

We Preach Christ Crucified

A six-session Bible Study by Carol Geisler

Lesson 4b: “The Word of the Cross” (continued)

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18

Opening Prayer:

Almighty God, through the weakness of Jesus’ humble birth and his death on the cross you brought about our salvation. Help us by your Spirit to turn from the tempting ways and wisdom of the world and to find our hope and peace in you alone. Hear our prayer in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Recalling Lesson 1: The Penalty and the Promise

Jesus took the *penalty* of death onto himself, suffering death in our place. In exchange, he has given us the *promise* of forgiveness and life.

Recalling Lesson 2: Crucify Him! Foretold and Fulfilled

The Savior *fulfilled* all that the Old Testament Scriptures had said of him. The Lamb of God “was *foreknown* before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you” (1 Peter 1:20-21).

Recalling Lesson 3: It is Finished!

Those things commanded by God in the Law were a shadow of the things to come. Jesus finished our salvation by the shedding of his blood on the cross. Those who have received this salvation have been “crucified with him.”

Introduction to Lesson 4:

“The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (John 3:19). Just as Adam and Eve hid – or tried to hide – themselves from the presence of the Lord, so people today still hide in the darkness of sin and create false gods so they do not have to face the true God. Only the light of the Gospel, the message of the cross, can shatter the darkness of sin and fear. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

[26] For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what

is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (ESV)

How does Paul describe the social standing of the Corinthian Christians? V. 26 "not wise according to worldly standards, not powerful nor of noble birth."

How does their social standing demonstrate the power of God? God's choosing of them shames the world and brings its wisdom to nothing.

How is God's choice of "what is low and despised in the world" demonstrated by the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ? His birth, living and death would all be considered "lowly" by worldly standards.

Why does this remove any cause for boasting on our part? God's choosing of us was not because we were great.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

[1] And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (ESV)

In what ways do some false preachers today try to influence their listeners with "lofty speech or wisdom"? Some use words in a beautiful way, or present facts and examples that have the air of truth, but have content that is not Biblically faithful or edifying.

What was the apostle's message? "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

How does Paul describe his presence and the message he proclaimed among the people of Corinth? "in weakness and in fear and much trembling... and not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (humility and action!).

Read 2 Corinthians 10:10

[10] For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." (ESV)

Paul's opponents apparently agreed with his personal assessment. What did they say about his personal presence and speech? "bodily presence weak; speech of no account"

What was the foundation of faith for those who listened to Paul's "weak" message of the cross? His written word, and demonstrations of the Spirit.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

[1] Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. [2] But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. [3] And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. [4] In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. [5] For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. [6] For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (ESV)

How might popular contemporary preachers (perhaps on television or online) "tamper with God's Word"? Present false conclusions from it, by not considering the whole of Scripture or the centrality of Christ.

How do they try to make the message of the cross more acceptable to today's audiences? By appealing to our culture of "success," or accommodating the ethics of the age, or wrapping their message in shiny packaging.

How does the apostle Paul describe the message he and his companions proclaim? An "open statement of the truth" (v.2)

What is their message? "Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as servants." (v. 5)

If people reject the truth, who has blinded their minds? "the god of this world" – meaning Satan (as in John 12:31), but perhaps also the "god" of worldly success

Read 2 Corinthians 3:16 and John 16:7-11

[16] But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (ESV)

[7] Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. [8] And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: [9] concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; [10] concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; [11] concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (ESV)

How is the veil or blindness removed? “When one turns to the Lord”

Who will enlighten them and convict them of the truth? “The Helper” (the Holy Spirit)

Read Galatians 5:7-12

[7] You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? [8] This persuasion is not from him who calls you. [9] A little leaven leavens the whole lump. [10] I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. [11] But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. [12] I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! (ESV)

And Galatians 6:11-16

[11] See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. [12] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. [13] For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. [14] But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. [15] For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. [16] And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (ESV)

The Galatian Christians were tempted to think that faith in Christ crucified was not sufficient for salvation. They were being told that they must also follow the Law of Moses and undergo circumcision in order to be saved. The Greek word *skandalon*, translated as “stumbling block” (1 Cor. 1:23) and “offense” (Gal. 5:11) is the source of our English words scandal and scandalous.

Why is the message of the cross so scandalous in the eyes of the world? Because of its lack of requirements on our part (like circumcision – following of the Law).

What might some preachers today try to add to the Gospel? Social justice, giving, evidence of the Spirit

Read Romans 10:12-17

[12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

[14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (ESV)

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But what has to happen first?

Someone has to preach the word (v. 14)

How does the message of the cross come to people? When people hear the word of Christ (v. 17)

What is Paul's argument here about believing, hearing, preaching and sending? They flow one from another, and they are all necessary.

Summary:

Enemies of the Gospel said of the apostles, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6). God has a way of doing that, of turning things upside down. He chose what is weak and foolish in the world's eyes to bring about our salvation – a baby in a manger who grew up to become a helpless victim on a cross and rose from death as our victorious Lord. From our point of view, it may be more accurate to say that God is really turning things to the way they should be, right side up.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, through your birth in Bethlehem, the weakness of your death on the cross and your mighty resurrection you won for us forgiveness and eternal life. Fill us with your Spirit so that even in the face of the world's so-called wisdom and mocking ridicule, we will boldly proclaim the saving message of the cross. Amen.