christ Crucified." Desiring God. June 25, 2019. Accessed June 27, 2019. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-present-power-of-christ-crucified>.
3. Pratt, Richard L. *1 & 2 Corinthians*. Edited by Max E. Anders. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000.