

*I Corinthians 2:1-5*  
*Substance over Style*

- What draws us to the Christian faith? For too many people it is more about style than substance.
- We can make the form of the preaching, the type of music, the architecture, the economic status of the congregation, etc. as the central issue of our faith.
- Powerful styles can bring “results.”
  - It is an effective way to draw and crowd. But to what?
  - It can make us feel comfortable. But with what?
  - It can make us feel secure. But about what?
  - It can generate enthusiasm. But for what?
- While it is only natural to have preferences we must recognize that our preferences can be powerful forces that displace the power of God with out our realizing it.
- In this passage Paul explains his ministry as being “not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” What does this mean? In some charismatic groups it is understood to refer to “signs and wonders” through the person spreading the Gospel. In some emergent church groups it is understood to refer to “ethics and symbols.” In some seeker church groups it is the quality of the ministry as measured by what the culture of the target audience wants. In all three cases there is a skepticism toward “words” and “reason” with a strong preference for “action.” The style becomes the issue.
- In some “seeker driven” ministries there is a tendency to avoid anything and everything that might be offensive to the people you are trying to reach. When marketing style replaces the substance of the message, we may win people to us but it will be hard to convince them to follow a Jesus who intends to mock the world's values.
- Note the following facts that might help us understand what Paul is going to say in I Cor.2:1-5.
  1. In the previous section (1:26-31) Paul told us that God had purposely chosen the things (people) that the World found distasteful (weak, powerless) in order to mock the world's values and pride. In this section he continues the same theme. Paul resists the style of presentation that the world would find powerfully persuasive in favor of an approach that emphasizes the power of God not man.
  2. Paul's ministry of power in Corinth is described in Acts 18 “<sup>1</sup> After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers. <sup>4</sup> And he was **reasoning** in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to **persuade** Jews and Greeks.”

There is no indication that Paul used "signs and wonders" in Corinth except to authenticate his apostleship (II Cor.12:12) "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by **signs and wonders and miracles.**"

3. Paul's teaching about power in I Corinthians 1 makes it clear that while others looked for "signs" he was preaching the "Word of the Cross" as the "power of God."
4. The word "demonstration" in verse 4 comes from a Greek term (apodeiknumi) which means "to show forth" or "to point out."
5. In Philippians 3 Paul identifies the power of God with the resurrection of Christ. "10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."
6. In Galatians 1 Paul makes it clear that the substance not the style or the message is the issue. No matter how attractive another message (gospel) might be, it is not to be received. "6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is {really} not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. 10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."

#### **A. Paul's message avoided the style of the world's power.**

I Corinthians 2 "1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom (wise and persuasive words), proclaiming to you the testimony (mystery) of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"

1. Paul's style was deliberately intended to mock the world's values not indorse them.
2. We must ask ourselves - What has attracted us to Christianity? Is it the world's values packaged as the gospel - (it makes me feel good, look good, and do well)?
3. Paul's message centered on what God had done in Christ on the Cross.

#### **B. Paul's message avoided bringing attention to his personal power (style).**

I Corinthians 2 "3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

1. Paul's power was not in his cleverness, nor in his intellect.
2. Paul's power was in the acts of God in history - death and resurrection of Christ.

#### **C. Paul's message called for faith, not in style (worldly wisdom) but in what God had done in Christ.**

I Corinthians 2 "5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

1. God's power is displayed in Christ.

2. God's power can be displayed in the miracles of the Spirit but this too often leads to the glory of man.

#### D. Lessons for us.

1. **Don't hide the Word of the Cross.** Boldly and confidently proclaim the Gospel. The "Cross" is the action of God. The "Word" is the explanation of the meaning of God's actions.
2. **Keep the main thing the main thing.** The biggest questions of life are addressed by the Gospel - (death, life, suffering, and hope). Put the present benefits of the Gospel in the context of the "past" actions of God in Christ and the "future" hope of our destiny with Christ.
3. **Show and tell.** Let people see the end of the Gospel in your faith, hope, and love.
4. **Authenticity over popularity.** Strive to be authentic rather than popular.