

ANSWER THREE: SOUND PREACHING

1 CORINTHIANS 02:01–05

Introduction

The Corinthian church was deeply divided. Two of the issues dividing it were a dispute over what kind of preacher should fill their pulpit, and which former minister had contributed the most to their church (cp. 1 Cor .1:11-16). The church desperately needed to understand what preaching really was. Only if they understood what God intended preaching to be could they hope to solve their differences. One of the strong solutions to division is sound preaching.

- I. Sound preaching is not eloquence or human philosophy (v. 1).
- II. Sound preaching has one great theme: Jesus Christ and Him crucified (v. 2).
- III. Sound preaching is proclaimed with a great sense of inadequacy (v. 3).
- IV. Sound preaching is not persuasive words, but a demonstration of the Spirit's power (v. 4).
- V. Sound preaching leads to faith (v. 5).

I. *1 Corinthians 02:01 Sound Preaching*

Sound preaching is not eloquence or human wisdom or philosophy. This is Paul's personal testimony. The words "I" and "my" are used eight times in these five brief verses, and note the opening phrase: "when I" (kago). It is emphatic. Paul stresses a critical fact: the concern of preaching is not eloquence or human wisdom or philosophy.

1. Sound preaching is not eloquence. The Greek word (huperoche) actually means superiority, elevation, pre-eminence, rising above. Remember Paul is speaking about words, not so much about himself, although the behaviour of a person could be involved. Paul did not try to sound more superior, more elevated, and more eloquent in his preaching. He was not concerned in the least with his preaching rising above and being more pre-eminent and recognized than the preaching of others.
 2. Sound preaching is not human wisdom or philosophy. Paul faced the same kind of situation that we face today, and in reality, the same kind of situation that every generation of believers face: a world that stresses the philosophy of humanism. The world, no matter its generation, is constantly seeking more and more wisdom, education, science, technology, and new and novel ideas, in particular ideas dealing with reality and truth. All of these pursuits are not only worthwhile, they are absolutely essential for man's welfare. The problem is this: man seeks these pursuits within the framework of this world. He forgets God entirely. As a result, the world's wisdom, education, science, technology, reality and truth are *only* of this world. And, of course, the destiny of all that is within the world is corruption and death. There is no fulfilling foundation and no permanency to anything within the world. Everything within the world is unfulfilling within itself, passes away and ceases to exist.
-

This is the reason Paul did not preach human philosophy or worldly wisdom. When Paul preached, he was not concerned with sounding like a philosopher or some deep thinker or some preacher and theologian with a new and novel idea or position.

3. Sound preaching is declaring the testimony about God. The word “testimony” (marturion) is the mystery or revelation about God. The glorious testimony or revelation about God is Jesus Christ and Him crucified (v. 2). Preaching is not delivering eloquent speeches nor sound advice on...

- self-development
- philosophy
- education
- new and novel ideas
- positive thinking
- history
- self-image
- religion and its rituals
- science

All of these have their place, and what truth lies within each needs to be taught; but they are not the subjects that are to be *preached by God’s ministers* to a lost world that is reeling under the weight of lonely, empty, starving and suffering masses of people. The genuine preacher of God is to preach the testimony (marturion, mystery, revelation) about God.

II. *1 Corinthians 02:02 Great Subject of Preaching*

Sound preaching has one great theme — Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The phrase “I resolved” (ekrina) means to have decided, to have made a decision. Paul made a *deliberate decision, a strong determination* to preach only Jesus Christ and Him crucified. His theme was not...

- Jesus the great model for men
- Jesus the great man of purpose
- Jesus the great martyr
- Jesus the great teacher
- Jesus the great example

1. The message of Paul was Jesus Christ, *His Person as the Son of God*, who has become for us “wisdom..., righteousness, and holiness, and redemption” (see 1 Cor. 1:30-31).
2. The message of Paul was Jesus Christ *crucified*. Paul declares, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Cor. 2:2). This is an emphatic, forceful statement:

⇒ The thrust of Paul’s preaching was the death of Jesus Christ.

⇒ The theme of Paul’s preaching was the death of Jesus Christ.

⇒ The message of Paul’s preaching was the death of Jesus Christ.

⇒ The principle of Paul’s preaching was the death of Jesus Christ.

⇒ The heart of Paul’s preaching was the death of Jesus Christ.

Paul concentrated on the death of Jesus Christ. The reason is clearly seen when we look at what Scripture says about the subject.

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are cleansed and freed from all sin.

Mat 26:28 *“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*

John 1:29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

1 Cor 15:3 *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*

Heb 9:22 *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

Heb 9:26 *Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

Heb 9:28 *So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

1 John 3:5 *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are accepted and reconciled to God and have peace with God.

Eph 1:6-7 *To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are justified.

Rom 5:9 *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are eternally redeemed.

Rom 3:24-25 *And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.*

1 Tim 2:5-6 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.*

Col 1:14 *In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Heb 9:12 *He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.*

1 Pet 1:18 *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.*

Rev 5:9 *And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we delivered from death.

2 Tim 1:9-10 *Who has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

Heb 2:9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are delivered from condemnation.

Rom 8:34 *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are delivered from the curse of the law, that is, from death and separation from God.

Gal 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”*

Gal 4:4-5 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

Col 2:14-15 *Having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are delivered from the judgment and the coming wrath.

1 Th 1:10 *And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

1 Th 5:9-10 *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are delivered from this present evil (corruptible and dying) age.

Gal 1:4 *Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that Satan's power over death and the world is broken and destroyed.

Heb 2:14-15 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

Rev 12:11 *They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are healed.

Isa 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are given all things.

Rom 8:32 *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that those who are powerless are saved.

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

1 Cor 8:11 *So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that the ungodly are saved.

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that sinners are saved.

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that the unrighteous are saved.

1 Pet 3:18 *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that the enemies of God are saved.

Rom 5:10 *For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that all men are drawn to Christ.

John 12:32 *"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we have access into the holy presence of God.

Heb 10:19-20 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that the great love of God is revealed to us.

Eph 5:2 *And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are freed from a self-centred life and live for Christ.

2 Cor 4:10-11 *We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

2 Cor 5:15 *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

1 Pet 4:1 *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are enabled to live for righteousness.

1 Cor 6:20 *You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are taught to love and sacrifice our lives for others.

Eph 5:2 *And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

1 John 3:16 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that our consciences are genuinely cleared so that we can serve God and bear fruit.

Titus 2:14 *Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Heb 9:14 *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we know the power of God.

1 Cor 1:18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are enabled to get rid of the old sins.

1 Cor 5:7 *Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast - as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that we are reconciled to men.

Eph 2:13-14, 16, 18 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier,...the dividing wall of hostility. And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility...For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

⇒ It is by the death of Jesus Christ that Jesus Christ gained the right to be exalted as the Lord of the dead and the living.

Rom 14:9 *For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*

Phil 2:8-11 *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Heb 1:3 *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Heb 12:2 *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

=> It is by the death of Jesus Christ that the church of God was bought.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

III. *1 Corinthians 02:03* Sense of Inadequacy

Sound preaching is proclaimed with a great sense of inadequacy. There are probably four reasons why Paul felt so inadequate.

1. Paul's personal appearance was apparently not impressive, not to the Corinthians. Paul says that he was unimpressive in person, (2 Cor. 10:10), and that he suffered some physical infirmity (Gal. 4:14; 6:11). This should not matter to a congregation of God's people, but it did to the Corinthians. Some among the Corinthians were more interested in the charisma, worldly ability and preaching skills of a pastor than in his depth and knowledge of the Lord. Unfortunately, this seems to have been the emphasis among many people of the Corinthian church.
2. Paul may have been a small framed man and a man with the knowledge, gifts and voice geared more to teaching than to preaching. When looking at the whole of Paul's life and what is said about him, this seems to be the case. However, the point cannot and should not be pushed. If the facts are accurate, then Paul would have sensed a deep inadequacy before the Corinthians because of their stress upon eloquence and charisma in speakers (1 Cor. 2:4; Cor. 10:10; 11:6).
3. When Paul came into Corinth he was sensing *weakness* in the ministry, a great personal inadequacy. In the four cities where he had ministered prior to Corinth, he had faced great trouble in the ministry. In Philippi he had seen a promising beginning smashed by the Judaizers or religionists. Similar happenings occurred at Thessalonica and at Berea. And in the city from which he had just come, Athens, Paul experienced what some say was a failure. Athens was a great intellectual centre, full of philosophers bristling about with the latest philosophies and world news. Paul had attempted to meet them on their own philosophic grounds. He had reduced Christianity to philosophic terms. He had tried to speak to them in the wisdom of the world, using their own terms and quoting their own authorities (Acts 17:22-31). His philosophical approach apparently failed to reach many for Christ (Acts 17:32-34). Thus, it seems that somewhere along the road, travelling between Athens and Corinth, Paul determined that forever after he would preach Christ and Christ alone, and he would preach in the simplest of words. He would never again wrap up the story of Jesus in the words of human wisdom and flowery speech.

4. Unquestionably, Paul sensed a spiritual inadequacy and unworthiness in serving the Lord. This is seen throughout his ministry. He knew that his sufficiency was in the Lord and in the Lord alone. He knew that whatever was done had to be done by the power of God's Spirit if it was to have lasting value. He knew that if anything was attempted in his own strength, it would fail and not last. Therefore, what Paul is describing is his *attitude*, his *state of mind*, which characterized his whole ministry. When he approached a person or a people to minister to them, he ministered to them in personal weakness and fear before the Lord, even to the point of trembling. He sensed a hesitancy, a nervousness, a tension, a trembling apprehension — all arising from a deep sense of inadequacy and of the eminent importance of the work.

Thought 1. No man should ever stand before a people in his own strength, stand before them depending upon...

- his appearance
- his charisma
- his ability
- his wisdom
- his novel ideas

The minister of God must know this: he cannot spiritually convert and change people. No person can deliver men from death and give them life that is both abundant and eternal. Only God can do that; therefore, the minister of God must live before God in weakness and in fear and trembling — always depending upon God's Spirit to equip him for proclaiming the gospel of God. God alone can give life and righteousness; God alone can bear the permanent fruit of life and true righteousness.

1 Cor 9:27 *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

1 Cor 15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

Eph 3:7-8 *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

1 Tim 1:15 *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.*

IV. 1 Corinthians 02:04 Preaching and the Spirit's Power

Sound preaching is not persuasive words, but a demonstration of the Spirit's power. Several points need to be closely observed.

1. Note the words *message* and *preaching*. A distinction is being made between sharing a message using daily speech or conversation and preaching. Paul's daily conversations focused upon Jesus Christ just as his preaching did. He is saying what he has already stressed: he was determined not to know anything among people except "Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Thought 1. What a dynamic example for us! Our lives and conversation should focus upon Jesus Christ — every day, all day long. When possible and *whenever opportunity can be made*, the theme of our conversation should be Jesus Christ and Him crucified...

- at home • in preaching • at work • in teaching
- at play • in discussing • at school • in sharing

Acts 4:20 “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

2 Cor 4:13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.

Eph 5:19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

Col 4:6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

2 Tim 1:8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

2 Tim 1:13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

Deu 6:6-7 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Psa 145:11 They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might.

Mal 3:16 Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name.

2. The word “persuasive” (peithois) means enticing, plausible. Paul’s witnessing and preaching was not based upon the enticing, persuasive, plausible arguments of man’s wisdom and philosophy.
3. The word “demonstration” (apodeixei) means to show forth with the most rigorous evidence and proof. The idea is that the evidence is presented so strongly that the truth is clearly seen.
4. The only way a person’s witness and preaching can be proclaimed so strongly is through the Holy Spirit and His power. The gospel of salvation can be convincing only when the Holy Spirit and His power demonstrates it.

Thought 1. Only the Holy Spirit can *convict, convince* and *convert* a person to live for God. Only the Holy Spirit can impart life to a person. Therefore, the minister of God must surrender his life to the Spirit of God. He must be filled with the presence, fullness and power of the Holy Spirit.

John 16:8-11 “When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 4:33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us [the Holy Spirit].

Eph 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

V. 1 Corinthians 02:05 *Sound Preaching Leads to Faith*

Sound preaching leads to faith. Note a critical point: the wisdom of men cannot save man. Only the power of God can. It is of no value whatsoever for a man to know...

- that Jesus Christ really lived, that He was an historical person.
- that Jesus Christ is really the Saviour, that he is truly the Son of God.
- that other religions and positions are not true.

A person’s salvation cannot stand in the human knowledge and wisdom of men. Human arguments and appeals may seem rational and logical, but they have no spiritual power. No man — no speech and no preaching — can convert a human soul and impart eternal life to it. Only God can do such a thing. Therefore, the minister of God must speak and preach under the influence and power of God’s Spirit.

Thought 1. Anything short of God’s Spirit places a person’s faith in the knowledge and wisdom of men. The crying need is for God’s people to be controlled by God’s Spirit so that God can demonstrate His power through them to a lost and dying world.

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ■