

Intro. There are a number of songs we sing about the cross—“The Old Rugged Cross,” “At Calvary,” “The Wonder of the Cross,” & more. It has been nearly 2,000 years since Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth, but ever since then, the sign & symbol of those who follow Him—members of the Christian faith—has been an old rugged cross. Families often experience “Growing Pains” along the way & a church family is no different. One of those “Growing Pains” is how divisions can creep up & begin to separate individuals & groups in the church, but the Bible says that the #1 remedy for this problem is for everyone to “Look to the Cross.” Just as the cross refreshes our souls, so water poured on a struggling tree refreshes the roots. Let’s turn to 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5.

Theme: Unity around the Atonement

Background: Paul writes to the Corinthian church to address some problems (growing pains) they were experiencing & pointed them to unity

➤ This passage provides us with 3 responses to the cross of Christ.

I. Be Saved through the Message of the Cross of Christ (1:18-25)

- “the word of the cross” (1:18)—it isn’t so much what we say about the cross as what the cross says to us
- There are only 2 kinds of people in the world: “those who are perishing”—literally, “to be cut loose,” for they are presently drifting farther from God; & those “who are being saved”—present tense speaks of sanctification (see more below)
- “power of God”—God’s way of displaying His strength in the salvation of sinners

Illus: You can take many different routes from here to Indiana, but the only highway that goes to heaven goes right through Calvary (cf. Hebrews 9:22). You see, the cross is not the best way to get to heaven, it is the only way to get to heaven (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)

- You may assemble all the best & brightest minds of the world—the world’s wisdom—but it is nothing more than foolishness to God (1:20)

Illus: I heard about a student in college who made a zero on a paper. He went to the professor & said, “I don’t believe I deserved this grade.” The professor looked back over the paper & said, “I don’t believe you deserved that grade either, but it was the lowest I could give” (Merritt, 19)—that’s how God feels about our wisdom

- “the folly of what we preach” (1:21)—it isn’t foolish preaching, for there is plenty of that going on, but the foolishness of the message being preached—the world cannot believe it because they say it doesn’t make sense for God to save that way
- People generally have 1 of 3 responses to the preaching of the cross (1:23-24)—(1) the Jew sees it as offensive (scandal from “skandalon”) for “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:23); (2) the Greeks (Gentiles) see it as foolishness; (3) believers see it as the power & wisdom of God

II. Boast in the Lord, Because of His Work through the Cross of Christ (1:26-31)

- When Paul uses the term “called” or “your calling,” (1:24, 26), he is using it in the effective sense. There are 2 calls of God in Scripture—the external call that goes out to anyone that hears the gospel proclaimed (cf. Matthew 22:14) & the internal call, or effectual call, that is part of the process of salvation, whereby God calls or draws His people to Christ effectively (see Romans 8:28-30; John 6:37, 44). Paul uses “called” to speak to believers.

Illus: Imagine you were choosing a basketball team. You would probably choose the tallest players. What about a football team? The biggest players. A track team? The fastest runners. A debate team? The brightest students. A prettiest contestant? The most beautiful lady. Why? Because the world looks for the best, brightest & most beautiful, but that isn’t what God does, for most of

those He calls (effectually) to Himself aren't the brightest or powerful or prestigious for He has chosen the common people to make much of Himself (1:26-29)

Illus: That doesn't mean we should be "dumb for the Lord" or "fools for Christ," for Paul isn't saying we shouldn't be educated (look how much education he had & he instructed Timothy to "study to show yourself approved, 2 Timothy 2:15), but that all of our learning doesn't earn favor from God. One Christian man prayed, "Lord, I'm thankful for my ignorance" to which somebody else whispered, "He sure has a lot to be thankful for" (Merritt, 28)

Illus: Lady Huntingdon of England was one of the richest ladies in England & in her testimony, she said she was saved by one letter in the Bible, the letter M, for the Bible says "not *many* noble" were called. It doesn't say "not *any* noble were called."

- God called Moses, a stutterer, as Israel's greatest prophet. He called David, a shepherd, to be Israel's greatest king. He called Amos, a country farmer, to be one of Israel's greatest prophets. God called Gideon (the runt of one of the poorest families) from Manasseh (the worst tribe) to deliver Israel from the Midianites with just 300 soldiers—a pretty small army. Why? So that He would get the glory? He called Fanny Crosby, who was blind nearly her entire life, yet she is one of the greatest hymn-writers the church has ever known—in all of these stories, God gets the glory
- A. Christ as our wisdom** (1:30)—He is God's gift to us to make us wise in His eyes, because our wisdom is foolishness
- B. Christ as our righteousness**—to stand in the right with God speaks of justification & is God's declaration of the sinner to be in the right with Him through faith in Christ
- C. Christ as our sanctification**—to make us more like Christ, removing the power of sin in our lives
 - The believer has been saved from the penalty of sin (justification), is being saved from the power of sin (sanctification), & will be saved from the presence of sin (glorification)
- D. Christ as our redemption**—the final act whereby we are rescued from this world of sin
- All of this is God's work & He gets all the credit so our boasting should only be boasting in the Lord (1:31)

III. Believe in the Power of God to Work through the Message of the Cross of Christ (2:1-5)

- Do you remember where Paul had left whenever he came to Corinth to preach Christ? He had just left Athens (Acts 17) where he encountered many philosophers & intellectuals & it appears that only a few accepted the gospel. Paul could have been discouraged & tempted to water down the message so more people would believe—like what happens in so many mega-churches & televangelists, yet Paul continued to preach Christ crucified, not with the words of wisdom like the world, but in demonstration of the Spirit & power

Illus: The cross was not the only thing Paul talked about, but it was central to his message—our logo here at Sweetwater is a watery cross because it is a reminder that the center of all we do points to the cross—it is our message, it is our mission, it is the point of every ministry, & should the day ever come where we stray from that, we must remove the word "church" from our name & call it a social club or organization or the like

Conc. It has been said that Jesus split history because of His work on the cross & His resurrection. Moreover, everyone has the cross in the middle of their eternity. Either you are on the hell side of the cross looking toward heaven or you are on the heaven side looking toward hell. The cross either stands between you & heaven or it stands between you & hell—that is the purpose of the cross—to separate us one from the other. So where are you standing? Are you presently being saved because you've already come to Christ by way of the cross? Then boast in the Lord's work in your life. Are you perishing because you haven't come to the cross, where Christ gave His life for you? Then "Look to the Cross" & come & kneel at the cross & find forgiveness.