

To Know Christ and Him Crucified

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Paul wrote these words in a letter to the church at Corinth. What did he mean when he said, “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”?

Before coming to Corinth Paul had been in Athens. The Greeks loved philosophy and to hear and talk about new things. So when Paul preached in Athens he gave logical arguments for why the people should abandon their idol worship. But Paul did not gain many disciples for Christ in Athens.

When Paul came to Corinth he decided to try a different approach. He would not use fancy orations and logical thinking. He would preach that Jesus Christ was crucified to save the human race from eternal ruin. How could such an approach possibly work?

Jesus was an obscure Jew. Crucifixion was the most horrible death the Romans could inflict on a human being and reserved for criminals who were not Roman citizens. What possible relation could there be between the cruel death of an unknown Jewish villager and the salvation of the world from eternal death? That would seem crazy to Paul’s audience.

It seems crazy to people today. Why?

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

It seems crazy to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified because people want to see a miraculous sign from God before they will believe the truth. They want to talk about some so-called wisdom from man. The message of the cross is foolishness to them. What is the message of the cross?

Is the message of the cross that a good man and preacher was killed by base men? That happens every day all day long in this world. A terrorist bomb explodes and good and innocent people die. A young lady is going home on a minibus and the driver brutally kills her. Unfortunately these kind of events are commonplace. The message of the cross is not that a good person, even a

prophet was killed by bad men. That is common enough. Jesus was not the first prophet to be killed. The message of the cross is not that. What is the message of the cross?

What makes Jesus' crucifixion something special? Why did Paul say that he would focus on that message and avoid all philosophy and logic?

The truth is spiritually discerned. The Holy Spirit of God enlightens the mind to receive truth. But humanity is proud. People think that they can figure out the truth with their intellect alone, without help from God.

But God desires humility from all intelligent created beings. Humility is the key to the kingdom of God. Every good thing comes from God. Everything. Humility is the opposite of self-love. The kingdom of God is founded on the principle of self-sacrificing love. Selfishness in all of its forms must be destroyed because it ruins the glory of the kingdom of God.

The law of God is the law of self-sacrificing love. Any violation of this principle must be eternally destroyed. That is why the Bible says that the wages of sin is death. Not death for a few days and then a resurrection. The wages of sin is eternal death. This death is accomplished when God removes His life-giving power from a person forever.

You have sinned. You have earned eternal death. How can you pay the price and live again? You cannot. But God has mercy and love to you. He offers a way of salvation from eternal ruin. He offers a way of forgiveness.

But the offer of forgiveness cannot remove the death penalty. If God forgave people's sins without the penalty being paid, the law and its penalty would have no meaning. God is just and His law must be obeyed. Therefore how can God forgive sin and maintain justice at the same time?

Justice demands the separation of the sinner from God. But who can be separated from God's life-giving power and live again? Only someone who had eternal life in themselves can do this.

According to the law, who must suffer the penalty of sin, the sinner himself or someone else? Of course the sinner himself or herself must suffer. Among humans who can pay the penalty and live again? Who among human beings has eternal life in themselves? No one. The human race seems without hope.

But hope found an answer in Jesus. Jesus is not a mere man. He is the unity of divinity and humanity. Jesus existed from the days of eternity. Jesus is one with God. I am not saying it. Jesus said it.

John 10:30 "I and *My* Father are one."

Jesus is one with God and therefore has eternal life in him.

John 10:17-18 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

The entire world, including you and me was created by Jesus.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

How did Jesus purge our sins? Jesus entered humanity because guilty humanity must pay the penalty of sin. Jesus was one with God and He also became one with humanity. Jesus took the penalty of sin upon Himself. He endured separation from God on the cross. The cross event was not a crucifixion like any other crucifixion. The Father and the Son who have been one since the days of eternity were separated at the cross. When we lose a loved one by death we are grieved at the separation. But the break-up of the unity of the Father and Son was much more painful than this. It was much more dramatic than this. God experienced horrific anguish with His Son on the cross.

What is the message of the cross? God Himself suffered the penalty of sin to give you eternal life. He suffered infinite anguish to His own being to save you from sin. He set you free with His own pain.

When you see that it is not just a good man or even a prophet but God Himself suffering for your sins, then you can begin to appreciate the love of God. Then your life can be changed. This can only happen if you open your heart to the Holy Spirit. You cannot understand this with human wisdom. Only the Holy Spirit of God can make you comprehend this.

This is the message that turned Paul's life upside down. This is the message that won his heart. This is the message that propelled him to go from city to city preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Won't you receive the message of the cross today?