

“Persuasive Power?”—1 Corinthians 2:1-5

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Persuasive Power?”, is 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 → *I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

What does it take to persuade a person? A simple perusal of your book store’s section on the power of persuasion will give you all the techniques necessary for selling a refrigerator to an Eskimo. Listing characteristics like credibility, effective communication skills, logical reasoning and an understanding of your audiences’ desires provides you with the tools necessary to influence people to do something or think in a particular way. It is happening in virtually every relationship of your life, in both positive and negative ways. Are you a person who can be easily persuaded?

Apparently the first century Christians in Corinth, Greece could be easily persuaded. Unfortunately the persuasion took their focus off of Christ and the true Gospel preached by Paul. He had brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to these Christians in Corinth during his second missionary journey. His relationship with them was unique in that it was the only place where he spent a considerable amount of time teaching them and establishing their congregation's ministry. *He stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.* (cf. Acts 18:11) However, in the years following there were many traveling preachers who preached *Christ from envy and rivalry* (cf. Philippians 1:15), troubling the Christians, distorting the Gospel of Christ (cf. Galatians 1:7) by proclaiming *another Jesus than the one* the apostles proclaimed (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:4), persuading many Corinthian Christians to doubt the credibility of Paul's apostleship. Apparently they were persuasive to say the least.

One of the tragedies of our sinful human nature is that we are so easily swayed to follow wrong paths and accept wrong concepts as truth. From the time that Adam and Eve entered into sin by the persuasive temptation of the devil in the Garden of Eden we battle such sinful persuasion everyday. Young people are warned about the dangers of "peer pressure." We are constantly encouraged to detect scams which can destroy our identity and steal our

possessions. Our propensity toward being persuaded negatively is so strong that we find it difficult to say “no” without feeling guilty, even if we are totally justified in doing so!

Being persuaded negatively becomes even more dangerous when it comes to your relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul said in Galatians 1:6-8 → *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him Who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.* The word translated “accursed” is the Greek word “anathema” which means to be eternally condemned in hell. In effect, Paul was saying “let him go to hell” instead of leading sinners to hell by a distorted concept of Jesus and the gospel.

In verse 1 of our text Paul made it perfectly clear that he did not “persuade” them into becoming Christians *with lofty speech or wisdom* as he proclaimed *the testimony of God* to them. In fact, he mentions that he came to them *in weakness . . . fear and much trembling* (verse 3). He stated clearly the focus of

His preaching and teaching in verse 2 → *For I decided to know nothing among you except **Jesus Christ and Him crucified.***

When the focus is Christ crucified people will recognize that their faith is **totally** the result of God's "persuasive power" in their lives. When you look at the crucifixion of Jesus the Holy Spirit makes you look at your sin from which you cannot set yourself free. He brings such conviction of sin so that you can also see the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin in His crucifixion, repent of your sins and trust in Jesus alone for your forgiveness!

Paul says in our text that his *speech and . . . message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that our faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

(verses 4-5) When we hear something it is natural for us to judge it on the basis of our own personal opinion or experience or how we "reason" it out in our own minds to suit our own desires. Humans usually fluctuate between two extremes for "verification" of truth—some kind of a "sign" or a logical explanation which can satisfy **my** standard for truth. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 says: *Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** The focus is always and only Christ crucified for us sinners!*

Instead of trying to persuade someone into becoming a Christian we are simply called upon to proclaim the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and depend upon the “persuasive power” of the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of people. According to Ephesians 4:14-15, our desire is to simply *grow up . . . into Christ by speaking the truth in love . . . so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*. This is a huge challenge because another aspect of our sinful nature is that we do not want to *endure sound teaching, but having itching ears that want to accumulate for ourselves teachers to suit our own passions, and . . . turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths*. (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3-4) Just think of the statements which you’ve encountered claiming to be from God which made you wonder where the person received their “divine revelation.”

The most important “persuasive power” in our lives must be the Holy Spirit working conviction in our heart through God’s Law and Gospel. He moves us to recognize our sinfulness and confess that sin, clinging to the Person & Work of Jesus Christ alone as revealed in His written Word alone. His “persuasive power” is also evidenced when we follow His command in 1 John 4:1 → *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

As He brings us to the written Word of God to *test the spirits* He will always lead us to *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. Our faith will be developed by the persuasive power of the Spirit so that it will rest **totally** on God's grace as displayed in the Person & Work of Jesus. His "persuasive power" will move us to share the **pure** Gospel and stand up for the truth of God's inerrant Word because it all has to do with *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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