

A WISE DETERMINATION

I Corinthians 2:1-8

In the book of Acts we have the account of Paul's entry of Corinth, where after a year and a half of earnest work he left a church. Going into that brilliant but godless city where they gloried in human ability and in human attainment, where they made much of the various arts and where they deified human lust and knew nothing of the true God, Paul's soul was deeply stirred. As far as he possibly could, he 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." He was very happy to move among them and preach Christ.

When Paul appeared in Corinth, he came neither as an orator nor 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." He did not try to imitate the methods of the philosophers. He did not use their philosophical verbiage. He did not speak as a rhetorician. His utterances were not orations of highly wrought eloquence. He 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 aim to carry everything before him with a flood of words, neither did he seek fame as an orator. He realized that it was quite possible to obscure the shame of the cross with the flowers of rhetoric, so he did not permit himself any flights of fancy or of the imagination in presenting the glad tidings. He had not come as a philosopher, but as a herald. He had a message to deliver, and refused to obscure it by many words. Seriously and earnestly, as becoming a man who stood between the living and the dead, he preached the message of the cross in all simplicity, for he said, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Paul was very wise in resolving that as long as he was among the Corinthians he would restrict himself to one theme. He had determined that he would not let his speech in their midst drift into abstractions. The Apostle did not think it right to extend the subject of his preaching beyond that of "Jesus Christ and him crucified." He understood full well that to court popularity was easy, but he could not thereby win the approval of God and achieve His purpose, which was the important thing in view of the account that he would be called upon to render at the Judgment-Seat of Christ.

In going to Corinth it was Paul's purpose to preach Christ; not as a new starting point in the development of the race, as a perfect man, as an example nor as a teacher--for all of that would have been mere philosophy--but to preach Him as dying for our sins. Christ as a propitiation was the burden of Paul's preaching.

Paul did not speak as an orator or rhetorician, that is, "with excellency of speech." He did not preach in order to give anybody a literary treat. After all, it is the business of every God-called preacher to transmit to people the Word of God. In contrast with the Greek orators who were exceptionally fond of flowery extravagances of speech, Paul was determined to make his messages plain. His manner was simple and unaffected; his diction plain and easily understood. He was not an enemy of human wisdom, for he was very highly educated, but he did oppose it as a means of human redemption. To him it was contemptible only when somebody tried to make it transcend its appointed sphere. Christianity nowhere places a premium upon ignorance or stupidity. Paul himself used attractive speech. He knew that there was a place for beauty and culture, but that there was no place for ostentatious display of human knowledge and personal talent.

Paul also knew that it was a mark of greatness to single out matters of chief importance from others less noteworthy, and to concentrate attention upon them. He did just that. Realizing that no other message would avail for the salvation of sinners or the edification

of God's beloved people, he centered his message around Christ and Him crucified. Thus he majored on His Person and work. For him the central theme of the divine revelation was the Cross, and no more splendid homage could he have rendered it than this, that he should act 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.

Some say, "We preach Christ," but the Christ who lived on earth for those thirty-three wonderful years never saved one poor sinner apart from His death. His crucifixion throws into relief several tremendous facts. It emphasizes the wickedness, the corruption and the vileness of the human heart. While He was here in the world which He had made, men cried, "Away with Him, away with Him; crucify Him!" Could we have any worse commentary on the iniquity of the human heart than that? As far as he was capable, man was guilty of the awful crime of deicide. He wanted to kill God or to drive Him out of His own universe.

Stand in faith by the cross of Calvary and see the blessed Saviour suffering and dying there; see the nails upon which He hanged and the blood dripping from those awful wounds; see the thorns crushed upon His sacred brow and the blood enwrapping His naked body as with a crimson shroud. That is what sin did, the sin that is in your heart and in mine. That tells out the story of the wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart. 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. One might well have understood it if God looking down upon that scene had let loose the thunders of His wrath and the lightnings of His judgment and had destroyed that throng in a moment. The cross of Christ is that which casts light on everything that men glory in and stains all its glory.

It was not in the consciousness of strength, self-confident and self-relying, that Paul appeared among them, but as oppressed with a sense of his weakness and insufficiency. He had a work to do which he felt to be entirely above his powers. In solicitude of mind arising out of a sense of his insufficiency, and with the consciousness of the infinite importance of the work, Paul approached it in fear and trembling. He preached under an overwhelming sense of his own weakness, and without any effort to commend his message to his audiences by rhetorical or philosophical devices. He did his work with a sense of tremendous responsibility and apprehension lest mistakes should be made, and evil be done instead of good.

Paul is admired for the fact that he did not think of himself as some great one. He certainly did not preach himself, as the noble leader of and dictator to the saints. He 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. So, it is no wonder that he preached in the demonstration of the Spirit and power. 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 Spirit.

In his living and preaching Paul did not seek to draw people unto himself. There is always a danger with public speakers attracting their audiences unto themselves. The difficulty in it all is that if we build upon the arm of flesh, we cause our hearers to trust in man, and their faith may be shaken and wrecked. Paul could say, "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ"; but he never went out to make Paul-ites. Paul sought to magnify and glorify Christ. To him Christ was the magnet by which all men should be drawn, and to Whom all should be united. It is a shame when any of us want ourselves displayed as some great one. Would that our ambition at all times was to magnify the Lord and to glorify Him!

Great results may be wrought by human power on a lower level. Logic may convince the intellect, rhetoric may dazzle the imagination and pathos may touch the heart, but the

Holy Spirit alone can convict and convert. As the powder is to the bullet, and as the strong arm is to the sword, so is the Holy Spirit to the Word.

The expression, "Proclaiming the testimony of God," indicates that Paul's method was that of assertion or declaration and not argument. Proclaiming or declaring with authority was the method used by him. He simply refused to employ the methods of the disputants. He had been taken behind the veil and shown one of God's secrets, and from there he came forth commissioned to impart it to others. He was simply obligated to tell it out, without addition or subtraction.

In verses six and seven we have a comparison between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. The wisdom of the world is the highest reach of man's searchings and findings apart from any divine revelation. The wisdom of God is something that is hidden from the Christless, but revealed to believers by the Holy Spirit. The foundation of saving faith is not reason, that is, not arguments addressed to the understanding, but the power of God as exerted with and by the truth upon the heart. Having been "put in trust with the gospel" it is our glorious privilege and inescapable obligation to offer it in its entirety to others.