

Text: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (I Cor.i.17,18).

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Many of God's dear people have stumbled at these words of the apostle; and many others, who are opposed to believers' baptism, have tried to prove from these opening words that he ignored believers' baptism altogether - that he refers to it merely as an abrogated rite. Now what the apostle really means here is this: God sent him to preach the gospel; that gospel he preached according to the commission which he had received from Christ; and, in carrying out this commission, Paul contended for believers' baptism, and insisted upon its being observed by those to whom the gospel had been made the power of God unto salvation.

There had been a very grievous division in this church at Corinth, in every way most dishonouring to God, and caused by the different ministers who had been amongst them. It is indeed a very lamentable thing when supplies cause divisions in churches; and I believe that the supply system is doing an immense amount of mischief in the present day. I do not say that either the minister or the people wish or intend that mischief should be done, but the system is nevertheless doing a great deal of mischief. However, keeping to the point before us, this division did arise in the same way, from hearing different ministers. Some were very much for one servant of Christ, and others for another, which occasioned the apostle to write in this way: "Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius" (verses 12-14). The apostle was thoroughly ashamed of their conduct, and he was heartily thankful that he had baptized so few of them - only one household, that of Stephanas. Why should the apostle have been so glad that he had baptized none but that household if baptism was a divinely instituted ordinance? Just because of the contention which was rife amongst them, and, as he tells us, lest this contention should cause some of them to say that he had baptized in the name of Paul and not in the name of Jesus Christ. These words of Paul - "Christ sent me not to baptize" - do not prove that he set aside or ignored believers' baptism. He did not mean that it was not the will of Christ that Paul should baptize.

He simply meant that, according to the purpose of God, the primary object in calling him to a baptizing service was that he might preach the gospel. The primary calling was not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; and, in preaching the gospel, he would contend for baptism. I have not come here for the last thirty years primarily to baptize, but I have come here to preach the gospel. Still, if, when I have been here, there have been any candidates and I have been asked to baptize them, I have willingly done so because I contend for the ordinance. I believe it to be a divine institution - that all who sit down to the Lord's Supper should be baptized, that no one in the days of the apostles was allowed to partake of the ordinance who were not baptized. Nevertheless, I come here mainly to preach the gospel. I speak about baptism if it comes under my notice and if I am asked to attend to it.

Just another remark: what the apostle says here about baptism completely overturns and demolishes the the Popish dogma of baptismal regeneration. By this, infants or little children, sprinkled by an ordained clergyman in the Church of England, are declared to become children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. I call that nothing less than a rag of Popery and a very fearful error. There could not be a more blinding lie of the devil; because there are thousands who belong to the Established Church (I have no unkind feeling towards them; I would, the Lord helping me, pray for them), who, just because they were sprinkled with water in their childhood, and because they took the sacrament, as they call it; are as firmly settled as it is possible to be in the belief that they will not be damned. And yet they will go off to the race course, the card table, the dancing room, and swim in the enjoyment of worldliness. They never had any darkness of mind, never anything like a disturbed conscience, about their standing before God; their confidence rests upon the fact that in infancy they were baptized, as they term it.

Now all this is an utter fallacy, and, besides this, I think I can see something else in the language of the apostle. If to baptize infants and children made them children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, do you think that this great apostle would have been glad that he had baptized only one household? If I believed in anything like baptismal regeneration, I could not rest until I had sprinkled all the children with whom I have anything to do. Baptism is a divine ordinance, instituted by Christ and commanded by Him to be observed by believers; and it belongs to none but believers. It is a blessed symbol of and witness to Christ in His death and resurrection. The apostle says: "Know ye not, that so

many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom.vi.3,4).

I pass on to other things: "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." What an immense amount of preaching there is in the present day which makes the cross of Christ of none effect - tending neither to the comforting of the souls of God's people nor to the building of them up in their most holy faith! The more popular and eloquent any great preacher may be, and particularly in a place like London, the more he will be followed; and thousands are drawn away from the simplicity of the gospel through what the apostle calls "the enticing words of man's wisdom" (I Cor.ii.4). No doubt there has been this morning in this city a rush to hear some great man, and the place will be packed with people; and in numbers of instances there is nothing in the preaching, the man himself is as dead as a stone, knowing nothing of what it is to be born again. As for God's power, the man is much more concerned about his own popularity. Now in this way the cross of Christ is made of none effect: God does not put forth His power with such preaching. As for the meaning of the cross of Christ in a day like this - well, our young people need instruction, if not in a chapel like this, yet certainly in many others. Just think of the large number of intelligent men and women who are wearing their gold crosses, and who have crosses upon their Bibles and a cross in their houses. That is not what the apostle here means by the cross of Christ. There never was anything in the mere wood on which the Lord Jesus was crucified. Even if that identical cross could have been discovered, it would be an extraordinary piece of antiquity, but spiritually there would be no more in it than in the wood of this pulpit. God has taken care that it should remain undiscovered, like the body of Moses (Jude 9); for the Israelites, had they discovered it, would have been carrying it with them wherever they went and worshipping it. Therefore, by the cross of Christ we understand the death and resurrection of Christ, and salvation by Him, being brought home to the conscience by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Then, again, Corinth was a very polished city; there were men of great erudition there. And the apostle, as the sergant of Christ, went amongst them to preach the gospel for the good

of their immortal souls, subject to the will of God. They might be ready to ask: "Do you despise learning and words of wisdom?" I should say: "No, certainly not." Our late esteemed friend, Mr. Philpot, as you well know, was a learned man, a man who spoke with the words of wisdom; but this is what we have to consider: if a real servant of Christ be a learned man and have great command of language, he will not rely upon his gifts, but he will preach in dependence upon the Spirit of God to make his preaching effectual. There never was a man that I have ever known in the ministry as a learned man who more renounced his own learning, apart from the sanctifying grace of God, than dear Mr. Philpot. There was never one who attached less importance to the mere wisdom of words than he - never one, during all the years he was connected with our churches, who more earnestly contended for power in religion, and power in the ministry of the gospel, than he did. Again and again - when preaching at the country anniversaries with unlettered ministers, who were nevertheless servants of Christ - he would, during part of the day, sit as a listener and bless God for those ministers. He would often feel, when hearing the unlettered man, those sweet operations of divine grace that would commend that man a thousand times more to the heart of the Oxford scholar than would have been the case if any learned Fellow from Oxford had been preaching before him and displaying nothing but human learning.

I often think how comparatively little power the preaching of the cross of Christ seems to have in this day compared with what was the case in days gone by. Ah, my dear friends, it is a fact that we need to be chiefly concerned about. I have thought a good deal on this subject lately. You know that, if a small company of British soldiers should be sent out to some part of the world to put down disturbances and be commanded to fire upon the enemy, it is not the noise of their muskets nor the smoke that fills the air, but it is the effect of the firing, that most concerns them. When there is a large fire in this city, and portions of a building are all in a blaze, what matters is not the mere stream of water sent up into the air (which might arrest the attention of little children), but it is the effect of the water on the burning mass. So spiritually: the important thing is not simply the preaching of the gospel in this city, but it is the effect which follows through the power of the Spirit of God. Are sinners convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment? Are they turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God"? (Acts xxvi.18). Are poor, erring children of God reproved? Are backsliders reclaimed? And are the tried and tempted comforted in their

tribulation while hearing the gospel preached? It is the effect, I say again, that we need to be concerned about. The farmer sows his seed: does it grow and bring forth a good crop? That is what concerns him. The patient in the hospital takes his medicine. Does it go to the root of the disease? Is he any better for the treatment? The mechanic raises his hand to strike with his hammer. Does he hit the nail on the head and drive it in the timber? In these cases it is the effect that matters more than anything else; so it is in preaching the gospel.

If men preach Arminianism, it is a terrible delusion. If men preach anything else but the gospel (I will put it in that brief way), it will not do to say: "Oh, they are good men; they don't see eye to eye, but they are good men, and God is doing great things by them." I say it is my honest conviction that it is a terrible delusion; and I do believe that the judgment day will, to the confusion of many, make it manifest. I wish to keep close to God's word. Paul said: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal.i.9). If any man stand up to preach with the purpose of attracting the admiration of the people to his gifts rather than with a desire to see the effect of the preaching of the cross of Christ, through the power of God, upon the hearts of the people, it is a terrible thing for the soul of such a man. Says the apostle: "Not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." There never could have been a servant of Christ who, during his ministerial course, was more deeply and constantly concerned about the spiritual effects of his preaching than Paul.

Just allow me to turn to his language in the following chapter. I think it is very beautiful, because we must remember that, when the apostle first went to Corinth, he took the state of the place very much into his consideration. He knew a great deal about the place and the people; and therefore, if he had been merely a carnal man, there would have been many temptations to take him away from the simplicity of the gospel. Mark what he says: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (I Cor.ii.1,2). You may depend that he had been very much upon his knees about this before he went to Corinth. He knew how deluded they were, how wrapped up in human learning, sophistry, and philosophy. He saw that the people were something like our present battleships, encased in steel, and therefore would require extraordinary guns to pierce through the thick coating in which they were encased.

Paul, the servant of Christ, saw that it was of no use to bring human philosophy and learning to overthrow human philosophy and learning. He felt this: If I reach the hearts of these people, break down their philosophic prejudices against the gospel, and show them that their learning is nothing at all, it must be through the power of God that they will be convinced. If any of these poor deluded people should be plucked as brands from the burning through my ministry, it must be by my preaching Christ. Therefore, he said: "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear." Look at this man, so divinely gifted, blessed with such a wonderful measure of grace resting upon him! I have sometimes contrasted with the apostle such weak creatures as we are, so little gifted, and with so little qualification in comparison with the great apostle Paul. And yet here is this eminent servant of God saying: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (verses 3,4). Is not that a beautiful manifestation of the grace of God in the man? And thus we find him saying later: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (I Cor.xv.10). "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." And it is as much so now as ever; it is an extremely solemn thing.

Now just suppose one of your supplies should go into one of the fashionable Nonconformist chapels in London, say the City Temple. He is, we will suppose, an uneducated man, one whom you love and whose ministry has been blessed to your souls. He enters the pulpit and preaches his sermon. He preaches nothing but the truth, contends for the doctrines of grace, insists upon a gracious experience of the truth, and warmly argues for the real power of God. God is with the man. But he makes great mistakes, mispronounces many of his words, and violates grammatical accuracy in almost every sentence. His hearers would say: "This is foolishness; this man is a mere novice!" All sorts of contemptuous epithets would be heaped upon him, they would shut their ears to his preaching, and would say: "Never again let us be insulted with such ignorance!" I am keeping here to the sense of the apostle: "The preaching of the cross of Christ is foolishness" to such people. "But unto us which are saved it is the power of God" - that is, the power of God in our regeneration, repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and the power of God in our being brought to renounce our own wisdom, just as Mr. Philpot renounced his natural wisdom. It was also the power of God to that other servant of Christ, dear old Mr. Warburton. You remember what

Mr. Philpot said when speaking of Warburton: "Warburton was afraid of my learning, and I was afraid of Warburton's grace. He trembled to speak before me because I was an Oxford scholar; I trembled to speak before Warburton because of the grace of God which I saw in him. They both despised the wisdom of this world; they both knew the things of God by the inward teaching of God's Spirit. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." And what makes me hope that the gospel has been made the power of God unto my soul is just this: God has taught me that gifts, learning, and eloquence amount to nothing. No matter what a man has, if he has not the grace of God - it is all nothing so far as the kingdom of God is concerned. For He says: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise" (verse 19) - that is, as I take it, in God's own people, because the wisdom of the wise of this world goes on until the end of time. The colleges at Oxford and Cambridge continue; wisdom and carnal preaching in the city of London goes on; but, says God, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise." God, by His grace, calls some of the wise and learned, as He did our late dear friend to whom I have referred; and He destroys that wisdom in them. And so in all His people. "And will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." I do not say that this will not admit of a wider sense; because God will ultimately destroy all the wisdom of this world, and will bring to nothing all the understanding of the prudent ones of this world. He will convince all men - some in one way and some in another - that Christ is the wisdom of God, and the only wisdom of God. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that 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. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom" (verses 20-22). The Jews, you see, sought a sign from Christ. They said to Him on one occasion: "Master, we would see a sign from Thee. But He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous nation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. xii. 38-40). "Salvation is of the Lord." For we read that "the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land" (Jonah ii. 9, 10). That event was typical of the Lord Jesus Christ being three days in the grave. So God will give this wicked world no other sign to demonstrate the truth of the judgment day, death, and resurrection than the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Says

Paul: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (verses 23,24). Amen.