

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 are an introduction to the letter, following roughly the format of ancient correspondence. It contains hints of Paul’s heart and concern for the Corinthians and many of the topics which he will later address. Disunity, the first of a series of problems about which Paul had heard, is introduced in verse 10. It evidenced itself, among other things, in the development of factions within the church.

The factions were a symptom of a bigger problem. The Corinthian believers were thinking wrong about the Gospel ministry, both about the Gospel message and the ministers of the Gospel. Paul calls the Gospel the message of the cross, foolishness to those who are perishing and power to those who are being saved (1:18-25). In 1:26–2:5 he gives two examples from their own experience which should remind them of their own encounter with the truth of his statements about God’s wisdom. They are instructed to consider the type of people in the church and they should reflect on Paul’s presentation of the Gospel.

I. The Calling of the Corinthians as a demonstration of the power and wisdom of the Gospel of God (1:26-31)

1. Paul directs the Corinthians to look at their situation when they heard and received the Gospel message.

It is a sobering analysis of their past. Few of the believers belonged to those groups which our human wisdom would rate as important or influential.

- a. The “wise by human standards” would be the intellectuals.
- b. The “influential” are also called the “mighty.” They were the principal people in society. They were those holding office and official authority.
- c. Those of “noble birth” were the aristocrats, those who were born into influential positions, the nobility.

The Corinthian believers primarily were not among the well-schooled, the well-placed, or the well-born.

2. Their “calling” reveals God’s plan to contrast His wisdom and power with human wisdom.

- a. God chose things called foolish, weak, lowly, and despised. This is in sharp contrast to that which worldly wisdom would select.
- b. It is emphasized by the repetition of “chose,” that God did this according to plan, thus also elevating these foolish, weak and lowly to significance – by God’s action.
- c. Foolish, weak, and lowly was the way that the world views such people.
- d. They are in fact despised and in the world’s view non-existent. God took those things which were below the notice of the world and used them to shame and make powerless the wise and influential of the world. Those that thought that they were something important were shown that they were not so important to God.

3. God’s plan had a two-fold purpose.

- a. God purposed to stop any and all human boasting. God will not be obligated to man and offers salvation by grace alone. Christians also have no grounds to boast in themselves since all that they have comes from what they are in Christ. He is our wisdom and beyond wisdom our righteousness (justification), holiness (sanctification being worked in us), and redemption (salvation in the past as the price which Jesus and in the future as our final completion).
- b. God purposed that all glory be directed to the Lord, a logical conclusion to what Jesus Christ has done.

II. The Preaching of Paul as submission to the power and wisdom of the Gospel of God (2:1-5)

1. Paul gives 4 ways in which he submitted in his preaching to belief in the power and wisdom of God.

- a. He did not place importance upon high-sounding oratory (2:1).
- b. He limited the scope of his preaching to that message which truly was the power and wisdom of God. He preached Christ only and Him crucified (2:2).
- c. He placed no emphasis on being personally impressive but came in weakness and fear and much trembling (2:3). Though Paul preached boldly (e.g., Acts 13:46; 19:8) and feared God rather than men, this apparently did not evidence itself of being “fiery” and “dynamic.” He acted among the Thessalonians with the gentleness of a nursing mother (1 Th 2:7).
- d. He relied upon the Spirit of God using the message of the cross (which is called the power of God) to open the hearts and minds of those hearing (2:4). The proof lay in the changed lives which occurred.

2. Paul had a clear purpose for submitting his preaching to a practical acknowledgment of God’s power and wisdom. He wished to assure that the believers’ faith was grounded on God’s power and not human thinking. Only God works real change.

The one who communicates the Gospel is not an important focus. The focus is on God using the message of the cross.

I fear that we often have failed corporately as the church and individually as believers to put these truths into practice. We have focused on the wrong audience and we have failed to trust God in our presentation of the Gospel. We should heed the command to tell everyone and not neglect one group for the other. Our presentation of the message also sometimes shows a lack of trust in God when we try to make the message logically attractive or sound materially beneficial. Neither are the message of the cross.

It is the message of the cross – Christ, and Him crucified – that is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. It is the message which God uses in the hearts of people.