A Gospel Witness God Empowers

(How to have God give power to our evangelistic efforts)

I Corinthians 2:1-5

2-5-2023

Introduction: When do you as a witness, teacher, evangelist, or preacher experience life-changing, eternal results from your labor of sharing the Gospel?

Answer: When God empowers your message! **(Verse 5)**

*** God will give real power to our evangelistic efforts, if we evangelize His way!**

God EMPOWERS our message...

I. When we do not <u>rely</u> on worldly <u>wisdom & words</u> (v.1)

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II. When we keep our message <u>focused</u> on <u>Jesus Christ</u> and <u>His finished Work</u> (v.2)

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III. When we do <u>not depend</u> on our own <u>strength</u> (v.3)

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IV. When we do <u>not</u> seek to force a decision by <u>persuasive gimmicks</u> (v.4a)

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V. When we trust the <u>Holy Spirit</u> to work with <u>His power</u> (v.4b)

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Introduction:

Why do many profess faith in Christ and then fall away? . . . become apostates? . . . never grow? . . . are nowhere to be found?

Could it be that we (the witness) have failed in our evangelistic method and message? Could it be that there were flaws in both what we said to the lost person and how we said it?

Note verse 5.

Many people's faith unfortunately stands *"in the wisdom of men"* and not *"in the power of God."*

--Converts of men, not converts of God

--No change in their lives, no desire for spiritual things, no love for Christ, etc.

What are some causes for this travesty?

Faith (belief) only comes as one first hears the Word of God.
"Faith comes by hearing. . . the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Faith does not come by gimmicks, manipulation, emotional services, signs and wonders, etc., but by the Scriptures.

The new birth will evidence itself by new life
Where there is birth, there is *life*!

When a birth takes place:

a. A family is received
(Jn. 1:12, 13; 3:1-7; I Jn. 3:9)

b. A family name is received
(Don't be ashamed of the name "Christian" - Acts 11:26; II Cor. 1:1)

c. A family inheritance is received
(Rom. 8:17; I Cor. 3:22, 23; Gal. 4:6; I Pet. 1:4, 5)

d. A family nature is received

1) This is true in the natural realm (Ps. 58:3; Rom. 5:12, 19)
2) This is true in the spiritual realm

a) A family love (I Jn. 3:14)
--for God (I Jn. 4:19-21)
--for God's children (I Jn. 2:7-11; 3:10-24; *4:7; 5:1)

b) A family likeness (I Jn. 1:5-7; 2:3-6; 2:29)

c) A family loyalty
You will have a desire to:
--Speak to your Father
(Rom. 8:15; Jn. 14:13, 24; 16:23-24)
--Listen to your Father (I Pet. 2:2)

d. A family discipline is received

Our Heavenly Father loves us enough to discipline us in order to train and protect us (Heb. 12:5-11)

If you make a "convert" there will be no real change. Those God converts, get converted!

When do you as a witness, teacher, evangelist, or preacher experience life-changing, eternal results from your labor of sharing the Gospel?
Answer: When God empowers your message! **(Verse 5)**

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God EMPOWERS our message...

I. When we do not rely on worldly wisdom & words (v.1)

"And I" - Paul, continuing his thought from chapter 1 now gives himself as an example of the principles laid down in the previous verses.

His key theme in chapter 1 was that it was terribly inconsistent and foolish for the Corinthians to be "man followers" (to be divided over personalities).

Reasons:

1) God chose to empower an unsophisticated message (v. 17-25)

2) God chooses to empower unsophisticated messengers (v. 26-31)

3) God chose to empower an unsophisticated messenger (Paul) (2:1-5)

The Greeks of Paul's day placed a heavy emphasis on skillful oratory and worldly cleverness.

"Excellency of speech" - Superiority of speech (i.e. eloquence of word)

Content always matters more than delivery

To deliver the "right stuff" in a tattered package is a million times better than delivering garbage in glittering wrapping!

How we say something has its importance, but what we say is of utmost value.

In your teaching, witnessing, etc., put more attention on being Biblically accurate than verbally impressive!

It's sad how many new believers can be "wowed," "impressed," or "awestruck" by a preacher's (evangelist's) style and charisma rather than by his substance and careful exegesis.

"Wisdom" - Worldly wisdom; man's wisdom; humanistic wisdom that leaves God out.

(Paul is not against "wisdom"; rather he is against the foolish, man-centered humanistic wisdom of this world (2:6).

Paul is not elevating ignorance. Nor is he promoting a mindless anti-intellectualism.

It's not that God isn't interested in talented orators or gifted speakers. What He is against is Christians putting their trust in themselves, their ability, their wisdom (II Cor. 3:5).

One can be an eloquent, polished, homiletical genius and still not have God's power and blessing!

When we rely on rhetorical art, eloquence, human rationalization, we get what man can do. When we rely on God's clear-cut Gospel message and His Spirit, we get what God can do.

"Declaring" - This word describes the proper way to deliver God's message:

1) To solemnly proclaim
(to announce truth with serious boldness)

2) To continually proclaim
(the present tense indicates a patient reiteration of the simple yet profound Gospel of Christ)

"Testimony" - Witness

The *"testimony of God"* is that body of Gospel truth that He has entrusted to us to bear witness of.

You can be a witness if you have a testimony. You can testify of that which you have witnessed (or experienced) in your own life.

You don't need a D.D., Th.M., D.Min., M.Div., or B.S. degree in theology to be a witness. All you need is a B.A. -- born again!

Paul is saying in effect: I did not borrow from the verbiage and opinions of Plato, Aristotle or Socrates. My testimony was from God!

God EMPOWERS our message...

II. When we keep our message <u>focused</u> on <u>Jesus Christ</u> and <u>His finished Work</u> (v.2)

***"I determined"* =** I resolved; I decided.

After evaluating the pressures at Corinth to drift from the centrality of Christ, Paul purposed in his heart that he would not succumb by getting side-tracked from his message.

Paul went to Corinth fully aware of the Grecian mind-set, the philosophical thinking, the worldly humanistic mentality he was up against.

Although Paul certainly ***"knew"*** more, he honed in his Gospel presentation to focus on Christ.

The "knowledge" he conveyed to them was limited and specific. Why? The salvation plan is limited to one message, and this message is exclusively Christ and His death for sinners.

The Gospel is clearly and succinctly delineated in I Cor. 15:1-3.

Paul's sold Gospel message was *"Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* (He strayed not from the <u>person</u> and <u>work</u> of Jesus Christ.

Paul gloried only in the cross of Christ. Gal. 6:14 - *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."*

Don't get side-tracked. Keep your Gospel witness focused on:

One Person - *"<u>Jesus Christ</u>"*
One work - *"<u>Him crucified</u>"*

Paul's Gospel message had one theme -- namely, the substitutionary finished work of Christ (Paul implicitly shows how this is the solid core, the bedrock foundation of our witness).

Scriptures emphasizing the fact of Christ's substitutionary death
(using the word huper):

"This is my body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:19)
"This cup is the new testament in my blood which is shed for you"
(Lk. 22:20)
"The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (Jn. 6:51)
"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (Jn.10:11)
"I lay down my life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:15)
". . . He (Caiaphas) prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation. . . and not for that nation only . . ." (Jn. 11:51-52, cp. 18:14)
"Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6)
"Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8)
"He . . . delivered him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32)
"Christ died for our sins" (I Cor. 15:3)
"For he hath made him to be sin for us" (II Cor. 5:21)
"Christ . . . gave himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:4)
"Christ . . . loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20)
"Christ [was] . . . made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13)
"Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5:2)
"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25)
"Our Lord Jesus Christ. . . died for us" (I Th. 5:10)
"Who gave himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:6)
"He by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9)
"But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12).
"Christ also suffered for us" (I Pet. 2:21)
"Christ also hath once suffered for sins" (I Pet. 3:18)
"Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh" (I Pet. 4:1)
"He laid down his life for us" (I Jn. 3:16)

When you give the Gospel, keep your presentation focused on Jesus and His substitutionary death.

Don't get side-tracked! Satan will try to do all kinds of things and raise all kings of questions to move you from your central point.

Things Satan will use to divert your message away from Christ and His work:

--Questions "Where did Cain get his wife?" "What do your think about ____?"
(he asks a question about which you are knowledgeable)

--Interruptions: the phone rings; the baby cries; the door bell buzzes etc.

--Arguments about religious differences

Sometimes a believer's gospel presentation has so many extras, so many add-ons (not unbiblical ones necessarily), so many rabbit trails, etc., that the burning ray of the true Gospel is clouded over.

The "Gospel," when it is not diluted (watered down) or added to or subtracted from, is powerful (Rom. 1:16 - *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.")*

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God EMPOWERS our message...

III. When we do <u>not depend</u> on our own <u>strength</u> (v.3)

Verse 3 shifts from Paul's message too Paul's <u>method</u>.

It's encouraging to know that even the "great" Apostle Paul had a battle with fear.

No wonder he requested prayer for <u>boldness</u>. Do you recall him saying: <u>Pray</u> *"for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."* (Eph. 6:19-20).

"Weakness" - To be without physical strength in a certain area of your body (we don't know what Paul's *"thorn"* was - II Cor. 12:7).

God can use your life no matter what ailment you have!

He delights to use the *"<u>weak</u> things."* (1:27)

"Fear" - Even Paul had times of apprehension; concern gripped his heart for his very life at times.

"Fear" is due to a lack of faith. Even the "giants" of faith have their moments.

"Trembling" - To shudder nervously; to shake due to fear.

SEE: Acts 18:1, 9, 10

The Corinthians were not impressed with Paul's personal presence (II Cor. 10:10).

There was nothing attractive about Paul's appearance. You wouldn't find him in the <u>Who's Who</u> of shining, varnished, charismatic preachers of today.

God uses weak, fearful, timid people! Those who are such throw themselves upon God for results, because they recognize that they are inadequate in and of themselves.

When we recognize our own weakness and inability, it is then that we are made strong by God (II Cor. 12:9 - *"And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

Note: Paul's weakness, fear, and trembling did <u>not</u> keep him from doing what he was commissioned to do.

Reason: He feared displeasing his Lord more! He did not want to be unfaithful to a sacred trust (I Cor. 9:16 - *"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me."*).

John 7:13 - *"No man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews"*

How to Overcome Fear:

1. Remember His presence is with you
   (Mt. 28:20; Acts 18:9-10; Heb. 13:5-6)

2. Pray for boldness (Acts 4:29, 31; Ps. 34:4)

3. Trust God for results, not yourself (I Thes. 2:2)

4. Know the adequacy of the Gospel message
   (Rom. 1:14-16 - *The power of the Word of God;* Heb. 4:12)

5. Memorize approach questions and a soul-winning plan (I Pet. 3:15)

6. Be more concerned about winning souls than winning friends (Gal. 1:10)

7. Don't be afraid of:

   a. Making a mistake (the greatest mistake you can make is to say nothing)

   b. Doing more harm than good

   c. Being asked questions (If you don't know the answer, assure them that the Bible has one, and promise to get back with them)

8.Begin! (*"In soul-winning, more than half the battle is won by beginning. Nobody would be walking today if they hadn't made their first attempt as a baby."*)

God EMPOWERS our message...

IV. When we do <u>not</u> seek to force a decision by <u>persuasive gimmicks</u> (v.4a)

Paul had great natural abilities and an impressive religious pedigree and background (Phil. 3:4-7), but he did not rely on them.

<u>Verbal manipulation</u> in witnessing is man attempting to do the Holy Spirit's job without the Holy Spirit.

Beware: The cults play mind games with unsuspecting people (Rom. 16:18 - *"For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple"*).

What are some methods many stoop to use to <u>entice</u> the listener to respond?

1) Salvation will give you a <u>trouble-free</u> life (Note: I Pet. 1:6, 7)

2) All you need to do is "<u>accept Jesus</u>" (this is true and false. They can't accept a "Jesus" they know nothing about; they must understand what He did for them and rely upon Him and His finished work).

We cannot lure people into Christianity by compromising our message and turning church into an amusement parlor. Many churches today "are constructed like theaters ('playhouses' Spurgeon called them). Instead of a pulpit, the focus is a stage. Churches are hiring full-time media specialist, programming consultants, special effects experts, and choreographers" (John MacArthur, <u>Ashamed of the Gospel</u>, p. 71).

One dear woman, struggling in a church that had become a worldly carnival, like Broadway, like "Show Time" religion, complained, *"What is the church going to stop trying to entertain the goats and get back to feeding the sheep?"*

Satan whispers:

1. Don't get <u>specific</u> but speak in vague generalities (subtle statements that could be taken more than one way) (Prov. 28:23 - *"He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue").*

2. <u>Soften</u> your message so it doesn't offend (Is. 58:1 - *"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins";* Jer. 48:10 - *"Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood";* II Cor. 4:2 - *"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*

   --Don't preach about <u>specific sins</u> (Is. 58:1 - see above; Prov. 27:5 - *"Open rebuke is better than secret love")*.
   --Don't preach on hell, fire, and brimstone
   --Don't preach on the blood of Christ (a "bloody message" is offensive)
   --Don't preach that all men are totally depraved

3. Speak so as to impress the intellectuals (you end up going over the heads of the average person)

4. Hold off on negative preaching (be only positive) (Ezek. 3:17-18 - *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand"*).

5. Go ahead, try a little flattering (flatter the people with how good they are) (Prov. 28:23 - *"He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue")*

6. Appeal primarily to people's emotions

   "A person convinced against his will remains an unbeliever still." (C.H. Spurgeon)

Jonathan Edwards intentionally read his sermons from a manuscript "so that he would not be guilty of using human persuasive techniques to gain a response. He wanted only the message to bring the results" (MacArthur, p. 57).

If someone, through persuasive techniques, could "talk a person into" being saved, the power of the Spirit would not be necessary. *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6)*

God EMPOWERS our message...

V. When we trust the Holy Spirit to work with His power (v.4b)

***"Demonstration"* =** proof, evidence

The changed hearts and lives of the Corinthians was clear proof that God's powerful Spirit did the work, and not Paul's persuasiveness

The proof was in the product.

The product was that wicked sinners (fornicators, idol worshippers, adulterers, sodomites, thieves, materialistic, drunkards) were miraculously transformed by God's power (I Cor. 6:9-11).

I Cor. 4:20 - *"For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."*

Mere words fall to the ground, but the Word of God energized and directed by the Spirit of God is mighty (Heb. 4:12).

God said to Ezekiel: *"But you shall speak my words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious"* (Ezek. 2:7).

REMEMBER: The real "Soulwinner" is the Holy Spirit

"The Holy Spirit is the soulwinner; we are but a vessel He wants to use. As we labor in this God-commanded task, our total dependence must be upon His power, ability and enablement. We are the vessel He desires to use, for He wants our minds, our hands, our feet, our lips to do the work of winning the lost." (Dr. Ed Watke)

a. The Holy Spirit must convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come (Jn. 16:6-8).

b. Let the Holy Spirit fill you (Eph. 5:18) and guide you (Acts 8:26-40).

c. Unless one is *"born of the Spirit"* they are not "born!" (Jn. 3:5-8; Titus 3:5)

d. The instrument the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to Himself is the Bible (Heb. 4:12). The Bible is *"the sword of the Spirit"* (Eph.6:17)

ILLUS: It is reported that a man went up to D.L. Moody and said, "I just saw one of your converts in the bar drinking and carousing." Moody responded: "He surely must be one of my converts; he certainly isn't a convert of the Lord."