

July 8, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Not Our Ways: Spreading the Word

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

God uses ...

1. A Foolish-looking Message (1:18-25)
2. Foolish-looking Messengers (1:26-31)
3. A Foolish-looking Method (2:1-5)

A little less than 10 years ago two letters and a number became the talk of our nation. Seemingly everyone had heard of these three characters. Many people were concerned about what the characters represented. Perhaps you know what they are. They are "Y2K." They stand for "Year 2,000." They particularly stood for the troubles that was going to happen when computers would be unable to make the transition from December 31, 1999 to January 1, 2000. Many people were genuinely worried about a catastrophe that would to come upon the world.

I remember when a friend of mine, who was very worried about this phenomenon, handed me a folder that labeled, "Y2K FYI." It was filled with a bunch of articles about what was going to happen on January 1, 2000. One article was entitled, *Is A Big Y2K Power Grid Blackout Inevitable?* Another article was entitled *Preparing for the Year 2000 Crash*. Another article was entitled *Y2K: A Global Ticking Time Bomb?*

Another article was written by Ed Yourdon, a computer consultant. He was planning to move to New Mexico at the time he wrote his article *Y2K Survivalists, Safe Havens, and Bugging Out*. His move was intended to prepare for the coming disaster. He wrote, ...

I've often joked that I expect New York to resemble Beirut if even a subset of the Y2K infrastructure problems actually materialize but it's really not a joke. It's likely to be fairly cold on New Year's weekend, and a combination of disruptions in utilities, telecommunications, banking, schools, hospitals, airports, unemployment checks, Social Security checks, food stamps, and/or welfare checks would be enough to make the citizens of New York (who normally only have to tolerate problems like subway strikes and embarrassingly incompetent baseball teams) extraordinarily grumpy. There's enough gunfire in the streets even in normal times, and I'm not comfortable exposing my family to the city's ill humor if Y2K turns out to be a serious problem. [\[1\]](#)

Another article was written by a man named Cory Hamasaki who was a mainframe computer programmer for more than 25 years. His article was entitled *500 Days to go*. He began by stating the problem then described all of the things that could go wrong. He then goes on to describe ways in which you can survive for the long-term. At one point he says this, ...

Know that I am an optimist. There is no reason to believe that we won't see a complete collapse of civilization. Anyone who says that things will be fine hasn't got a good sense of history or current events. [\[2\]](#)

At the time of the crisis, I was working in the computer department of a hospital. As a result, I collected many other resources regarding the events surrounding Y2K. I'd like to share a few of them with you.

One article I collected was contained in a book sales catalog called *Elijah Company* that was selling Y2K resources. In their 1998 fall season catalog there was a brief article that put forth three possible scenarios:

Scenario #1: Brown-out: Temporary interruptions in many services for up to several months. (Picture something like the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo).

Scenario #2: Black-out: Prolonged interruptions in many services for a period of years. (Picture something like the Great Depression on a global scale or Germany at the end of World War II).

Scenario #3: Wipe-out: The collapse of civilization and the end of the world as we now know it. (Picture a total breakdown and restructuring of society).

These were the only scenarios presented. The article continues ...

We have analyzed reams of information about Y2K, and have become convinced that disruptions are probable. We don't know which of the scenarios above will play itself out, but we believe you would be prudent to prepare for some disruption of your lifestyle, just as you would be prudent to prepare if a blizzard were heading your way. [\[3\]](#)

The implication?--Buy some of our books!

A lot of people made a lot of money in those days as they took advantage of the fear that permeated many as they heard about these things. My favorite was a full-page advertisement on the back of World Magazine in the August 29, 1998 issue which began with these words, ...

Newsweek calls it "the day the world shuts down," and "the event that could all but paralyze the planet." The *Wall Street Journal* calls it "the most expensive accident of all time." *Computer World* says, "the problem is far worse than even the pessimists believe!" There's no question: There will be problems--and no one knows for sure how bad they'll be.

That's why you need to prepare now for the turmoil we'll likely face in the event of simultaneous system failures and the 'ripple effect' the Year 2000 (Y2K) computer bug will bring. At the very least you need to know how to:

- Keep your family warm even *without* electricity (Don't forget: this crisis will begin in January).
- Buy the necessities you need even if the banks are closed or you can't get access to your accounts.
- Provide emergency protection and medical care even if 911 is constantly busy.
- Feed your family even if the grocery shelves are empty.
- Secure clean, uncontaminated drinking water if even your water treatment plant can't.

Don't Be a Victim

You have very little influence over whether the federal government or private industry gets its computer fixed in time. But that does not mean you have to become a victim. You can begin preparing now to make sure you and your family survive the coming chaos.

To assist you, Y2K consumer advocate and best-selling author, Michael Hyatt has prepared a two-part family information and protection resource, The Millennium Bug Personal Survival Kit: Everything You and Your Family Must Know to Get from One Side of the Crisis to the Other. ...

The complete package: the six-tape audiocassette series (\$79 separately) and the Y2K resource manual (which also sells for \$79), is available for a limited time for just \$89 plus \$4.95 shipping (a savings of 50%). ...

Get Started Now

The Year 2000 crisis is approaching fast. If you want to protect yourself and your family, it's crucial that you get The Millennium Bug Personal Survival Kit as soon as possible. Don't delay.

[There follows ordering information as well as an 800 number: 1-888-Y2K-PREP (1-888-925-7737).] [\[4\]](#)

Now obviously the ways of these people who predicted great catastrophe upon the earth weren't the ways that things turned out. It's a good illustration of how the things that we might think will happen aren't what actually happens. It's a good reminder that our ways aren't God's ways.

We are in the midst of a topical sermon series this summer entitled, "Not Our Ways." It has been my aim to show you the ways of God in such a way that you might see that the ways of God are not necessarily our ways. My messages have been a call to trust in the Lord, even if you don't fully understand everything. Four weeks ago we looked at **the problem of evil**: God has created a world in which He has used evil to accomplish His purposes. Three weeks ago we looked at **imputation**: The process of God declaring others guilty or innocent based upon the action of another. Two weeks ago we looked at how **God provides salvation to men but not to angels**. Last week we looked at "**The Manner of the Messiah**." When the Messiah came, He didn't come in grand glory. He came in humility.

I have taken the idea of all four of these examples in which God's ways are not our ways from a sermon by Edward Payson entitled "God's Ways Above Men's" that he preached in the early 1800's. In the heart of his sermon Edward Payson gives eight examples of how God's ways are not our ways.

Now we will look at Payson's fifth example of how God's ways are not our ways. Here is what Edward Payson writes,

God's thoughts and ways differ widely from ours in his choice of means and instruments for propagating the religion of Christ. We should have thought that a religion whose author had been crucified as a malefactor; a religion, which instead of favoring and flattering time ruling passions, prejudices and propensities of men, directly opposed them all, and which was therefore exceedingly hateful to them,—would have needed the assistance of angels, or at least, of the most powerful monarchs the most enlightened sages, the most splendid natural and acquired abilities, to procure it success. But instead of such instruments, which we should have chosen, God saw fit to employ a handful of ignorant fishermen to effect this purpose, and even forbade them to use any human artifices to procure them success; but charged them to rely entirely on the effect of a faithful, simple, unadorned statement of the great truths of Christianity. Hence the language of the apostle, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things that are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things that are not to bring to naught things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. For when, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." [\[5\]](#)

In other words, Payson was saying that the message of a crucified Messiah is a difficult one for people to grasp. Think about it. Our Savior

has come to earth. Rather than being received by His people, they rejected Him. Rather than ignoring Him, they put Him to a cruel death upon a cross. This was our Savior! -- The One condemned and crucified as a sinner. It's a difficult message. The likelihood that people will receive this message is small. So, Payson says, we might think that we need someone great, who can come and spread it throughout the land.

This is the way that it works in advertising: Advertising agencies find a credible personality who people know and trust. This person then becomes the spokesman for your product. When this famous well-trusted person promotes your product it is sure to sell because people like the promoter. "If Michael Jordan is promoting this product, hey, it must be good." It's probable that people will even purchase a lesser quality product, simply because of the advertising.

As it goes with advertising so we might expect it to go with our gospel. Our message really isn't that convincing. After all a crucified leader doesn't sound too appealing to people. So we might expect God to employ some angels to come and preach forth His message that people might believe on account of the great glory of the one proclaiming the message. Or perhaps we would expect God to use some great king or rich man to propagate this good news of sins forgiven. Or perhaps we would expect God to use the smartest and brightest of people in the university setting to prove to all that this message is true. However, none of that is the case.

In actuality God uses normal, ordinary, weak people to spread the message of Christ. That's how God does it. It may not be our ways. But, it is God's ways and we need to accept it and embrace it.

My message is entitled "Not Our Ways: Spreading the Word." The way that God spreads the word is different that what we might expect. First of all God uses ...

1. A Foolish-looking Message (1:18-25)

A Foolish-looking Message is the point of chapter 1, verses 18-25.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For the word of the cross is foolishness 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 cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? 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 through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Please note that I didn't call the gospel "a foolish message" because it is not a foolish message. Indeed verse 18 affirms that this message we believe and preach is powerful. Rather, I called it "a foolish-looking message." This is because the message of the gospel appears foolish to many in the world. There are many on the outside of the church who look at us as fools for believing these things. If they are correct in their assumption that these things are indeed wrong, then they are justified in doing so (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Consider again the truth of verse 18, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." There are people in this world who are perishing in their sins. They have sinned against a holy God, and will suffer for their sins for all eternity. When the message of hope comes to them that is able to save them from their sins they think it to be foolishness. They hear the message that can give them life but they refuse its counsel. They prefer to go their own way and try to brave it on their own rather than trusting in a crucified Messiah.

This is the basic reality for many people who are alive today. They hear the message of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a sinless life, who died upon a cross, and who rose from the dead. They hear that His death upon the cross was for sinners so that whoever believes in Him might be forgiven of their sins. However forgiveness is only the starting point. Those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life. Those who believe in Jesus will live in heaven with God enjoying His presence forever. When the people of the world hear this they reject it refusing to believe it. This is the case for many who hear the gospel presented. They think it to be foolishness.

A few weeks ago, a man in our church invited me to join him and his office staff in attending a "motivational seminar" at the Allstate Arena in Rosemont. The event was targeted for business people to help motivate them for their jobs. Phil told me that he had gotten some cheap tickets to this event where some pretty respectful people were speaking. Steve Forbes, one time presidential candidate, was going to be there. Colin Powell, military general and former secretary of state, was going to be speaking. Lovie Smith, head coach of the Chicago Bears, was going to talk. Zig Zigler, a motivational speaker, would also be there. Furthermore there were several others who I never heard of before who were going to be there. I figured that it would be an interesting time to hear these guys so I joined Phil and his office staff in attending. The arena was crowded. My guess is that there were about 10,000 people at this event.

To my surprise the entire event turned out to be an evangelistic outreach. (Maybe that's why the tickets were so cheap. Perhaps somebody had subsidized the event so that many people would be willing to come).

Anyway, shortly before lunch, a guy named Peter Lowe, presented the gospel. For about half an hour, he went through a very adequate presentation of the gospel. He described God, as a holy and righteous God. He described our sin which keeps us from God. He told about Jesus who can bridge the gap between us and God through the cross of Christ. He gave opportunity for anyone who wanted to pray "the sinner's prayer." I was shocked by the man's boldness in speaking to this obviously secular audience. However I prayed the entire time that he would proclaim the gospel clearly and that God would do His work. Mr. Lowe reminded me a bit of Paul at Mars Hill (Acts 17).

Now, I don't exactly know the fruit of his message but I did get one person's perspective. During Peter Lowe's presentation of the gospel I happened to look in front of me. There was a man typing an email (or text message) on his hand-held device (a cell phone or blackberry or something). I happened to look down at what he was typing. All I could read was one sentence. "I'm here at the Allstate Arena at a motivational seminar. Some pretty cheesy things are going on." Those are the words that he had typed, "pretty cheesy things going on." This is a great illustration of how many people view the gospel. Paul said that this "word of the cross is foolish to those who are perishing" (verse 18). This man in front of me that day used different words to describe it, but communicating the same thing. He called it "cheesy." He was one of those who considers the gospel to be foolishness.

Now in God's gracious dealings with men there are another group of people who hear the same message and believe it! Those who do so find it to be "the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Indeed that's the testimony of many of us here this morning. Many of us have heard this message and have believed it. Our experience has been that the gospel has worked powerfully in our lives. It has given us an inner strength to face the difficulties of life with joy knowing that our future is secure in Christ. There's a reason why God has chosen to do things this way. He has given us a foolish-looking message so that the wisdom of men might be destroyed.

This is the thrust of verses 19-21, "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.' Where is the wise man? 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 through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

Here is the idea: There are many in this world who think themselves to be extremely wise. There are many in this world who think that they have things figured out. God has decreed that His message will be such that it will confound these wise people. It will be a puzzle to them that they simply won't ever be able to figure out. However it is not because this is such a hard puzzle. Rather, it's an easy puzzle. Anyone can get the solution. Yet the solution is so easy that they won't accept the solution. In that way God destroys the great wisdom of men by giving a simple solution that they will not accept.

This is like a game that I play with my children sometimes. My children are at that age where they like to go to the playground and play on all of the playground equipment. Often one of my children will ask me to make up an obstacle course for them so that they can see if they are able to do what I tell them. I'll look at this big thing with slides and monkey bars and rings and swings and poles. The big thing is painted with different colors: the bars are green, the platforms are brown, and the handles are yellow. So I tell them something like this, "I want you to start at this slide. I want you to get to the other slide over there using only one hand." On other occasions I have said, "I want you to start at this slide. I want you to get to the other slide over there using only one foot." At other times, I've continued on the theme, saying, ""I want you to start at this slide. I want you to get to the other slide over there without touching anything that's painted green." (I don't know why I always choose an obstacle course from one slide to the other, but I always do.) There are times when the rules are easy. There are times when the rules are difficult.

I remember one time when I had made my rules. It had something to do with not touching anything painted a certain color like green or yellow. My child said, "Dad, that's easy." They started at the slide and stepped off onto the wood chips where they proceeded to walk to the other slide. When I protested the reply I received was, "Dad, I didn't touch anything yellow". "The woodchips are brown!" My child was right! According to my rules, it was easy. I tried to make it difficult but my young offspring made it easy.

This is a little bit like the wisdom in the gospel. We are placed upon this earth with the incredibly difficult task of knowing God and being right with Him. Along comes somebody who says, "It's really not as difficult as you think. You are trying to navigate your way across this whole maze of playground equipment to come to the slide on the other side. Here, let me show you the way. Step off the slide and onto the woodchips. The walk is easy."

Upon hearing these things, the wise of the world may protest saying, "It can't be that easy. You have to go through the playground equipment."

Yet God says, "No you don't. Not in my kingdom. If you had to go through the playground only the strongest of the strong would be able to get through. My kingdom is different than that. My way is easy. Look, you simply need to walk around the playground equipment."

Upon hearing this we may still protest and refuse to believe that it's that easy. The result for many is they end up not knowing God, which is what verse 21 says, "the world through its wisdom did not come to know God" (verse 21).

The reasons are varied why people reject it. In verses 22-23 we see two groups of people rejecting this message. When the Jews of Paul's day heard this message they stumbled over it. They couldn't even begin to perceive a concept of their Messiah being rejected. They perceived their Messiah coming with great signs and wonders to be seen and believed upon by all! Yet that is not how Messiah came. When the Greeks of Paul's day who trusted in their own intelligence heard this message they thought it to be utter foolishness. They couldn't believe in a rejected leader. They couldn't fathom someone rising from the dead so they rejected the message.

These reasons are typical of people today. There are those who want Christianity to be demonstrated. They want experience power in their health. They want to see power in their checkbook. They want to have abundant blessing upon their lives. When Christianity can't come with these sorts of things it is no use to them. There are those who want to know all mysteries. They want to know all of the answers to all of the questions of philosophy. They want to know how it is that someone can rise from the dead. They want to know what's going to happen in the future. When Christianity can't bring all of these answers, it is of no use to them. As verse 24 says, "to those [of us] who are the called, ... Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God."

We may not have all of the strength. We may not have all of the answers. Nevertheless we have found in Christ a power for living that is better than health, wealth or prosperity. We have found a joy in difficulties. We have found in Christ a wisdom that's more satisfying than all of the smartest men upon the earth. We have discovered a trust in God's ways. The reason is found in verse 25, "The foolishness of God is

wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Wisdom and power are both experienced in the cross for those who believe. This is the message that God is spreading in our world today. It is "A Foolish-looking Message" (1:18-25).

That is not all that is foolish-looking in the ways of God. He also chooses ...

2. Foolish-looking Messengers (1:26-31)

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Notice first of all the sovereign ways of God. In verse 26, we read of God's calling of the Corinthians. This is the call of God to salvation. Ultimately, God is the one who chooses those who will be saved. Now, I am not denying that any one of us chooses to embrace Christ and believe in Him. We do. Our experience confirms that. But, ultimately we choose God because He has first chosen us. That's what verse 30 is all about, "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus." It's not your own doing. It's God's working. Your salvation originates in Him and when He calls you, you will come.

There are particular types of people that God calls unto salvation. That is the point of verses 26-28. He chooses "foolish-looking" people. Look at how verse 26 describes them, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." When God chooses those who will be in His church: He doesn't call the wise of this world. He doesn't call the strong of this world. He doesn't call the rich of this world.

Who is in the church? It is those the world would consider, foolish, weak, and ordinary. The church is not filled with a bunch of really smart people. The church is not filled with a bunch of really strong people. The church is not filled with a bunch of really rich people.

It is really quite easy to understand why this is the case. You enter the kingdom by coming to the end of yourself. You enter the kingdom by realizing that you are not smart enough to figure it out all by yourself. You enter the kingdom when you realize that you need help because you are weak. You enter the kingdom when you realize that all you have by way of worldly possessions ultimately means nothing to you.

When Jesus encountered those who were wise and strong and rich. He had very little positive to say about them.

When Jesus encountered those who were **wise** in their own eyes Jesus demonstrated how foolish they were by answering all of their questions and showing all who were around exactly how foolish they were (Matt. 22). At one point, Jesus gave praise to God, saying, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight" (Matt. 11:25-26).

When Jesus encountered those who **trusted in themselves**, that they were righteous, Jesus, told this parable ...

Luke 18:10-14

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: "God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

It's not the mighty and self-sufficient who will be in the kingdom. Rather it's the weak beggars who will be justified in God's sight. God chooses the humble of this world to be exalted.

When Jesus encountered one who was **rich** in this present world He told him, "One think you lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me" (Luke 18:22). When Zaccheus came into the kingdom, he said, "Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much" (Luke 19:8). Riches are a deterrent for entering the kingdom. Riches give you reason to trust in yourself which is exactly opposite of the way in which we come into the kingdom. We come in a poor beggars. This is why Jesus said, "blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20).

The way into the kingdom of God isn't through intelligence, giftedness, or worldly possessions. In actuality these become a hindrance at times. On the contrary God chose the foolish, weak, and ignoble to enter His kingdom. This was not void of purpose.

Look once again at 1 Corinthians 1, beginning in verse 27, "but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God."

The reason why God chooses the foolish, weak, and despised of the world is as verse 29 says, "that no man may boast before God." A foolish person can't boast that he has finally figured God out. A weak person can't boast that he has become strong enough for God. A poor

person can't boast that he has become rich and successful enough to impress God. In the church, there is only one boast. That boast is the cross of Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:14). Our boast is that we have come to know the Lord through the mighty cross. We don't preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5).

Christ has become everything to us. That's the point of verse 30, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us the wisdom from God, and the righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." We find our wisdom in Christ. We find our righteousness in Christ. It is in Christ Jesus that we are sanctified. We have been redeemed through the precious blood of Christ. Our only course of action is to boast in Jesus which is exactly what verse 31 says, "Let Him who boasts, boast in the LORD."

This last phrase is a quote from Jeremiah 9:23-24 where the LORD says, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things."

It brings pleasure to God when those who don't have everything by way of the world's standards find their sufficiency in Him. These are the people to whom God has called us to be His ambassadors, bringing the good news to one and to all, that forgiveness of sins is found only in Christ Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through Him (John 14:6).

God's ways aren't for flashy, good-looking, talented, athletic, rich scholars to bring this message to a dying world. He has called you. He has called me. We all are called to be a light to the Gentiles with the saving message of Christ.

You say, "But I am not very smart! I'm not a good speaker. I don't have anything to offer God." If this is your current reasoning I say, "Perfect!" You are who God chooses to "spread the word." Your only boast is in God which is exactly what he wants!

He has called "Foolish-looking Messengers" (1:26-31) to proclaim "A Foolish-sounding Message" (1:18-25). At this point, you might be asking yourself, "Well, how am I supposed to do this?" Good thing you asked because in chapter 2, verses 1-5 Paul gives us a methodology that we can follow.

God uses, ...

3. A Foolish-looking Method (2:1-5)

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

The method of the apostle Paul is the paradigm of our method. The same way that Paul preached the gospel is the same way that we ought to preach the gospel. We see three characteristics of his method. First of all, ...

1. It is simple (verses 1-2).

It's not superiority of speech. It's not superiority of wisdom. Rather it's one single simple message: "Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Such a statement is really quite remarkable. This is especially apparent when you understand what was taking place in Corinth during the days of Paul. Corinth was a great center for Greek learning. Today, we look up to the great athletes in our land. Those that can run the fastest or jump the highest or hit a little white ball the furthest are often rewarded with great fame and fortune. Maybe we look up to the greatest actors in our land. Those who can play a part so perfectly, that it seems as if they actually were pirates on the Caribbean, are highly esteemed in our culture.

In Corinth it wasn't the athlete that was held highly and richly rewarded. Rather it was the orator. It was the speaker. Those who could move audiences with their words were rewarded with great fame. The Corinthians were captivated by those who could move an audience to tears and then to laughter and then to political action. They captured the attention of the crowds. They attracted great numbers of students. They were esteemed in their culture. It is in that culture that Paul comes with the gospel.

Yet Paul specifically chose not to compete with the great orators of the day. Instead Paul came with simplicity. He didn't use large words or sophisticated arguments. He didn't demonstrate having great worldly wisdom. Instead he preached a simple message, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (verse 2). This was a specific choice that He made.

With Paul's intelligence, he was certainly capable of wooing the crowds. He had a fabulous story to tell of his days as a Pharisee. He could tell his great story of encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus. He could tell others of the radical change that Christ made in his life. He had a great grasp of the Scriptures and could put that on display for all to marvel at.

However, Paul was careful to make sure that his own life and his own intelligence didn't overshadow the life and death of Jesus Christ. In verse 2 Paul said, "I determined" to communicate these things in these ways. It was a resolve in his heart that he would be counter-cultural. He wouldn't use the methods of the day! The reason is simple. Paul didn't want people attracted to him! He wanted people attracted to Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross and the implications that it has for our lives. So he specifically toned down his message, that it might be simple.

And this is what we need to do today. In talking to others about Christ, you don't need to have all of the answers to all of the philosophical questions. You don't need to know all of the intricacies of the other world religions. You don't need to know why you believe the Bible to be inspired and inerrant. These things are all good things to know. As you know these types of things it will give you more confidence in speaking with other people. Yet at the end of the day you simply need a simple message, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

You simply need to tell others of how God became a man and lived 2,000 years ago, lived a sinless life, and died for our sins so that by faith in Him we can be forgiven. You simply need to tell others that Jesus calls you to repent of your sins, believe in Christ Jesus, take up your own cross and follow Him (Luke 14:27). Paul's method was to preach a simple message (verses 1-2).

A second characteristic of Paul's method is that ...

2. It is fearful (verse 3).

"I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" was what Paul said. How many of you are fearful of talking with others about your faith in Christ? It is an intimidating, fearful thing. It intimidates me, even though it's my job to speak with others about Christ. I'm comforted to know this message that Paul preached intimidated Paul as well. It wasn't second nature to him. It was difficult for him.

To be sure Paul's circumstances were unique. He was fearing for his life in Corinth. He preached the gospel with such boldness and passion that he may easily have been killed when he was preaching it. *But* God came to him at Corinth and said to Paul, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

Now it's highly unlikely for any of you to be killed or imprisoned for preaching the gospel. You don't have that to fear but it still remains a fearful thing to confront others with their sins. You don't know how they will respond. You may lose relationships in doing so. This is especially difficult if it is within your own family. It is not too pleasant to have a family member at odds with you because you have shared Christ with them and they have rejected it and have rejected you for confronting them.

Wouldn't it be nice if you had a similar promise to the apostle Paul? In a very real way you do. When Jesus gave His disciples the great commission there was a promise that in their disciple-making God would be with them. The promise is equally applicable to us as well. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

As you go and speak with others, you have the promise from Jesus, Himself, that He will be with you. This ought to bring great comfort to your soul. The one who has "all authority," will be with you. Should you be traveling into a dangerous area of town, it's always comforting to have a police escort. When you have the authorities with you, it's not likely that you will encounter any problems along the way. In speaking with others about the word of the cross, we have a police escort! The one who has all authority has promised to be with us in this process!

I would love to tell you, "don't be afraid," but you will always have a healthy fear when speaking with others about the Lord. Paul had this fear and so will you. That is our method. It is simple (verses 1-2). It is fearful (verse 3). Thirdly, ...

3. It is spiritual (verse 4).

"And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (verse 4).

The idea here goes back to verse 1. When Paul came to Corinth to proclaim the gospel he didn't come with great words of persuasion. He wasn't the bold salesman who knew exactly how to counter every argument that was presented to him. Rather Paul contends that he went to Corinth, spoke the saving word of the cross, and let God work. This is how it works: we speak; God works. It must be this way.

Down in verse 14, we see why. "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." In other words if you talk to a natural man about spiritual things your words simply will not communicate. Oh, the words may come in the ears but without the working of the Spirit of God within the heart of an individual there will be no understanding. That is what verse 14 says, "He cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." A natural man isn't a spiritual man. Thus he has no ability to understand what you are saying unless the Spirit of God would come upon him and give him a spiritual heart to hear and believe.

This is how it works: we speak; God works. This is because our message is a spiritual message.

Let's finish by looking at verse five. This verse brings a purpose behind Paul's methodology of spreading the word. See, there is a reason why our method is simple (verses 1-2), fearful (verse 3), and spiritual (verse 4). It is, "so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

We need to be careful in the things that we do in telling the truth to others. We need to make sure that their faith doesn't rest upon the wisdom of men.

Suppose you have an opportunity to speak of Christ with somebody about Christ. Going away, you think to yourself, "I answered all his questions. I proved the Bible to him! I'm so glad that he professed to believe!" This may not be such a good thing, because you persuaded somebody to believe in Jesus, based upon your own intelligence. Your "convert" may last just as long as they don't encounter anybody smarter than you are.

Or, you may go away from a church service, saying, "Wow! That church service was emotionally powerful! music and the songs touched the heart. The lights were dimmed at the right moment. The preacher was witty, intelligent, articulate, and downright convincing. I can see why so many people came forward at the preacher's invitation." Such people may have easily been moved by the emotional impact that the service made, and not the truth.

We need to be careful. It may just be that we have gained converts to a wisdom that has all the answers. It may just be that we have gained converts to an emotional experience. What happens when someone comes along with more intelligence than we have? What happens when the convert sees that you don't have all the answers to all of life's philosophical questions? That's what brought him in but may very well be what sends him out! What happens when someone has a more powerful emotional experience? That may very well be what sends him out! That's why Paul was very intentional with his methods (verse 5).

Suppose that we came up with some great methodology of evangelism what was very clever. Suppose we came up with the ultimate crucifixion and resurrection experience like they have at Walt Disney Land. Suppose we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to create a theatre which would hold about 100 people. Each seat is specially rigged to create some special sound effects. As people go in, you give them some special 3D glasses. You also give them some big headphones so as to experience the sound perfectly without any distractions from the audience.

Imagine those entering the theatre watching an incredibly well-done movie. As Jesus walks up the hill of Calvary special seats in the movie theatre begin to put forth a cool breeze which makes it feel like the cool of the day. When Jesus is hammered to the cross with the 3 Dimensional effects you get a close up view of what took place. You even feel the blood squirt on your face as little puffs of water come from your chairs. When the cross is lifted into its hole you feel the ground bump as it settles into the ground. When darkness comes upon the land you see the clouds coming and actually begin to feel a bit of the rain upon your body as it comes down from the top of the theatre. When Jesus dies you feel the earth shake. You are transported to the temple where you see the veil ripped in two from top to bottom as you feel its gentle breeze. You see the many tombs being opened and people being raised from the dead walking out among the audience of the theatre.

And then, you are taken to the tomb where Jesus lay. The theatre is perfectly dark as if you are in the tomb with Jesus. Through special sound-canceling technology in your headphones it's perfectly quiet in the room. After a few moments (though it seems like eternity) the earth shakes once again and you see a bright light coming into the tomb as the stone rolls away from the entrance of the tomb. At this point the camera angle now comes from the eyes of Jesus. You have become Jesus. You encounter the women in the garden. You hear Mary weeping outside the tomb. You hear yourself say, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (John 20:15). She looks at you thinking that you are the gardener and asks, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away" (John 20:15). Then you hear yourself say, "Mary" (John 20:16). At this point Mary turns around and says, "Rabboni," and gives you a bit hug which you feel as the strap around your seat tightens. You then are heard to be saying, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God'" (John 20:17). Soon you find yourself walking along a dark road and encounter two disciples of Jesus who are downcast. As you sit in your chair the chair shakes and vibrates in such a way that it feels as if you are really walking. You hear yourself say to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" (Luke 24:17). You experience the walk upon the Emmaus road hearing Jesus open the Scriptures beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, and explain to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). Finally Jesus says, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

After this powerful presentation, people are invited to pray the sinners prayer. As they leave, they have an opportunity to go through one of two doors. They can leave through the "I prayed to receive Christ" door or they can leave through the "I'm not interested" door. Now suppose it was found that such a methodology was producing about a great success rate in people leaving through the "I prayed to receive Christ" door.

So I ask you, "Would this be a good thing?" Perhaps. But you need to realize that people may well be leaving that theatre saying, "Wow! That was an amazing presentation. It was a good experience for me! Those people who put that together did a great job! Their presentation convinced me to believe." If people say this, what have they done? It is possible that they have trusted in the ingenuity of men as they have experienced Jesus through technology but that's not the way that Paul did his ministry. Personally, I doubt that Paul would ever do his ministry in this way, because he was very careful about his ministry methodology: that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (1 Cor. 2:5).

Paul used "A Foolish-looking Method" (2:1-5). He went into Corinth with a simple message that he spoke with much fear and trembling. He did little by way of persuasive words to manipulate those in Corinth into believing. The only one convincing those in Corinth was the Spirit of God which worked powerfully among them "so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

The danger of the theatre idea is that those who experienced these things would certainly be susceptible to the next great experience that

they might have in being bigger and better than what they just experienced. Paul wanted to be sure that people encountered the living God through His word instead of through his great intellectual or speaking ability that would only bring attention to himself. Rather, he trusted in the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21).

D. A. Carson said it very well, "These verses [1 Cor. 2:1-5] do not prohibit diligent preparation, passion, clear articulation, and persuasive presentation. Rather, they warn against any method that leads people to say, 'What a marvelous preacher!', rather than 'What a marvelous Savior!'" [6]

These things might sound crazy to our ears. If this theatre could produce massive converts every show why not use it? Because it may just be that people are attracted to the wisdom of men instead of God.

God uses (1) A Foolish-looking Message (1:18-25) (i.e. the word of the cross), spoken by (2) Foolish-looking Messengers (1:26-31) (i.e. (unintelligent, weak, and despised people), who follow (3) A Foolish-looking Method (2:1-5) (i.e. one which proclaims the simple truth to others without any overt display of human ingenuity). May we trust His ways.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 8, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] I was unable to find the complete text to this article online. However, a Google search revealed that there was much discussion on the internet about this article written by Ed Yourdon.

[2] The complete text of this article can be found at <http://www.kiyoinc.com/wrp90.htm>.

[3] *Elijah Company*, Fall 1998, "Y2Chaos", p. 20.

[4] *World Magazine*, August 29, 1998, Back Cover.

[5] Edward Payson, "God's Ways Above Men's." See <http://www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/PaysonGodsWays/PaysonGodsWays.htm>.

[6] D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, p. 35.