

## A WISE DETERMINATION

"For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2).

When Paul went into the brilliant but godless city where the people gloried in human ability and human attainment, where they made much of the arts, and where they deified human lust and did not know anything about the true God, his soul was stirred deeply. As far as he could, Paul put aside everything that was merely human and went in absolute dependence upon the Spirit of God with one great message, "Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Like all great men who have really accomplished anything worthwhile in this world, Paul was a man of considerable reflection. He was a calm thinker, and never reached a rash or hasty conclusion. He carefully considered the conditions, weighed the alternatives, and then arrived at a definite decision. Paul was a man with a clear-cut plan and program. He counted the cost, considered the obstacles which lay in his way, weighed the prejudices of the carnal mind, and made his choice.

Paul did not enter Corinth as an orator or as a philosopher, but simply as a witness. He said: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God." Paul didn't try to imitate the methods of the philosophers, or to use their verbiage. He did not speak as a rhetorician. His utterances were not orations of highly wrought eloquence. Paul did not seek to make the gospel palatable by presenting it with enticing words. His manner was simple and unaffected; his diction plain and easily understood. He did not try to carry everything before him with a flood of words, or to seek fame as an orator. Realizing that it was quite possible to obscure the shame of the cross with the flowers of rhetoric, Paul did not permit himself any flights of fancy or of the imagination in presenting the glad tidings. He had not entered Corinth as a philosopher, but as a herald. He had a message to deliver, and he refused to obscure it by many words. His one great purpose was to make known the Christ of the cross.

Paul was a man with a specific determination. Many people possess plenty of grit and determination, but their efforts do not amount to much because they lack a definite objective. They fail because they lack singleness of aim. Their interests are divided. They have too many irons in the fire. Many preachers are generalizers. Much of modern preaching is a medley. It is a mixture of psychology, philosophy, politics, poetry, science, and the topics of the day, with just a little Scripture thrown in to give it the appearance of respectability. Not so with the Apostle Paul. He "determined not to know anything" while among the Corinthians except "Jesus Christ and him crucified." He wisely resolved that everything else would be subordinated to this one great end. It was entirely possible that some might have considered him "narrow!" He might have been criticized for not being "abreast of the times." But Paul did not care. Seriously and earnestly, as becoming a man who stood between the living and death, Paul proclaimed the message of the cross in all its simplicity and purity. To preach Christ and Him crucified was his all-absorbing passion.

Paul was very wise in deciding that as long as he was among the Corinthians he would restrict himself to one theme. He did not think it right to extend the theme of his preaching beyond that of "Jesus Christ and him crucified." Paul knew full well that to court popularity was easy, but he also knew that he could not thereby win the approval of God and achieve the Lord's purpose for him. After all, the approval of God because of the achieving of His purpose was the important thing, both for the time being and when he would be called upon to render his account at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Paul's aim was a worthy one — worthy of his native genius, his tremendous energy, his indefatigable zeal, and his willing self-sacrifice. His preaching Christ and Him crucified was a task which would require and engage all his talents. It was a work which demanded all his time and strength. No wonder he asked, "Who is sufficient for these things?" No wonder he desired the prayers of God's children in behalf of his ministry. The love of Christ which he preached passeth knowledge. The riches of Christ which he proclaimed were unsearchable. The gospel of Christ which he published was unfathomable in content and inexhaustible in scope.

Paul did not speak "with excellency of speech" as an orator would have done. He did not preach in order to give anybody a literary treat. As a God-called preacher it was his business to transmit the Word of God to people. His messages were simple; his diction plain and easily understood. He was not an enemy of human wisdom, for he was highly educated, but he did oppose the attempt to make it a means of human redemption.

Realizing that no other message would avail for the salvation of sinners or the edification of God's people, Paul centered his message around Christ and Him crucified. Thus he majored on His Person and work. He acted as if nothing else were worth thinking and speaking about. Because the cross of Christ is of such consequence in the reconciliation of sinners to God, it ought to receive the most careful and earnest attention. It should be the joy of the Christian's heart, the theme of his conversation, and the glory of his life.

Stand in faith by the cross of Calvary and see the blessed Saviour suffering and dying there. The cross brought out and declared all the malignity that was in the heart of man, but it also told out the infinite love that was in the heart of God. Paul did not use enticing words of man's wisdom, with which to inveigle sinners into sainthood. His trust was in the power of God, made manifest in the Spirit. It is encouraging to know that the success of the gospel does not depend on the skill of the preacher, but on the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are four reasons why the theme of Christ and Him crucified should be central in preaching in this as in every other generation.

#### I. It Honors God The Most.

The man who wisely determines not to know anything among his people except Jesus Christ and Him crucified must necessarily magnify God's grace, depend upon God's Spirit, and expound God's Word. He does not try to display oratorical ability, but to glorify his Saviour and Lord. Any preaching which does not have Christ for its center and circumference ends in exalting the messenger. Our Saviour said: "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit," and the only type of preaching which will produce spiritual and eternal fruit is that which is illuminated by the light of Calvary.

#### II. God Honors It The Most.

Corinth was a stronghold of Satan. As Paul viewed its godless and idolatrous crowds indulging in wickedness, he determined to preach Christ and live the Christian life in their midst. As a result, the blessing of God rested upon his labors, sinners were introduced to Christ, souls were born again, and a church was established. Through the centuries, God has honored most the messages

of those men who have heralded the cross, preached the atonement of Christ, and magnified His precious blood.

### III. It Is Needed The Most.

There are unsaved people, who are dead in sin, indifferent to the eternal interests of their souls, and on the broad road that leadeth to destruction. How are they to be reached? Who can quicken them into newness of life? There is only one answer -- the Christ of Calvary. There are backsliders who have left their first love, are out of fellowship with God, and are living without the joy of salvation. What is the divine prescription for such cases? It is the story of redeeming love. The same means which first brought them to Christ will bring them into communion with Him again. There are church members who are indifferent to their obligations, blind to their responsibilities, and useless in Christ's service. Nothing but the love of Christ apprehended in the soul will constrain them to deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow Christ. There are church members who are out of fellowship with one another. What can reconcile them? The nearer they get to the cross the nearer they will get to one another. Here then is the remedy for every evil, the cure for every spiritual malady. The preaching of Christ and Him crucified is the world's greatest need.

### IV. It Is Wanted The Most.

Christ alone can satisfy the hearts of true believers. The bread of life is what their souls are hungering for, and only Christ can meet their deepest longings. The language of the saints is, "Thou O Christ art all I want, more than all in Thee I find." And this is equally true of unbelievers. The desire of those Greeks of old expresses quite well the inarticulate cry of multitudes in the world today, "Sirs, we would see Jesus." Other themes may interest and entertain, but Christ and Him crucified alone opens the blind eyes, cleanses penitent sinners, and satisfies the souls of men.

"I have heard the voice of Jesus,  
Tell me not of aught beside:  
I have seen the face of Jesus,  
All my soul is satisfied."