

Spirit Empowered Preaching
God's Power Vs. Man's Presentation
1 Corinthians 2:1-4

Sam Horn, Ph.D.
Northland Baptist Bible College
Mid-America Conference On Preaching

Introduction:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Paul has come to Corinth – a city thoroughly given over to idolatry and paganism
Its people were thoroughly wicked – Corinthian to the Core

The only hope – only answer – only solution big/powerful enough to confront this situation was the Gospel – the power of God.

So, Paul came to this kind of a city with this kind of a message and delivered it. And it made a difference in the lives of real people – the Corinthian Church was born.

This message is as relevant and as powerful today as it was in Paul's. However; not everyone agrees. Most would agree that the content of the Gospel is just as powerful and important. However, the “container” in which the content is packaged is really up for grabs.

However, in this chapter, Paul argues that the method of delivery must be carefully evaluated lest it change or nullify the effect of the content of the message.

He preached a message that presented God as the sole source and power of salvation and his delivery reflected that message. Rather than depend on human wisdom or ability he preached in such a manner that depended on the Spirit for success (in demonstration of the Spirit) and would be verified by evidence of power (and of power) – namely in its accompanying result (that your faith would stand by this power of God and not by human wisdom).

I. The Priority in the Preaching event

The powerful, accurate, clear, and attractive proclamation of the biblical message is the real priority for the preacher

A. The Marks of Spirit Empowered Preaching

1. Word Centered

His message was focused on the Jesus Christ

His person
His work

2. Content Driven

Excellence = superior, “to rise up above”

Paul did not employ or depend on a form of preaching where the thing that stood out above everything else was either the creative packaging or delivery (“excellency of speech) or the presentation/application (human wisdom).

What stood out above all else was the Word – Jesus and Him Crucified.

NOTE: Paul did use a delivery style and at times he did vary that style. But he did not depend on style/delivery as the primary means of making preaching effective.

The content shaped and determined the method of delivery.

NOTE: This means that not all methods of delivery are created equal. This means that there are some methods are not acceptable.

B. The Manner of Spirit Empowered Preaching

Dependent on the right thing – not human wisdom or excellent speech

Not culture driven

Not necessarily designed to reflect the latest and greatest relevant thing in communication

Not need driven or even purpose driven

It was message driven!

Negative Illustration: Winston Churchill

A noted orator famous for using speech – particularly his rhetoric and style – to move audiences and to impress and persuade.

Churchill noted this dangerous tendency in his life in the statement that follows written at 23 years of age.

“It is quite true. I do not care so much for the principles I advocate as for the impression which my words produce and the reputation they give me. This sounds very terrible. Perhaps to put it a little strongly, I should say that I very often yield to the temptation of adapting my facts to my phrases!”

Paul never preached in this manner – he did not depend on his delivery to be the selling point of the message so he resisted all attempts to “fit the facts of the gospel” with the attractive phrases of a new and exciting delivery style.

“He completely denied the thought of ever depending on the persuasive and argumentative resources of the public orator of his day!”

II. The Preacher and the Preaching event

“Amidst all of the emphasis that is put on the ability and talent of the preacher today, the NT paints quite a different picture. It describes the gospel preacher as a mere earthen vessel that contains or carries the treasure (2 Cor 4:7)”

A. An appropriate humility

Paul never forgot that he was just the message and not the main event. It was not about him – it was about Him!

In fact, he uses three terms to remind the Corinthians of how he had come to them – this keeps the focus off of him and on the power of the Spirit and the power of the message.

1. Weakness
2. Fear
3. Much Trembling

It is not just that he was in this shape because he had suffered rough conditions (although he had indeed suffered).

The primary idea here is that it is not just the external circumstances that had affected Paul – it was his internal shortcomings as a preacher of which he was fully conscious that caused him to look outside of himself for the strength to make the preaching effective.

B. A necessary dependence

The responsibility for the preaching, the difficulty of the task, and the realization of what was at stake forced Paul (and it should us) to take a realistic look at himself – his conclusion was that he could not pull this off on his own or by the employment of his creative skill.

In other words, if God didn't get involved – he would preach but nothing of eternal significance would happen in regard to the Corinthians.

No wonder he describes himself as weak and fearful and trembling!

So where did he go for strength? What did he depend on?

Negatively, he did not come with human wisdom and excellent words -- that is not where he put his dependence.

Positively, he put his total dependence on the confidence that when he preached – it would be accompanied by a powerful work of the Spirit of God. In other words – as he declared the message, he was fully aware that the only way it would penetrate a lost man's heart was by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit!

III. The Persuasion in the Preaching Event

A. Persuasion must not be:

1. The effect of Worldly Wisdom

Hey – no one will ever buy this message. The Greeks will dismiss it as foolishness and the Jews will decry it as heresy. So – if we really want to reach people, then we are going to have to change our tactics. Let's dress this up a bit.

Corinthians wanted to “dress up the gospel” in the garments of human wisdom

This “foolishness of God” is wiser than man.

They underestimated its benefits – 1:30

They misunderstood its focus – Christ

Not primarily focused on the answer to Man's needs
Focused on Christ!
A God centered message.

2. Then or Now

We can't do this now in our generation either – we must resist this in our generation as Paul did in his.

Here is his answer:

So you want to dress up the gospel in human wisdom?

a. Look at its message – a crucified messiah! Utter foolishness.
How are you going to dress this up without changing the content?

b. Look at its members – you – not many mighty or noble or wise
– but rather the offscouring of the world!

c. Look at its messenger – me!

So, think carefully before you “dress it up”

Bottom line – you don't think the message works? Well it does and you are the proof!

B. Persuasion must be:

1. In line with the nature and character of the message

Nature of the Gospel

It is the power of God – so don't use the power of man to preach it. Rather since it is the power of God unto salvation, then choose a delivery that depends on the power of God and not on the resourcefulness or the ability of the preacher.

Character of the Gospel

It is crucified message – so the delivery must not negate this. It is a message that can't be understood apart from God's personal intervention so select a delivery that depends on this!

2. In conformity with the true purpose of the message

It is a message whose purpose is designed to remove us from the power of the World and its flawed wisdom – so don't depend on this flawed wisdom as the primary means to get this message across!

In other words, both the nature/character and the purpose of this message are in total contrast to human manipulation or enticement. We must preach the content of this kind of a message via a delivery that is not manipulative or dependent on human rhetoric to get people to decide.

I.E. If we could just get more of this or pick up the pace here or change this illustration or start with this – then the people will decide and accept!

NOTE: It is not wrong to use illustrations or to arrange the points of an outline in order to help clarify the message – what is wrong is when we put our trust or dependence on these things as the means by which we persuade men to act on our message!

IV. The Power behind the Preaching Event

Holy Spirit of God

God has prepared “hidden things” which eye has not seen or ear heard – and He has prepared them for us!

He reveals them through His Spirit who reveals them to us in Spirit given words!

- A. The Holy Spirit Inspired the Word We Preach
- B. The Holy Spirit Illumines Our Minds as We Study in Preparation to Preach
- C. The Holy Spirit Anoints Our Communication of the Word as We Preach
- D. The Holy Spirit Opens the Spiritual Eyes of Those Who Hear the Preaching
- E. The Holy Spirit Convicts the Heart during the Preaching
- F. The Holy Spirit Prompts Response and Enables Genuine Change in Respect to the Preaching.

V. The Proof in the Preaching Event

A. The Evidence of the Spirit

Demonstration: idea here behind this term is “strong and irrefutable evidence”

Evidence of what? Evidence that the Spirit has been present and that God’s Power has been at work!

How will we know that? By the result – that your faith would stand as a result of the power of God and not as a consequence of great delivery or creative rhetoric.

B. The Encouragement of the Spirit

This is actually a great encouragement to the preacher.

If success in preaching depends on my ability and my creative energy to come up with new and exciting delivery vehicles – than there is really no true hope for the hearers because as I get honest about my abilities – I am weak. As I realize the magnitude of the task – I fear. As I realize what is ultimately at stake – I tremble.

If, when I stand up to preach, everything depends on me – than I am not sufficient.

However, If when I stand up to preach everything depends on the Spirit’s working – then He is sufficient and there is great hope.

The great evidence of all of this is the Corinthians themselves! A weak and powerless preacher (Paul) came with a message from God. Rather than resorting to “enticing words of human wisdom” he simply declared the message clearly, accurately, and directly and depended on the power and work of the Holy Spirit – the result was a host of Corinthians had light shine in their hearts and they came to Christ!

Conclusion:

The combination of human wisdom with the gospel makes the gospel itself of none effect, . . . “empty,” without inner reality or substance. The gospel would not only lose some quality or some part of itself; it would evaporate entirely and leave only a hollow show of gospel terms and phrases. (R. C. H. Lenski)