The Preaching of “Christ Crucified”

Henning Panthel · Corinthians 1:23–24 · May 2, 2026



1 Corinthians 1:23–24

> 23 but *we* preach Christ crucified, to Jews an offense, and to nations
> foolishness; 24 but to those that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ
> God’s power and God’s wisdom.

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Crucifixion was probably the cruelest and most disgraceful method of execution in antiquity. The Romans considered crucifixion so degrading that it was normally not carried out on their own citizens. To crucify someone was an act of shame, an expression of contempt and a symbol of weakness. It was reserved for “uncivilized foreigners”, who were convicted as serious criminals, rebels, or runaway slaves.

Why Jesus was crucified

However, there was one man who did not fall into that category and was still crucified. It was Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1). The Son of God, who came from heaven to earth as a man and who alone lived in absolute holiness and righteousness. He was crucified...

• *...because God delivered Him up to save lost sinners, by His determined purpose and foreknowledge (Acts 2:23),*

• *...because lawless men hated Him and wanted to kill Him (Acts 2:23),*

• *...because, out of love, He gave Himself willingly. He did so for His God and Father. He also did so for His assembly and every individual believer (Hebrews 9:14; Ephesians 5:1, 25).*

The preaching goes out into the world

Three days after His death on the cross, God raised this Jesus and, after 40 days, He took Him up into heaven. Since then, the preaching of “Christ crucified” has gone throughout the world. For everyone who hears it, it becomes a decisive moment in life - one way or the other. It can leave him completely cold, or it can completely change his life. It can be foolishness to him, or even a stumbling block, or it is God’s power and wisdom to him. The apostle Paul addresses this preaching at the start of his first letter to the Corinthians.

Foolishness to the Gentiles

The Greek city of Corinth, with several hundred thousand inhabitants, was one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. Its population was “multicultural" and consisted of people from different national, cultural, social, and religious backgrounds. Their lives were often marked by idolatry and immorality. Major trade routes and two harbors had led to growth and prosperity. But Corinth was not only “booming” economically. Because of its schools of philosophy, the Corinthians were proud of their scholarship.

They wanted to explain the world with scientific thinking and conclusions. They also wanted to explain human existence and the meaning of life. However, this worldview leaves our God’s revelation in His Word; for them, it is illogical, and too simple that the salvation of humanity and the purpose of life should be found in One crucified in weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4). To the “disputers of this age,” the One mocked as “King of the Jews” was a failure. He ended up powerless on the cross. They didn't know what to do with such a person.

A stumbling block to the Jews

Alongside the group of Greeks, there were also Jews in Corinth; they met in a synagogue. When Paul testified on his first visit that “Jesus was the Christ,” they opposed him and blasphemed (Acts 18:4–6). For them, the preaching of the crucified Christ was a stumbling block.

• On the one hand, for “religious” reasons. Under the Mosaic Law, someone was cursed who was hanged on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). Yet they overlooked why Jesus became a curse. They also ignored that, according to Deuteronomy 27:26, they themselves are under the curse of the Law.

• On the other hand, they expected a Messiah. They expected Him to free their nation from the Romans with power and signs. Instead came the despised Jesus of Nazareth. They had not wanted Him, and they killed Him like a criminal. Nothing could outrage them more than the preaching that this One was to be the great Savior.

Unchanged attitudes

The Greeks sought wisdom, and Jews requested signs (1 Corinthians 1:22). Has this attitude changed after almost 2000 years? Not really. The world of politics, science, and culture still scoffs today at the preaching of “Christ crucified.” And the religious world still does not want to hear that every person is a sinner and needs the Man of the cross as Savior. It applies to all of them that, because they regard the word of the cross as foolishness, they are perishing (1 Corinthians 1:18). The wisdom of this world has a terrible outcome.

God’s power and wisdom to the called

Called out in Corinth

From among the Greeks and Jews in Corinth, God called out a “group”. They no longer belonged to their world. For them, the preaching of “Christ crucified” was neither foolishness nor a stumbling block. The believers recognized God’s power and wisdom in this preaching. They are described here as “the called.”

God’s wise plan

They recognized how wise God’s plan is. It solves a dilemma that is cannot be solved from a human perspective. The dilemma was that, on the one hand, God must judge the sinner, because He is holy. On the other hand, He does not want the sinner’s death, because He is love. God’s wise plan was the cross of Calvary. There, He brought together mercy and truth and also righteousness and peace (Psalms 85:10). The Man Jesus Christ became Mediator between God and me and gave Himself on the cross as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6).

As the Son of God, He has known and shared the thoughts of His Father from eternity. He came to earth as a man to carry them out in divine wisdom. So He - rejected, slandered, mistreated and crucified by men - became the Savior of lost sinners. This is illustrated by the story of the poor wise man who saved a city by his wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:13–16).

God’s power

For the called, the preaching of “Christ crucified” is also God’s power. The women who followed Jesus on the way to the cross (Luke 23:27) saw a man before them whose back was torn by scourging and who wore a painful crown of thorns on His head and who seemed to have no strength to carry the heavy wooden cross. They pitied Him. Those who later passed by at the cross saw a man, fastened to the wood by nails, seemingly unable to save Himself (Matthew 27:39–44). They mocked Him. The people in the crowd, who then saw that He had died, beat their breasts and went away. Everyday life continued. Their displayed mourning for this man who died on the

cross was only brief. They forgot Him.

Even if Christ hanging on the cross is, for most people, merely the epitome of greatest weakness, those who are called see a completely different picture. For them, God's power cannot show itself in a greater measure than in the Man of the cross:

• *By nature, they were dead in sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1). They were lost because they can never come to God by their own effort and strength. But when they heard of the crucified Christ and believed in Him, they came to know God's power. It is the power by which He carried out His wise plan at the cross. It is the power by which He, through the cross, saves lost sinners by grace.*

Complete and eternal salvation

For the called, the work of the cross means complete and eternal salvation. It is the salvation of their souls, which they already have now. It is also the salvation of their body, when they have arrived in heaven. They know they could contribute nothing to this salvation. God's power alone brought it about.

The cross shapes our affection

Paul did not preach only in Corinth about the crucified Christ. To the Galatians, he even portrayed Jesus Christ "as publicly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1). He presented Christ and His work on the cross in a powerful way.

That had made them blessed (Galatians 4:13–15).But apparently not much of it remained. When he wrote to them a few years later, he had to point out that they had been bewitched by "false brothers secretly brought in" (Galatians 2:4) and been bewitched by false teachings.

Keep the Message Fresh

We want to learn from this that preaching "Christ crucified" shapes our hearts' affection for Him. Let us make sure this preaching always stays fresh in our hearts and is not impaired by false teaching. The more precious the preaching of "Christ crucified" becomes to us, the more our love for Him grows.

We will especially notice this when we have been on the path of faith for some time. It keeps us from indifference and causes us to bring Him more thanks and worship. It helps us follow and serve Him more faithfully. It should also motivate us to share the gospel with others. It is possible that they reject the preaching as foolishness, but it is and remains the good news.

Source https://thebiblestudy.site/article/the-preaching-of-christus-crucified/