

## THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND OUR DEEPEST UNSPOKEN FEARS

Good Friday - April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026, 10:00 a.m.

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**IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 - “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*”**

Such a short text, and yet it raises so many questions. Paul rehearses his first overtures with the gospel at Corinth. Here, in this hub of business and culture, where people seemed to have so much on the go and minds occupied with everything but saving grace, what would Paul say? How would he get their interest? How was he to make the saving work of God in Christ sparkle in their minds? What would he do to arrest their attention and capture their interest?

***“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*** But surely that would be a mistake. These people were hardly ready for such a blunt approach. Why did Paul make such a decision? Was there nothing else in the whole counsel of God worth knowing? Paul had a whole Old Testament to work with and the whole oral tradition growing up around the teaching of the Savior. What about the Sermon on the Mount?

And if Paul wasn't going to work with **any** of that stuff, what was it all **for**? Or was Paul just narrow in his understanding? Was his mind small or contracted? Were there a hundred other wonderful things that could have been said, but were all beyond Paul's grasp?

It doesn't look like it. Paul says his narrow focus was no accident - ***“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*”** So he could have shared more but chose not to. He could have broadened his approach to their tastes but felt it unwise to do so. He could have bridged the gap between their present interest and his full heart with a thousand other interests but refused all such temptations.

And the mystery is even deepened when we remember Paul **knew** the message of the cross wasn't a pleasing one to the worldly mind: **“...we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles...”**(1 Corinthians 1:23). Or **Galatians 5:11** - **“But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.”** - IPAD TEXTS

He's saying, “If I want to preach a more **market savvy** message - if I want to avoid a message that

leads to ridicule and persecution, all I have to do is avoid the cross of Christ. Because the cross of Christ is the **only** religious message that knocks the legs out from under confidence in innate human potential and goodness. Only the cross exposes the needs - the **real** needs - of people. Only the cross exposes people to needs **other than** the ones the advertisers and the therapists tell them they have. The cross brings to the forefront the spiritual weight and actual guilt (not just guilt **feelings**) and permanent pollution **sin** brings in the sight of a just and holy God.”

So, clearly, Paul knew the cross of Christ rivets fallen human attention on God’s absolute intolerance of sin. It smacks of divine judgment and wrath.

And yet he pronounces this message boldly - proudly. Paul wasn’t out to cheat these people by his narrow approach. He knew there were more immediately **appealing** messages to bring, for sure. But **those** messages weren’t as helpful or as loving for the masses. In bringing them the cross, right up front, he was choosing the most **loving** approach. And now we’re going to look at **why** this is so:

1) **THE HEART OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE ISN’T IMMEDIATELY APPEALING. AND IT ISN’T MEANT TO BE**

There are some truths that are so pivotal that if you leave them out, you can’t get anything else right either. This is one of those truths. If the gospel message we bring to the world is instantly inviting, it is certain proof we have the wrong message.

And here’s the point at which churches get confused. There is certainly absolutely **nothing** unappealing about Jesus Christ. Everywhere He went people loved Him. Only the self-promoting religious and political leaders found Him offensive. But the Biblical record is clear. The common people heard Him gladly. Everybody **loved** Jesus. And they **should** have loved Him. He was a gracious, loving, kind, miracle-working, healing, teaching Jesus. On this point we’re **all** agreed.

But the **person** of Jesus, and the **teaching** of Jesus, and the **miracles** of Jesus are **not** the gospel of Jesus. Not by a long shot. And the message we’re bringing to our culture - like the message Paul brought to Corinth - **isn’t** a message about what Jesus was like, or how many hungry He fed, or how many people Jesus healed.

No. When the Bible talks specifically about the **mission** of Jesus and the **message** of the church, it makes it very clear that the **niceness** of Jesus isn't the issue. It's the **gospel** of Jesus that's the issue. And right from the start we're all warned that the **gospel** of Jesus won't be immediately **appealing** to the masses:

**IPAD TEXT - Luke 2:34-35 - "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."**

Right out of the gate this child - Jesus - God the Son - the Messiah and Redeemer - was, according to godly Simeon, **appointed** for something specific. And God the Father was the One who appointed Him. And if God the Father makes an appointment, then it's an appointment that sticks. This divine Son would be appointed for the **fall** and the **rising** of many in Israel.

Note that order. The **falling** comes first. There is no **rising** until there is first a **falling**. Jesus doesn't just take me **up**. First He takes me **down**, and **then** He takes me **up**. That's the order of His working. And to make it all even more clear Simeon spells it all out further.

The Son was also appointed for a **"sign that is opposed"**(34). That's what the prophet says will mark the assignment of Jesus in His death on the cross. That whole message of the cross as God's dealing with human sin would be **"opposed."** What a word! The message of Jesus crucified will meet with **opposition**. If there's **no** opposition, the sign hasn't done its work.

This is what would lead Paul to ask the Galatians why, if he had switched to a message of human potential and accomplishment, **why** was he still being persecuted for his message. Meaning the persecution he **was** experiencing was **proof** he was still preaching the true gospel of the cross of Christ.

But even if this is all true, how does it answer our initial issue? How is this message - this **opposed** message - still the most genuinely wise and loving approach to this lost culture? How

is it sensible and loving that Paul would go to a pagan mega-center like Corinth determining to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified?

It works like this. Only the message of Christ crucified brings the opposing voice of human pride to the surface and expose it for the sin that it is. That's why Simeon said Jesus was a ***“sign to be opposed.”*** The sign was ***designed*** to arouse and expose the depth and power of human pride. The message of the gospel is ***tailored*** to cut across our natural tendencies toward self-help and self-potential.

The first reaction to the gospel is proud opposition just as the first reaction of the alcoholic is to deny he is one. And that self-destruction must be ***exposed***. And the nature of the message of the cross is it ***creates*** this antipathy. It excites this response. The ***falling*** comes before the ***rising***. The only way up is down. Christ can only pour in ***grace after*** He has confronted ***pride***. Old John Newton got it right: ***“T’was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.”***

But that's just one reason why Paul ***“decided”*** to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified. There is another that is often overlooked:

2) **ONLY THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS GIVES A FOUNDATION FOR HOPE FOR THE PERPETUAL LOVE OF GOD IN THE FACE OF MY FUTURE SINS**

I praise here the ***wisdom*** of divine redemption. There are truly different ways we can know of the goodness and love of God in this fallen world. The unearned warmth of the sun on our face on a beautiful day. The seemingly magical quality of seeds in the soil that produce blossom and fruit. The rain that turns brown grass green. All of these give testimony of God's tender care.

But none of these taken separately, nor the sum of all of them together, comes close to revealing the depth of God's love for sinful creatures like us. We talk so much about the cross in our conversations. We wear them of gold and jewels around our necks, and so are in danger of forgetting the depth of humiliation to which the Savior surrendered Himself.

Could there have been some other way for God to forgive? And If God had chosen to do it some other way, why did He choose the death of His Son on the cross? Paul gives us a hint at the logic of the cross in **Romans 8:32** - “**He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” - IPAD TEXT**

These words move us beyond the realm of **forgiveness**. Whether or not God **could** have found some other way for redemption we’ll never know. But the **reason** He choose Christ crucified is clear. If God had chosen some **lesser** path - if redemption could have been at a **smaller** cost - even if forgiveness **could** have been divinely decreed, we would forever have lost what Paul saw as the greatest guarantee of God’s undying, unconditional love for bad people.

Look carefully at those words again: “**He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (8:32). - IPAD TEXT**

The argument rests on the fact that nothing can now be needed in my life which would cost God **as much** as what He has already **given**.

But suppose God had **not** given up His own Son? Suppose He had found some other way to provide forgiveness **without** giving up His only Son? Suppose He had just shouted down from heaven - or texted - or instagrammed His message - “**It’s OK. I forgive you!**”

That would be wonderful, of course, But what proof would I have that, at some point down the road, some **further** help and grace needed by me might require something **beyond** God’s initial declaration of forgiveness? How could I be sure I had not slipped beyond the bounds of the forgiveness previously granted?

This is precisely where the glory of proclaiming the cross enters the picture. God, in all the power of His **divine imagination**, could not find anything more costly to offer for my pardon. He planned it that way so I receive not only **forgiveness** for past sins but **assurance** for future ones.

The sun and the moon and the seasons and the rain and all the earth's bounty only show God's provision. They offer not one shred of evidence for His *pardon*. But if God did this tremendous work on the cross, not for those who were pure and noble and unspoiled by sin, but for those who have failed, and stubbornly so - if *these* are the ones for whom the greatest work has already been done, then the cross becomes the best news ever.

So yes, if I'm a sinner, even if I chafe in the blindness of my pride, then show me this. Show me Christ crucified. Let me glory in the cross. And don't keep it from me!

I feel so inadequate to paint the glory of the gospel to you. But if you've ever taken the time to wade through **Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment** you will come to this amazing paragraph on the scandalous bestowal of gospel grace to undeserving, but repentant sinners. I find it one of the most moving things I have read outside of the sacred scriptures:

**“And at the last Judgment Christ will say to us, ‘Come, you also! Come, drunkards! Come, children of shame! And he will say to us: “Come, vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast...come all the same!’ And the wise and the prudent will say, ‘Lord, why do you welcome them?’ And he will say: ‘If I welcome them, you wise men, if I welcome them, you prudent men, it is because not one of them has ever been judged worthy.’ And he will stretch out his arms and we will fall at his feet, and we will cry out with sobbing, and *then* we will understand it all - we will understand the Gospel of grace. Lord, your kingdom come!”**

Come with your broken heart. That's all you need to do.