

Christ Crucified

By Steve Pruitt

I suppose that most of my life I have been known as a person who doesn't mind giving his opinion. Like most folks I have an opinion about everything and I like to use my first amendment right to tell anyone who will listen what I think; to my shame most of the time. My wife and kids will tell you that when my opinion is asked for I speak my mind and let the chips fall where they may. I usually don't shy away from a good theological debate and sometimes incite one. The scripture passage James 1:9 that says be swift to hear and slow to speak; goes right over my head. Ecclesiastes 3:7 that says there is a time to be silent; right over my head. I suppose I fit in the category of Proverbs 29:11 that says a fool utters all his mind.

The world is full of opinions; just listen to talk radio and the pundits on Fox News, CNN and MSNBC. They will tell you what is right or wrong with the present administration and give their wisdom on why it's good or how it can be made better. And then boast that they have the best news and commentary. There are numerous talk shows in which you can watch and get advice on just about anything; some good, but a lot of it is full of worldly wisdom. But it doesn't stop with the world; the church is full of opinions.

The local Christian book stores have shelves full of books by people sharing their opinions; a lot of them good, some not so good. Ponder the divisions in the church; hundreds of denominations. The Methodist believes one way, the Baptist another, and then you have Presbyterian, Church of God, Church of Christ, Episcopal and Catholic churches. The list goes on and on. Inside these denominations you have denominations. Within these denominations you have Calvinist, Armenians, Pre-tribbers, Post-tribbers, cessationists, Charismatics, Pentacostals and Evangelicals; all with differing theologies which they believe is the correct one.

All of these divisions and varying opinions that exist today are nothing new to society. In the apostles Paul's day there were numerous Greek philosophers of the Epicureans and Stoics who spent their time telling and hearing something new (Acts 17:18-21). The city of Corinth had a mixed population of Romans, Greeks and Jews all of whom worshiped different philosophies, gods and idols. It was the same within the religious community; there was a division among the Jews; the Pharisees and Sadducees. There were even divisions within the church that Paul founded in Corinth. There were those who were saying "I am of Paul" and others were saying "I am of Apollos" or "I am of Cephas" (Peter) and others "I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:12).

Paul was aware of the divisions in the church at Corinth and that they were boasting in their wisdom and understanding. Pride had crept in and prohibited them from dealing with the sexual immorality in the church. They were experiencing God's grace in signs and wonders and spiritual gifts as well. However, Paul approached his ministry there with one main focus; Christ crucified.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 (ESV)

Paul had a lot of things in which he could boast. If anyone had earned the right to give his opinion it was Paul. Beside the fact that he had suffered greatly for the sake of the gospel, Paul had received such remarkable revelation that a messenger from Satan was sent to buffet him that he might not be conceited (2 Corinthians 12:7). After Jesus had ascended he appeared to Paul and spoke with him (1 Corinthians 15:8, Acts 9:4-6). Paul had also experienced being caught up into the third heaven and heard words that cannot be told and which no man may utter (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Yet, when he came to Corinth he decided to know nothing but Christ crucified.

It is obvious when you read the letters to Corinthian church that Paul had spoken to them of other issues in addition to the cross and Christ crucified. So, what did Paul mean when he said he decided to know nothing but Christ crucified? I believe he meant that everything he had to say he wanted to say it in relation to Christ crucified. He wanted everything he did in his ministry to reflect Christ crucified. Why? Paul wanted to ensure that message of Christ crucified was not lost in words of eloquent wisdom. Look at what he wrote.

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:17-24 (ESV)

Paul wrote in verses eighteen and twenty-four that the cross and Christ crucified is the power of God. The power of God for what? In Romans 1:16 Paul wrote that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. It could be that the greatest display of the power of God is the miracle that takes place when God takes the filthy rags of man's righteousness (Isaiah 64:6), washes them in the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5) and clothes that sinful man in his righteousness. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote that for our sake God made Jesus who had not sinned to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). We were, by nature, children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). God satisfied his wrath toward us by offering his son on the cross. It is the blood of Christ which has delivered us from the wrath to come (Romans 5:9). Forgiveness of sins can only be obtain by the blood of Christ crucified (Acts 5:31, 13:38; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). It is the power of God.

It is my perception that Paul went to Corinth claiming to know nothing but Christ crucified to ensure that the message was not lost in the signs and wonders that were taking place or in the gifts of the spirit that were in operation; things in which we often associate with the power of God. He wanted the Corinthians to understand that the cross and Christ crucified was not merely a novelty of the past but had relevancy in the present. He wanted them to understand that not only was Christ crucified the power of God unto salvation but also the power of God to live a holy life.

This principal applies to us as well. Paul wrote in Romans 6:6-11, *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* (ESV)

In other words, the only power I have to consider myself dead to sin I have because Jesus was crucified. And if I have believed on him for salvation then I was crucified with him so that I might no longer be a slave to sin. And because he was raised my life has been swallowed up by his. That is why Paul could write to the Galatians, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20 ESV)

I read a quote once by John Piper who said, "The cross is not merely a past place of substitution, it is a present place of execution." The cross is where we execute our pride, our

greed, our selfishness, our lusts and all the sin that so easily besets us. The cross is not just a novelty we hang around our necks or use for a grave marker. The power of the cross didn't dissipate with the death of Jesus. Piper went on to say, "Don't treat the cross like a historical relic of the past. It is the power of God to change everything in your life." Paul told us ". . . *those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*" (Galatians 5:24 ESV). So the cross and Christ crucified is the power of God unto salvation and the power of God by which our flesh is crucified to our worldly desires.

Christ crucified is not only the power of God it is the wisdom of God. How so? God in his wisdom uses the preaching of a foolish looking event to bring about the salvation of all those who will believe. This message of Christ crucified sounds foolish and it did so especially to the Greeks in Paul's day who were always seeking wisdom. As I stated before there was a heavy Greek population in Corinth and they had lots of gods and idols whom they worshiped. When Paul came preaching Christ crucified they had to have thought it was foolishness. A god delivered his son to die for the sins of lawless men who he would then forgive by the very blood they shed. They probably thought, "What kind of god has his wrath appeased by the death of his own son. That should make him angry. He should avenge his son's death. What a puny God."

Peter preached to the Jews that Jesus was crucified according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), but it looked like weakness to them. The cross was a place of defeat and shame for the Jew. They were looking for the signs of a powerful king who would rid them of Rome not a "weakling" who would die on a cross, so it was a stumbling block to them. But the cross was not weakness; it was and still is the power of God. And because of the stumbling of the Jews salvation has come to the Gentiles.

This wisdom of God was a secret wisdom which God decreed from the beginning. Had they understood it they would not have crucified him (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). God in his wisdom hid it from the rulers in Jesus' day so that his plan of salvation might come to fruition.

Christ crucified is also the wisdom of God because it takes away man's boasting. If Christ crucified is the power of God for salvation and the means by which I die to sin then I cannot boast in anything I have done. Paul, in warning the Galatians about returning to the law once they had been saved, said, *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* (Galatians 6:14 ESV) Apart from Christ crucified there is nothing I can do to neither save my soul nor perfect it. I cannot read my bible enough, pray enough, attend enough church services or feed the poor enough. Paul went on to write the Corinthians concerning the cross, *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 ESV)

So, in closing, let's examine where we are in this walk of life by asking ourselves some questions. "Have I believed in Christ crucified for the forgiveness of my sins?" If the answer to that question is no, let me encourage you to put your faith in Jesus Christ. There is salvation in no other. If the answer to that question is yes and you have believed in Christ crucified for the forgiveness of your sins ask yourself, "Am I trusting in/relying on the power of Christ crucified to overcome my fleshly desires? Have I been crucified to the world and the world to me?"