

1 Corinthians 2 (Part 1): 1-5 • Christ and Him Crucified

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the truth, to the wisdom of Your Word, not worldly wisdom, but Godly wisdom that is from above. And teach us today, Lord God, from Your Word. If there's conviction, let it bring conviction.

Lord God, whatever is needed here today—instruction, hope, encouragement—use the Word today to speak into the lives of your children that we might be equipped and empowered to do your will. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

When I read through the first few chapters—and by the way, some of you might be wondering when we started 1 Corinthians—you'll remember I told you this was going to be a corrective letter. In the very first week, we started to get into the first correction that Paul was going to address, and that was the matter of divisions within the church.

Have you noticed that we're not talking about divisions anymore? Because, typical with Paul, he gets sidetracked. This is just very, very common in Paul's letters; he'll start talking about something, and then he'll get back to it when we get to chapter 3. But he needs a couple of chapters in between to just talk about other stuff and so forth. So I just wanted you not to think that we lost our moorings here. We'll get back to it and several other areas of correction as well.

But what I see happening here is Paul taking a church that got started on the right track, in the right foundation, but just drifted away. And he's writing this letter to bring them back where they need to be. Let's get back where we need to be. This is good stuff for you and me to hear because we've had 2,000 years of drifting into really crazy places and things and stuff, so we can use this. There are times that we need to just reexamine, reexamine our roots, see where it is we have strayed from, and that sort of thing.

I loved worship this morning. I felt like so many of the songs were germane to what we're seeing here in 1 Corinthians. Sometimes I get done with a worship time like that, and I think, good grief, I have to follow up that? Because it's just such a precious time of spending time with the Lord. But there is in our lives almost a constant barrage of distractions that at any time could cause us as

believers to focus our collective attention somewhere other than where it needs to be.

And what Paul is addressing here in these first couple of chapters is the simplicity and the preeminence of the message of the cross. We talked about it last week, and I don't want to scoot too quickly past it here. That's why we're only going to be covering these first 5 verses today because it's so important. We've done it, and we can still do it, and we do still do it.

And it's not like we're—well, I'm not suggesting that as Christians, we're no longer focusing on the cross from the standpoint that we no longer believe in it. We do. But we just get distracted and get busy doing all kinds of other things. That none are bad, by the way, of those other things that we might get done.

But people will see issues and problems in the body of Christ, and they'll start to focus on those. There are people who are focused on trying to save the family unit from collapse, and that's a worthy task. There are people who are fighting diligently for the rights of the unborn. Nothing wrong with that. There are people who are ministering to and supporting those who are in troubled marriages. Certainly no issues there in terms of any problem.

There are Christians who are working tirelessly to rescue victims of the sex trade. There are people, believers dealing with political refugees and all the needs and concerns that go along with those sorts of people. There are those who are providing support—and we do in our own church here—to those bound by addictive, habitual behaviors.

There are those who feel called to rally the body of Christ to participate in political elections and so forth. And then, of course, there are others who are just very, very focused on feeding the poor. Nothing wrong with any of those things, as I said, incredibly important focuses, and each one is worthy of our time.

But here's the point of all this: they can also draw our attention away from the simple task of sharing the powerful message of the cross. And you might be thinking to yourself, wait a minute, pastor Paul, aren't you going a little too far? I mean, all those things you mentioned, aren't they part of the gospel? And the answer is actually no, they are not. They are not part of the gospel.

What they are is expressions of God's heart to a lost and broken world. And as believers, we do and participate in those things because we are called to be salt and light in the world, so we do them, and it's not bad that we do them. They are

the kinds of things born-again Christians do in a world that desperately needs hope. But do not confuse those things with the message of the cross.

And here's why I say that. You can work to give blankets to those who are cold. You can work to give food to the hungry. You can work to bring deliverance to those who are oppressed, and we can still not be fulfilling the Great Commission, which is to bring the Gospel to a lost world and to make disciples.

You want to know what set the early church apart from the way we have tended to do things? They did all those—I don't know if they did all those things. I think some of those things are maybe a little bit more a product of our culture, perhaps, but they were very involved in their culture. They were very involved in their society, but you know what they did? They took the message of the cross along with them. They went into all those areas where they were involved, and they brought the message of the cross, and that's what we have to do, too.

We tend to get distracted doing things without bringing the message of the cross. And what you find is you find Christians who take a very worthy thing, like perhaps rallying the body of Christ to be involved in the political process—I don't see any problem with that—but they leave the cross out of feeding the poor. Certainly, nothing matters with that but not bringing the cross, just bringing food. There's no cross there.

And over time, in a very subtle sort of way, bringing food to poor people or to hungry people becomes, to them, the gospel. They believe that they're doing the work of the gospel when they're feeding poor people. That's what Christians do who have been changed by the gospel. But please understand, believers, that to bring the gospel is to do those things plus bring the message of the cross along with you for that.

So the church in Corinth was experiencing these kinds of distractions already. They were very close to Athens. In fact, Paul came from Athens to Corinth for the first time, and we know that, what drove the people of Athens and also greatly influenced the people of Corinth. And that was a draw to wisdom, a draw to philosophy. They loved a good persuasive argument.

We talked about this last week. The Corinthians were into that to the point where they began to become divided, by depending on who they thought was the best speaker: well, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Paul, I'm of Peter, or something like that. And that's the kind of thing that the Grecian culture would do. That was what they were into; that was just really popular—to follow a charismatic

speaker who could persuade you powerfully to his message with his incredible oratorical skills.

Paul had to write to remind them of some things about his first visit. Look in verse 1 with me again, he said, *“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.”* And this is such an important thing.

This is a very simple way of Paul saying, I didn't come to you proclaiming the Gospel in a way that is attractive to the world, okay? I didn't come doing it in a way that the world goes around doing things. In other words, I didn't use worldly methods.

And that's a good reminder for us today in the body of Christ because many times we have used, we, the body of Christ, have used worldly methods to convey the message of the cross. You might say, well, pastor Paul, what do you mean by that? Well, what I mean is, we end up using things that have a worldly attraction. See, we know what attracts the people of the world. Just put up a big sign with the latest lottery amount, and you'll draw a crowd because that's a very attractive sort of thing in our culture today.

What else is very attractive in our culture? Well, this has been going on for quite some time, but health issues are extremely attractive because and I suppose it would be in a culture that thinks that this life is all there is. It's like, let's try to be the best-looking, feeling people we can be physically. As long as we have life in these mortal bodies, we might as well be active and healthy and have good complexions and be free from the ills of life. It's crazy, isn't it?

In our culture today, where stores used to stand, what is taking over? Clinics, right? Have you noticed, have you pretty soon our town is going to be one big clinic? You're going to have to drive a long way to get groceries, but you can walk to the clinic because they're taking over everything. Why? Well, somebody might say, well, Paul, you don't understand, the baby booms are getting older, and there's just more people that need medical help and that sort of thing. Yeah, that's part of it, but we're also obsessed. We're obsessed with our health. Those are the things that are attractive to the world.

And I, by the way, am not speaking against clinics and stuff like that. I use them. The point is, it's just very attractive to the world. Money and health are two of the things. In my lifetime, I have seen those two things used to proclaim the gospel. And I'll bet you have too, if you've been around for a little while. I've seen preachers trying to draw people into the kingdom of God with the idea

that God wants you rich or God wants you perpetually healthy. If God is in your life, you should never experience anything related to the ills of human frailty, and so forth. People have drawn huge crowds with those things, as you can well expect, because they are already attractive to the world, and so we're using them to attract people, supposedly, into the kingdom.

But David Guzik, who's one of my favorite Bible teachers, pastors at Calvary Chapel—I think down at Santa Barbara now—but he made a statement once that I really appreciated. He said, what you draw people with is what you're going to draw them to. In other words, if you're using money or the idea of the attractiveness of money to attempt to draw people into the kingdom, that's what you're going to draw them to, not the kingdom, but to money. And if you're using the idea that God always wants you healthy, that's what you're using to draw them with. That's what you're going to draw them to. They're going to be drawn more to the issues related to health.

I want you to notice what Paul decided to draw them with and to. Look at verse 2 in your Bible: *“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”* That's it. That's it, you guys. He says, I determined when I got there. And remember, this came on the heels of his trip to Athens, where I think Paul was sickened by this constant attractive draw of worldly wisdom.

And so, I think that time in Athens really had a huge impact on Paul to the point where he came to Corinth and he thought, you know what? Have you ever had that happen in your life, where something happens and you just grr, I'm done with this or that? And he was—when you go back in the Book of Acts and you read about Paul's speech to the Athenians when he spoke in the Areopagus. It was like driving a car with flat tires. It said that only a few people came afterwards and went, yeah, Jesus, pretty cool. But the vast majority of the people went, you're an idiot. Exactly.

Paul had very little success in Athens, very little. I think he learned a lesson in Athens, and he took it to Corinth and he decided from that point on, I will know nothing among these people. Because, you see, if I try to appeal to them on the basis of what's attractive to them on a worldly level, then that's what they're going to be attracted to. They'll be attracted to me or Apollos or Peter, and that's exactly what he was fighting against.

And so, when Paul heard that these kinds of factions were going on, he was like, ahhhh, now I got to write these people and remind them. Do you guys remember when I came to you? Paul says, he says, I didn't come to you with persuasive words and worldly arguments and great oratorical skills. I came to

you knowing nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Notice that language: nothing except Christ and Him crucified. This is Paul's way of saying, I took the most socially unpopular part of the Gospel, that part that's most offensive from a worldly standpoint, and I camped there.

Can you imagine? Think about that today. Take what is really, really, really unpopular about Christianity. Well, obviously the cross is one of the things that can be very, very unpopular as it relates to how worldly people perceive Christians and what they believe. Paul said, I took that which was most unpopular and I camped on it. I didn't move from it.

But again, I need to remind you of something: Crucifixion. To us, it almost has a poetic, lovely sound. When we say Christ was crucified for us, we all go, ohhh. Those people didn't go, ohhh. They went, oh. Because crucifixion was a present day for them. It was the most horrific way to die that they could imagine. It was socially detested so much so that, I'm sure you've heard this, it was illegal to crucify a Roman citizen. It was so horrible.

And yet Paul purposely stuck on that theme and didn't stray from it in speaking to these people about Christ. It's almost like he was trying to talk them out of coming to Christ. Have you ever thought that? It's interesting. Take the most socially awkward thing about Christianity and camp on it in front of people of the world. That's what Paul did. Almost like he was trying to talk them out of coming to the Lord. Obviously, he wasn't, but in the end, the message of the cross is not going to appeal to people of the world or who are worldly minded.

It's funny; Jesus did the same thing. I don't know if you know, but when you read through the Gospels, it's almost like he was trying to talk people out of following Him. Somebody comes to Calvary Chapel and we're like, hey, welcome! Glad you're here. Jesus would say, you really want to come? You really want to follow Me? Are you sure?

Let me show you a passage from Matthew chapter 8. It says that,

Matthew 8:19-20 (ESV)

And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

And a scribe came up (to Jesus) and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, (well, buddy, let me tell you

something:) “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the aid have nests, but (I don’t) the Son of Man (have anywhere) has nowhere to (even) lay (my) his head.*”
(Still want to come?)

That's not something you would expect someone to say when somebody comes up to you and says something like, I will follow you wherever you go. You'd think you'd say, hey, praise the Lord, man. I'm glad you're devoted and really want to do this thing. Jesus didn't. In fact, a couple of chapters later in Matthew, he said this. He says, listen,

Matthew 10:34-36, 38-39 (ESV)

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter -in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of this own household. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but (I've come to bring) a sword. For (In fact) I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of this own household. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Anybody want to sign up?)

This is interesting, though, that Jesus isn't trying to soft-pedal the Gospel or make it seem like a cakewalk as far as accepting it. He says, actually, here's what's going to happen. If you decide to really come to Me and put your faith in Me and your hope in Me, you're going to find out that you'll find yourself at odds with some of your family members who don't believe, who in fact refuse to believe. There will be tension in your own home between husbands and wives, parents, and children, sons and daughters-in-law to parents-in-law, and so forth.

There will now be tension. I will be introducing tension because you believe and they don't. And believing in Me is going to so change your life that you're not going to be able to live the way you used to live. You will be so radically changed that the people around you are going to think you're nuts. They're going to talk, they're going to use phrases like, he's gotten religious. He's one of those fanatics. He's a Jesus freak, and they're going to start to pull away from you, even members of your own family.

Some of you in this room have experienced it. Relationships you once had with family members are now strained and distant because you made the determination to walk with Jesus with all of your heart, so, that's not one of the kinds of things you say to people to get them on board.

And then when Paul, as we go through, continue here in chapter 2, when Paul talked about just his own demeanor when he came to the Corinthians. Look at what he says in verse 3, in fact he says, *“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 (rather) in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...”*

You see, when the Apostle Paul came to Corinth, he didn't swagger in as the Apostle. Ladies and gentlemen, the apostle is here. There was none of that. There was none of that; when I walk into a room, people tremble. You know what Paul said? When I came to you, I was trembling. I came in personal weakness.

Paul was a man, I believe, you may disagree with me and you have the right to do that. I believe that Paul was a man who was dogged by physical weaknesses and infirmities, particularly of the eyes. He writes to the people in Galatia and says, I can testify that if you could have, you would have gouged out your own eyes and given them to me (Galatians 4:15). And I believe that part of—I think Paul had a lasting issue, probably stemming first of all from when he was blinded on the road to Damascus. That's a guess of mine as to when it actually occurred.

But it seems pretty clear from the evidence, biblically speaking, that Paul struggled with physical weaknesses. He came and many times he would get to an area where they were going to plant a church and he was physically ill, physically struggling. We know Timothy went through some of the same things. Particularly dealing with bacteria from drinking all kinds of different water from different places. That's one of the problems when you travel.

Some of you guys who've traveled a lot know that. You drink water from so many different sources, your body never gets time to acclimate to the particular bacteria that may be in a water source, and you end up building up this bacteria, and it creates some pretty nasty symptoms. And Timothy struggled with some of that, so these people, they're very real.

I'll never forget one time I was speaking—or I wasn't speaking, excuse me—I was attending, rather, like a conference. And one of the pastors got up, and it

was his time to share. And he talked about how he'd been sick the night before, and he was still really shaky. And he said, if I have to run off the stage, I've been having to stay close to the bathroom. He says, you'll understand. And I was embarrassed for him. I was like, why in the world would you tell people that?

First of all, I guess I'm very private about those sorts of things. There's something about when an individual conveys personal weakness, and then they get done talking, they get done sharing, and you've heard a powerful message. You end up saying, wow, that was powerful, but it wasn't them. It was the message. It was the Word. It was Jesus who embodies that message. That's where the power comes from.

And I've come to understand that, that is a pretty powerful thing to do sometimes—to confess personal weakness. Just like Paul is doing here, because he didn't want anything that he did to draw their attention off who Christ is.

I'll be honest with you, if Paul lived today, I don't think he would allow himself to be called reverend. I don't think he would. I just have to say that just based on what I've learned of the man from studying his letters. I don't think he would allow himself to be referred to as Reverend Paul the apostle. Because that's, first of all, it's a man-made term. It has nothing to do with any biblical origin. But second of all, it sets him apart as somehow above other people.

And that's one of the reasons I've really disliked that title as well. I don't think that any of us should convey the gospel to people from the standpoint that we're looking down our nose at them. But rather in weakness. Some of you have been hindered from sharing the gospel because you've got issues of sin in your life. And you've thought to yourself, well, once I get these sin areas worked out in my life, then I'll be able to go share the Gospel.

Have you ever stopped to consider? Now, of course, God wants you to deal with the sin issues in your life, and He wants to bring strength into your life that you might have victory. But have you ever stopped to think that maybe the weakness that sin causes in your life might be the very thing that makes you real and genuine in the eyes of other people?

Sometimes somebody who's had some real marriage issues in their past has something to say to people with who are having marriage issues. Somebody who's really struggled with addictions has something to say to those who are struggling with addictions. I guess my point is when you're sharing Jesus with a lost world, you can't wait around to become this paragon of virtue before you

share Jesus. Or we're never going to get around any of us to sharing Jesus because there's always going to be something we're going to find in our lives that isn't right, that isn't quite what it should be.

Are we going to wait? Are we going to wait for those things to go away before we share the Lord with the lost, or are we going to go to people like Paul did and say, here's a trustworthy statement: Jesus Christ came to die for sinners, of whom I am the worst (1 Timothy 1:15). That was Paul's statement.

Paul did not want them to be impressed with him. Look what he goes on to say in verse 5. He explains why he didn't want them focused on him, verse 5: *"...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."*

And this is just simply Paul's way of saying: I wanted to make sure it wasn't about me. But when I talked to you, that you had come away realizing it's about Jesus, so, to make sure that it wasn't about him, Paul came to them in a very unimpressive manner.

Have you ever gone to church? And heard someone speak and walked away thinking, well, he wasn't very impressive. Who cares? That's worldly wisdom. But we're so geared to charismatic personalities and things like that, that we look for that sort of stuff. But we end up missing something else: the power of God, because we can become so easily fixated on the power of man and what's in a man, we can miss the power of God.

And Paul said, here's why I didn't come to you with an impressive speech or impressive language, or I didn't come to you in strength as the apostle. I came to you in weakness. I came to you trembling, fearful, anxious, struggling. Here's why, so that you'd see the power of God. And you wouldn't mix up; you wouldn't, Paul wasn't going to have himself leave an area and have people go, whoa, that Paul, wow. That was not his goal. He wanted people to see a demonstration of the power of God.

Let me ask you a question: Have you experienced the power of God in your life, or have we been distracted by other things? Or have you experienced God's power? Maybe in your marriage, maybe in your home, your family? Have you experienced the power of God? Not talking about the power of human beings, the power of God. Have you experienced it, or is it just been something you've read about? Do you know it's possible to know the Word and not know the power of God?

Do you remember a time when Jesus was confronted by a group of people called the Sadducees? And they told him this long, really boring story about a guy who lived among them, who'd been married, and he died without bearing any children. Remember that story? And according to the terms of basically Mosaic Law, the woman was taken by the next oldest brother to have children for his dead brother.

And whether or not the story was true, we can't corroborate, but they told the story in such a way as to say the woman had been passed between seven brothers and had children with none of them, which seems amazing. So they came up with a question, a really lame duck question about, so in the resurrection, whose wife is you going to be? (Matthew 22:23-28) Which was dumb from the beginning because the Sadducees didn't even believe in a resurrection in the first place. So it was a loaded, ridiculous sort of a conversation.

But if you remove yourself from the conversation and you look at Jesus's response to them, you find something that can be very eye-opening. Let me put it on the screen. It's from Matthew chapter 22. It says,

Matthew 22:29 (ESV)

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because (of two things) you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."

See, this was a point of error in their lives: they did not know the scriptures, and they did not know the power of God. You need to know both of them. It's possible to know the scriptures without the power of God; you need to know both. You need to know the power of God. Know the power of God.

You say, Pastor Paul, what in the world are you talking about? Well, do you know the power of the wind? I'm talking about inanimate sort of things now, but do you know the power of water? Have you seen what it can do? Most of you have. Have you ever seen a tree uprooted from the ground because of a strong wind? That's the power of the wind. How did you learn about that power? You experienced it. How do you know the power of God? You experience it. You have it happen in your life.

When Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, he said this,

Colossians 1:29 (ESV)

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

The apostle Paul understood that the power of his life was not the power that a human being could generate; it was the power that could only come through God. He had experienced it firsthand, and he talked about it. He says, guys, I've experienced it, and not that God has extended His power to me because I'm good. I'm still a sinner saved by grace, but I have experienced the power of God in my life.

Now some of you have experienced the power of God in your life. Some of you, your marriages were a train wreck, like mine was at one point. And God healed you, and you experienced the power of God and His healing power. And you knew that you knew that you knew when your marriage got healed that it was so completely beyond you that it was laughable. If some people looked at you and suggested somehow, oh, I see you guys got your marriage together. No, we did not. God put it back together. It was the power of God. I experienced it.

Some of you have experienced the power of God in other areas of your lives. But what is it that causes us to experience the power of God? And what is it that holds us back from experiencing the power of God? Well, I'll tell you right now what holds us back: the junk that Paul is confronting the Corinthians with right here. Worldly human junk stuff. Stuff that we rely on, like ourselves.

You got marriage problems? Stop trying to fix it. Give it to God and trust Him, and you just get busy obeying. Just obey God and let him do the healing. Do you know what, though? What I've just said to you? You can hear it, but it won't happen, usually, until you come to the end of yourself. Usually, we'll hear people say, hey, just trust God. Pfft, I'm not going to trust God. I'm going to try to do it myself. And we don't say that. But that's what happens. We spring into action. I'm going to fix this thing, like, there's no need to fear. I'm here.

And God just sits back and goes, alright, fine, go for it. I'll let you hit your head against that wall a couple more dozen times. And we do right? And then hopefully we come to a place where we just come to the end of ourselves and we're like, you know what, I thought I could fix this, but I can't. I can't, I can't make it better.

And when we reach that conclusion, God's waiting, He's right there waiting patiently, and He's saying, oh my child, I love you so much. I knew it all along, but you had to know it for yourself. You had to know it and experience it. You don't have what it takes, but I do. Now, are you ready to trust Me? Are you ready to give me this thing that you care about so much but have no power to restore? Are you willing to deliver it over to me and let me take care of it?

When we get to the end of ourselves, when we say, that's it, I can't do it. That's when the power of God begins to operate in our lives. If you're not experiencing the power of God in your life, it could very well be that you've been trusting in yourself.