

Theme: YOUR FAITH IS IN GOD'S POWER

- I. This faith rejects worldly wisdom
- II. This faith clings only to Jesus
- III. This faith grows mature through God's Word

**And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup>For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup>My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup>so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. <sup>6</sup>We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.**

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Whether it's which company should provide your car insurance to which team you should root for, you can't escape it. The ads on TV and billboards try to get you to buy their product or eat their food. The people on the radio or the news may try to convince you to vote a certain way. Whether it's marketing or strong opinions, someone is always trying to persuade you to their point of view. With over \$580 billion spent on advertising last year, it seems fair to say their efforts at persuasion are working.

With people being pulled so many ways by the marketing world, how can we persuade anyone to come to church? In God's Word today, Paul is not trying to persuade anyone. He knows winning people over to God is not something he is responsible for. No, only God himself can create faith. YOUR FAITH IS IN GOD'S POWER. As we'll see today, faith 1) rejects worldly wisdom, 2) clings only to Jesus, and 3) grows mature through God's Word.

Paul opens his letter to the church in Corinth by reminding them he was called **“to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”** Notice Paul calls adding anything, even eloquence or wisdom, to the gospel *emptying the cross of its power!* But don't we think the opposite? If we had just the right words, wouldn't we be better able to win people over to the gospel? In our text, he reminds the Corinthians again, **“I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.”** Instead of “all the right words,” Paul **“came...in weakness with great fear and trembling.”** Why? Persecution followed him everywhere. The same crowd that ran him out in Thessalonica followed him to Berea. The Athenians thought his belief in the resurrection foolish. The Jews in Corinth kicked him out of their synagogue. It was so bad Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision to comfort him so Paul would keep speaking the good news.

In our fast-paced world, audiences are always changing. Companies are constantly re-evaluating their marketing strategy. How much stress should be placed on information? How much weight should be placed on actively pursuing the customer? Even the ads we see only last for a matter of weeks or, if they're really good, a couple months. So imagine if someone could guarantee success through marketing?

We might be tempted to think Paul was guaranteed success because Jesus appeared to him. After all, which of us wouldn't feel a lot better about our church if Jesus came to tell us to keep going? Or better yet, what if Jesus himself returned to earth and became our pastor? Think of all the people he could win over with **“wise and persuasive words.”**

The Corinthians were wrapped up in the Greek world of wisdom and eloquence. The success they sought was saying the right thing to convince others they were right. These Christians wanted to prove they had superior reasoning. They used worldly wisdom to prove they knew more than the rest. They relied on their own skills. And worse, they compared themselves to each other. Each thought himself wiser than the others. With their superior wisdom, could they win people for God?

We might not be in first century Corinth, but we may often think the same. If we knew how to respond to people when they object to our beliefs, people might be more attracted to Christianity. If we could use all our skill to market our faith to the community, if only we could make what we believe sound *reasonable* to the people around us—how much good could we do? Instead of getting doors slammed in our faces, we could have people breaking down the church door to come here! Do we trust our human wisdom? Of course! It's only reasonable!

And do you compare yourself to others like the Corinthians did? Like children arguing on the playground about who's fastest, who's smartest, who's tallest, don't we argue about who has the best plan? If you're like me, you constantly compare yourself to others. If I had the gifts of Paul, I would speak to more people about Jesus. If I were more courageous, wiser, I would...and why? It shows either a lack of security in ourselves, or a certainty, like the Corinthians, that we are superior. Either way, we put an unhealthy emphasis on our own abilities.

We see that in the world, too. If you want something done right, you'd better do it yourself. But God calls us back to reality this morning. He wants us to consider what our faith is. If we're relying on ourselves to grow God's church—or even confident that our best-laid plans guarantee success—we're stealing glory from the one it belongs to. Our self-reliance and self-importance deeply offend God.

Every marketing campaign, ad, and commercial tries to tout a product as the best. God does not, however. He is the very best, but he doesn't flaunt how much better he is than others. And because he knew we couldn't "get the job" of our salvation "done right," he did it himself. He didn't use a marketing gimmick or clever wisdom. In his wisdom, he came in the weakness of human flesh—not as the Mighty God from on High, but as the lowly servant Jesus.

That's the message Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians. In spite of a slew of problems in the Corinthian church, Paul still refers to them as "**brothers and sisters.**" He still counts them as his fellow believers as he reminds them how they came into the Christian faith. It wasn't by Paul's preaching prowess or some supernatural event that these people came to faith, but by God's power, a power that demonstrates itself in weakness.

Humanly speaking, the cross is folly, weakness, and shame; it is offensive to reason that God had to die for the little things I do wrong. What kind of God dies at all? If he's really able to do everything, couldn't he have found a more painless way to save people? And a cross is reserved for the worst of criminals! But God in his superior wisdom chose to demonstrate his power by dying to bring the world back to him. He didn't advertise and then leave you to figure it out. God reached out in love by doing for you. In his wisdom he became man so he could die on a cross at just the right time to save you. At the cross, Jesus he forgave all our self-confidence and all our wrongdoing.

People in the marketing industry do their best to come up with slick slogans that will roll off the tongue and make you remember their product. Phrases like "I'm loving it" or "Just do it" guarantee that you won't forget McDonald's or Nike anytime soon. These companies use street smarts to make sure they stay on top.

Paul didn't come up with a sleazy slogan, but he did encourage the Corinthians to put **THEIR FAITH IN GOD'S POWER** as seen only at the cross of Christ. "**I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**" Your faith is in God's power, in Christ. Only Jesus has the power to save your soul from death. Only Jesus has the power to forgive your sins. Don't get comfortable with any other message—cling to the crucified Christ. Don't let anyone take you away from

him with human wisdom or a sweet tongue. If I or any other preacher here moves away from the message of Christ crucified, find another church that feeds you with that message.

Ads that run for a long time wear on us. We become desensitized to commercials that have been running for months. God forbid that we ever tire of hearing the good news of Jesus and his cross! That is your life; it's God's power, and the object of your faith. Instead, continue to hear that good news as you grow mature and learn the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of God is nothing other than that same message of Christ crucified. Paul reminds the Corinthians that wise message brought them into the faith: **“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”** They didn’t come to faith by the power of Paul or his skill, but the power of God. That’s how we reach our goals of bringing growing our church. But what exactly is the power of God? Christ and his cross are God’s power. The Corinthians, like us, came to faith **“with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.”** Good preachers didn’t bring you to faith, but faithful preaching, proclamation of God’s Word. The Spirit’s power, God’s power, is intimately linked with the message of Christ’s cross. The gospel message of good news—proclaimed by a preacher, recited by a child, sung by a choir, read in the Bible, tasted in the Lord’s Supper—that is God’s power. The Holy Spirit promises to work in his Word and sacraments. We have no promise from God that he will come to us in any other way. Through regular use of Word and sacrament, in daily devotion, group Bible study, or worship with our fellow believers, we grow mature in the faith. That is the only way God has promised to speak to us. That’s the only way he’s promised to give us his wisdom.

The world in its wisdom comes up with all kinds of schemes to control the world with wealth and marketing schemes. People are always trying to convince us to purchase their product. But God offers us the greatest treasure of all—Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins—as his free gift. In his wisdom and power he brought us to believe that through that message. Continue to grow into him as you consider his message of love. Amen.