

Paradigm for Pentecostal Preaching

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Frederic L. Godet summarizes the Pentecostal preacher's purpose: "The preacher's task in this work lies, not in wishing to act in the place and stead of the Spirit with the resources of his own eloquence and genius, but in opening up the way for Him by simple testimony rendered to Christ."¹ While preachers should strive to do their best for Christ, they should at the same time allow the Word and Spirit to do their unique work in the hearts of people. But how do preachers open up the way for this work? I will address this issue by answering two other questions: What are the biblical premises for Pentecostal preaching? And what are the biblical principles for Pentecostal preaching? One paradigm for Pentecostal preaching answering these key questions comes from the Bible as a whole and from 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 which specifically focuses on Christ and reliance upon the Holy Spirit for lasting results.

First, I will briefly examine some general biblical premises for Pentecostal preaching. Then I will focus more at length on some specific biblical principles for Pentecostal preaching drawn from 1 Corinthians 2:1-16.

Some General Biblical Premises For Pentecostal Preaching

As Fred B. Craddock says, "The pulpit has a memory, participating in a tradition reaching back across the centuries."² Its earliest remembrances stretch back to the Old Testament and continue through the New Testament in the gospels, Acts, and epistles.

Paul was actually in sync with the whole revelation of Scripture when he declared his intention to preach only "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" in 1 Cor. 2:2.³ This focus proves true even of the Old Testament. Graeme Goldsworthy explains, "That the whole Bible testifies to Christ is what we mean when we say that Christ is in all the Scriptures. It is because of this that the preacher must ask the question of every sermon, 'Did the sermon show how the text testifies to Christ?'"⁴ Christ constitutes the ultimate sacrifice of the Pentateuch. He provides mediation for the saints in the Psalms. And the Lord Jesus serves as the subject of prophecy in the Prophets (cf. Luke 24:44). Naturally, any Pentecostal preacher would want to bring out this Christo-centric focus in light of the declaration of Paul's theme for preaching. Much more will be said about this emphasis on Christ in the second half of this paper.

Of course, the priests and prophets were expositors of God's Word. The case of Ezra the priest and scribe expounding the Word in Nehemiah 8:1-12 serves as a classic example of biblical exposition. Likewise, all the writings of the prophets are in essence sermons preached to Israel and some of the surrounding nations.

Pentecostal preachers have long been noted for their ability and tendency to tell stories while they preach. They see this as following the precedent of that Master of preaching, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In parable after parable, Christ likens the kingdom of God to something familiar to His listeners in order to aid their understanding (cf. Mark 4:10-12.). Concerning this premise, two extremes must be avoided. First, Pentecostal preachers must not rely solely upon illustrative material. Jesus also preached the kerygma—the announcement of the gospel—and taught the didache—the application of the gospel (cf. Matt. 5-7; John 3-4). Second, Pentecostal preachers must not depend exclusively on biblical exposition. Balanced Pentecostal preaching makes ample use of both illustrations and exposition. Exposition has been compared to the foundation and walls of a building and illustrations to the windows that let the light in. One without the other is poor form and impractical. Jesus was the Master of both illustration and exposition, although many modern scholars emphasize primarily His unique contribution to preaching with the parables. Jesus was Master of the metaphor such as "I am the good Shepherd" (John 10:11, etc.). In light of this

paradigm for ministers, Pentecostal preachers should make use of whatever rhetorical devices available to them like illustrations to improve their communication of the gospel to those who find it difficult to hear.

Two principles concerning preaching stand out in the Book of Acts. First, preachers must preach the Word, not their own ideas or opinions (cf. 2 Tim. 4:12). Preaching Christ revealed must be centered in the text.

Second, preachers must preach as ambassadors of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20). Ministers are representatives of the Lord. They must stay true to His orders and represent the heavenly homeland accurately in word and work.

Wherever the apostles preached the gospel, they stayed true to the original message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (i.e., the kerygma), regardless of the consequences, fair or foul (Acts 2:14-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 7:2-53; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 17:22-31; 22:2-21; 26:1-23, etc.).⁵ This model furnishes another reason why sermons should always be based upon Scripture. Use of the Bible helps insure the proper testimony of Christ and the powerful anointing of the Spirit. In this way, ministers are less likely to misrepresent their Lord.

Robert Mounce summarizes the didactic nature of New Testament preaching, especially as exemplified in the epistles, as follows: 1) Preaching serves as the means of God's self-revelation to people. 2) Preaching reveals the actions that God has taken to redeem humanity. And 3) for preaching to be effective, the listeners must receive its message. The problem is not with people's inability to understand the gospel, but their unwillingness to hear it.⁶ Thus, there exists all the more need for Pentecostal preachers who preach didactically with 'a demonstration of the Spirit's power.'

In addition, some specialization of the ministry occurred not long after the ascension. For then Christ gave:

Some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13).

The bulk of ministers today sense a calling to serve as pastors and teachers, which underlines the felt need for a didactic ministry in the church. Believers need regular, systematic instruction in the fundamentals of the faith. They require guidance in response to contemporary moral dilemmas. And Christians want constant pastoral care in the wake of modern stresses and strains, whether spiritual, physical, social, intellectual, emotional, or financial, etc.

The Book of Acts and the epistles also make it clear that Pentecostal preaching should be pneumatic (i.e., anointed by the Spirit) in nature. But we will examine this aspect in depth in the latter part of this paper.

Some Specific Biblical Principles For Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:1-16)

Corinth was an unlikely place to plant a church because of its reputation for wickedness. Still Paul spent eighteen months there, longer than usual for him, and left behind a vibrant church.⁷ Most scholars believe that Paul wrote this letter most likely from Ephesus on or around A.D. 55 in response to reports and a letter containing questions from Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11; 7:1, etc). The city was a wealthy trade center and featured a temple to the goddess Aphrodite with 1000 priestesses, who served as temple prostitutes. Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18).

The culture of Corinth, no doubt, had an impact on the local church. The members divided into factions over their favorite preachers, sinful lifestyles, differences in worship styles, and questions about the gifts of the Spirit, etc. They struggled with issues that involved sexual immorality and lawsuits, etc. They also had questions regarding marriage, personal rights, and the resurrection of Christ.

Some scholars like James A. Davis argue for a Jewish sapiential (i.e., wisdom) background, instead of a Greco-Roman background.⁸ Wilhelm Wuellner also believes the background of 1 Cor. 2:1-16 is Jewish homily rather than Greek rhetoric. He asserts that the three features of the homily pattern fit the larger context of 1 Cor. 1-4: "(1) The correspondence of the opening and closing statements or scriptural quotations; (2) subordinate scriptural quotations supplementing the opening quotation; and (3) paraphrases of key words or phrases from the opening and/or subordinate quotations in the homily."⁹ However, Wuellner admits that this pattern does bear resemblance also to 'Cynic-Stoic diatribes.'

The passage in 1 Cor. 2:1-16 reveals the material and means for Pentecostal preaching. The material for Pentecostal preaching comes from Christ (1 Cor. 2:1-5). The means for Pentecostal preaching comes from the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-16).

Gordon D. Fee argues that 1 Cor. 2:1-5 provides a pattern for preachers. He writes, "One senses that for Paul this is not merely a historical replay of his time with them, but also functions as something of a paradigm for his understanding of Christian ministry."¹⁰

As for the immediate historical background of this passage, some like William Barclay believe Paul failed for the first time in Athens before the Areopagus, so that the apostle comes to Corinth with fear and trembling (Acts 17:22-31; 18:1).¹¹ However, it is more likely that Paul was concerned to please God and to reach the Corinthians with the gospel. After all, there were some positive results in Athens (Acts 17:32-34).

Furthermore, the speeches Luke records of Paul in Acts are rhetorically polished. Even Paul's protestations to the contrary belie sophistication.¹² The apostle may mean to appeal in 1 Cor. 2:1-5 to his sincere motives, honest humility, or a subtle sarcasm and irony.

Interestingly, in the ancient world, "Even the most renowned speakers (e.g., Dio Chrysostom) regularly disavowed their own speaking abilities in order to lower audience expectations; then they spoke brilliantly. Rhetoricians recommended this technique."¹³ In this way, Paul actually used the very same skills with the addition of the anointing of the Spirit that some Corinthians denied he possessed.

Michael A Bullmore makes three observations about Paul's response to the Greco-Roman rhetorical background of 1 Cor. 2:1-5: 1) Paul refuses to adopt the Corinthian style of choice in regards to content and manner of speaking. 2) Paul seems to contrast himself with a particular rhetorical style favored at Corinth. And 3) Paul makes this decision on theological grounds. He desires that the Corinthians rest their faith in God not a particular rhetorical style.¹⁴

In any case, the wise people of this world stumble over the wisdom of God. The Lord has made the gospel so simple that anyone can understand its basic message, yet in the process many wise people are repelled by that simplicity. For those who accept it, Christ becomes both the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18-25). As a result, most of the converts in Corinth were among the common people. On one hand, God does this to humble the philosophers of this world. On the other hand, Christ has become our wisdom, which means He provides us with righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). No one can boast that their superior intellect resulted in their salvation in any way (1 Cor. 1:26-31). Salvation actually requires a wise person to become as it were a 'fool' to be saved. While the wisdom of God *may seem* foolish to the world, the wisdom of this world *is* foolishness to God. And the Lord requires sincere humility before He bestows salvation on anyone (1 Cor. 3:18-23). New converts should not even boast over the preacher they happen to be saved under (1 Cor. 1:10-17). Even boasting of their wisdom after salvation perverts God's intention.

A. T. Robertson gives a succinct explanation of Paul's disclaimer in 1 Cor. 2:1-4:

One is not to stress Paul's language in 1 Cor. 2:1-4 into a denial that he could use the literary style. It is rather a rejection of the bombastic rhetoric that the Corinthians liked and the rhetorical art that was so common from Thucydides to Chrysostom. It is with [this] comparison in mind that Origen (c. *Celsus*, vii, 59f.) speaks of Paul's literary inferiority. It is largely a matter of standpoint."¹⁵

Paul made this disclaimer so that the faith of the Corinthians would rest in the power of God, not in the power of rhetoric. Also, the apostle refers to wisdom "due to the fact that [he] ... takes up ideas of his opponents and tries to put them to a positive use. This is why scholars [also] see reminiscences of the gnostic [*sic*] myth and terminology of the mysteries in [the next] ... section (1 Cor. 2:6-16)."¹⁶ But Paul's ultimate reliance was upon God to convince his audiences.

Now, let us examine three of the principles this paradigm sets forth. I will attempt to state each principle in a complete sentence. In order to develop each principle thoroughly, I will explain, illustrate, and apply each one in turn.

Principle 1: Mystery—A Christo-Centric Mystery Informs Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:1)

Leon Morris qualifies the meaning of preaching in the New Testament: "Preaching the gospel is not delivering edifying discourses, beautifully put together. It is bearing witness to what God has done in Christ for man's salvation."¹⁷ In other words, preaching is more divine proclamation than human persuasion.

The present tense of the participle *καταγγέλλων* indicates ongoing action. Paul's preaching continually 'proclaimed' the gospel.¹⁸

Some discrepancy exists over whether the original reading was 'testimony' or 'mystery' of God. The KJV, NASB, and NIV translate 'testimony.' The UBS and Nestle-Aland Greek texts have 'mystery', as does the NRSV. The reading 'mystery of God' seems more likely than 'testimony of God' because of earlier textual support.¹⁹ The word translated 'mystery' in this context means the "secret plan of salvation, the gospel."²⁰

J. Sidlow Baxter expresses the mystery well, “In the super-miracle of the Incarnation, our very Creator, Preserver, Judge, becomes our Kinsman, Sinbearer, Redeemer! Of all miracles and mysteries this is the most staggering.”²¹ Accordingly, humans cannot understand this mystery without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Principle 2: Message—A Christo-Centric Message Informs Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:2)

Paul came to Corinth determined to preach “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). William Barclay puts it well, “It is always true that simplicity has a power that nothing else has ... [F]or most people, the way to the recesses of a man’s inmost being lies, not through his mind, but through his heart.”²² At the same time, Paul did not just preach about the crucifixion of Christ, although it was a major theme of his preaching. He preached Christ in spite of the shameful death He died for the sins of the world.²³

When Paul denies using persuasive words in his preaching, the apostle means that he avoids excessive oratory and subtle arguments. Instead, Paul concentrates on the proclamation of the truth and allows it to work in the hearts of people.²⁴ Without doubt, Paul’s many years as an evangelist implies “the ability to find and exploit an initial area of common ground with his hearers.”²⁵ Paul did not intentionally alienate his audiences, but he did rely more on theology than oratory to accomplish his mission.

Oswald Chambers describes the attraction of ‘Christ and him crucified’:

“In the Cross [*sic*] we may see the dimensions of Divine love. The Cross [*sic*] is not the cross of a man, but the exhibition of the heart of God. At the back of the wall of the world stands God with His arms outstretched, and every man driven there is driven into the arms of God. The Cross [*sic*] of Jesus is the supreme evidence of the love of God.”²⁶

Upon the cross, Paul sees the love of God revealed as Christ dies for his sins. And we, too, upon that old rugged cross, observe Christ dying for our iniquities and the transgressions of the whole world (cf. John 1:29; 1 John 2:2).

Principle 3: Methodology—A Christo-centric Methodology Informs Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:3-5)

When he arrived in Corinth, Paul was afraid “primarily of God rather than of men. It was fear in light of the task committed to him,” according to Morris.²⁷ He was not afraid of the Corinthians. The ‘fear and trembling’ referred to in 1 Cor. 2:3 “suggests that Paul’s weakness was in his delivery, not in his awareness of contemporary rhetorical style.”²⁸

Some at Corinth were unimpressed with Paul’s appearance and oratorical skills (2 Cor. 10:10). Paul seems to admit in later correspondence that his delivery and unwillingness to charge for his services made him appear weak in light of the Corinthians’ expectations and their highly developed, personal rhetorical skills (2 Cor. 11:6-7).²⁹ Because of Paul’s fear and trembling, Godet thinks the Lord encourages the apostle while in Corinth in a vision to “not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10).³⁰ If this is indeed the case, Paul’s fear was not founded only on his consternation at the thought of God’s displeasure, but also by his fear of the reactions of the Corinthians to his message.

By way of application, if the apostle Paul never became overconfident in his preaching, neither should modern Pentecostal preachers. “The preacher who is really effective is the preacher whose heart beats faster while he waits to speak.”³¹ Another reason for Paul’s fear might also exist. If the preaching of Paul had relied upon human wisdom alone, the gospel would have run the risk of a more eloquent speaker coming along and explaining away the good news.³²

As to Paul’s “message and ... preaching,” Godet writes:

I rather think that *λόγος* [*logos*] applies to the matter, and *κήρυγμα* [*kerygma*] to the form; the *λόγος* is the gospel itself; the *κήρυγμα* is the testimony the apostle renders to it. Neither the one nor the other has been corrupted in his work by the infiltration of human elements or by self-seeking.”³³

The genitive in the phrase ‘with’ or ‘in’ “demonstration of spirit and of power” may either be an objective genitive (i.e., a demonstration of spiritual power) or an exegetical genitive (i.e., a demonstration consisting of spirit and power).³⁴ Most likely, the phrase in Greek, “in demonstration of the spirit and of power,” serves as a hendiadys, where two words are used, but only one idea is intended.³⁵ Thus, the NIV translates, “with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.” While the Greek does not distinguish between small and capital letters, the context strongly suggests that the Spirit of God provides the source of power, not the human spirit. The Spirit

incorporates human wisdom, but the latter is never the source of power. The preaching of the gospel rests on a 'higher plane' than human rationality.³⁶ While the demonstration of the Spirit and power, undoubtedly, included some miraculous confirmations of gospel truth such as 'signs and wonders' and the anointing of the Spirit, it may well intend a more general usage. The power of God worked through the apostle to convince the Corinthians of sin, etc.³⁷ The Spirit's power exercised in the conversion of sinners into saints, according to Fee, ultimately manifests itself in the reception of the Spirit, evidenced by spiritual gifts like tongues.³⁸

A strong contrast is made between the human wisdom divine power. The ἀλλά ["but"] clearly indicates this polarity. Paul emphatically wants his hearers to place their faith in the power of God, not in the wisdom of humans. Robertson writes:

The Judaizers at Corinth did not discuss the rhetorical niceties of these Letters. They felt the power of the ideas in them even when they resisted Paul's authority. Paul used tropes [i.e., figures of speech], but he smote hearts with them and did not merely tickle the fancy of the lovers of sophistry.³⁹

Craig S. Keener points out that though "Paul here disapproves of *mere* rhetoric, ... his own writing, including 1 Corinthians, displays extensive knowledge and use of rhetorical forms."⁴⁰ This statement does seem to be an accurate appraisal of the situation.

In a footnote, Fee points out that:

[Paul's] letters, which at times have all the character of speech, are in fact powerful examples of rhetoric and persuasion. Nonetheless Paul can confidently assert before those who have come to care about such things that his preaching was not of this kind. This seems to make certain that it is not rhetoric in general, but rhetoric of a very specific and well-known kind, that he is disavowing.⁴¹

Maybe Paul refers to those orators whose motives were suspect and whose design was to impress and to gain a personal following for the purpose of financial exploitation.

Fee concludes this section in 1 Corinthians as follows:

What he [Paul] is rejecting is not preaching, not even persuasive preaching; rather, it is the real danger in all preaching—self-reliance. The danger always lies in letting the form and content get in the way of what should be the single concern: the gospel proclaimed thorough human weakness but accompanied by the powerful work of the Spirit so that lives are changed through a divine-human encounter.⁴²

Interestingly, Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," made little impact when he first preached it to his own congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts. But when he preached the same message at Enfield, sinners shrieked in the aisles under the conviction of sin. And new converts wept for joy. What made the difference? Edwards himself concluded that it was the move of the Holy Spirit. "The wind blows wherever it pleases" (John 3:8).⁴³

The Means for Pentecostal Preaching Comes From the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-16)

Christ serves as the wisdom of God in two ways: 1) as a Mediator of redemption from sin; and 2) as a Mediator of intercession in prayer.⁴⁴ But this wisdom is now communicated to believers through the agency of the Spirit. For instance, the Spirit inspires a number of means to make effective preaching possible: wisdom, Scripture, knowledge, discernment, and a Christ-like mind. Again, I will endeavor to state each of these five principles. Afterwards, I will explain, illustrate, and apply each principle.

Principle 1: Wisdom—Spirit-Inspired Wisdom Empowers Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:6-8).

The contemporaries of Jesus noted the wisdom with which He spoke (Matthew 13:54; Mark 6:2). Christ even promised His followers a similar wisdom when they faced persecution after His ascension into heaven (Luke 21:15).

In the Book of Acts, the adversaries of Stephen could not compete with his wisdom (Acts 6:10). Stephen serves as a figure of Christ in that both spoke with wisdom, were innocent of any wrongdoing, and prayed for God to forgive their enemies at the time of their executions (Acts 7:60). Likewise as Stephen points out in his defense before the Sanhedrin, the Lord gave Joseph wisdom and saw to it that Moses "was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts. 7:10, 22).

Maximilian Zerwick states, “The particle δε nearly always implies some sort of contrast” (1 Cor. 2:6).⁴⁵ Therefore, the wisdom Paul refers to in this verse differs from that of the world. This wisdom represents the type that Christ Himself possesses and distributes to mature believers.

C. K. Barrett explains the meaning of the ‘secret’ or ‘hidden’ wisdom, in this way: “The preaching of the cross is ... *hidden* in the sense that it has only been disclosed at the turning of the ages, in the recent historical event of Christ crucified; hidden also in that it has nothing to do with *persuasive words of wisdom*” (emphasis his).⁴⁶ Obviously then, this wisdom is no longer kept secret or hidden.

In contrast to godly wisdom, “Worldly wisdom which [*sic*] rejects the cross, whether in its Jewish or Greek variety, is objectively proved to be that which it always was: foolishness, i.e. rebellion against God, in the form of human self-exaltation and boasting.”⁴⁷ George Eldon Ladd explains the meaning of the cross and why many consider it foolishness:

God in his wisdom has used the depth of humiliation and degradation as the means of salvation. This is the *meaning* of the cross, decreed by God ages ago (1 Cor. 2:7), hidden in God’s mind and heart, but now revealed in the proclamation of the gospel message. This redemptive meaning of the cross, although openly proclaimed (1 Cor. 1:17, 23), is, from a purely human perspective, such foolishness that people unaided by the Spirit cannot accept it or acknowledge its truthfulness” (emphasis his).⁴⁸

The cross was the last means first century peoples ever thought God would use to save the lost. And today, many wonder how the crucifixion of someone so long ago can atone for the sins of humanity.

This wisdom was not only the apostle Paul’s means of preaching the gospel. The other apostles made use of the same resource. Morris points out, “The plural *we* links Paul’s teaching with that of other Christian leaders. There was no division among them” (emphasis his).⁴⁹ All Pentecostal preachers then and now who preach with divine wisdom are following in the footsteps of the apostles.

Conversation does not change people; the cross changes people. As Godet so eloquently says, “It is not the light which rays from the cross which changes the heart, it is the cross itself.”⁵⁰ The contents of our preaching, not our delivery, convicts and converts sinners.

E. W. Bullinger explains the meaning of ‘mature’ in 1 Cor. 2:6, NIV. “The word τελείος (*teleios*) receives its true meaning, initiated, from the Greek mysteries, where it was used of one who had been initiated into them.”⁵¹ The mature, then, are the ones who are members of the body of Christ, i.e. the church. C. F. D. Moule suggests that the Greek prepositional phrase εν μυστηρίω perhaps means, “consisting of a mystery.”⁵² Paul says he speaks the wisdom of God in (or consisting of) a mystery which has been hidden (1 Cor. 2:7). The latter phrase is an articular participle. Dana and Mantey explain the significance: “When a participle has the article, it is thereby attached to the noun as a qualifying phrase, as a sort of attribute.”⁵³ In other words, the wisdom of God is a mystery, having been hidden, until the present time. Paul places θεου [“of God”] before the noun σοφίαν [“wisdom”] to emphasize that the wisdom he speaks comes from God or is about God, not anyone or anything else.⁵⁴

Verse 8 contains a second class ‘contrary to fact’ conditional sentence with εἰ and the indicative in the protasis and ὡς with the indicative in the apodosis. Consequently if the rulers of this world had known (but of course they clearly did not), they would not have crucified Jesus.⁵⁵ Wallace believes that the conditional sentence in 1 Cor. 2:8 sets forth the protasis as the cause and the apodosis as the effect.⁵⁶ Although this verse suggests an ‘unreal’ condition, the reality is that “knowledge (of wisdom of God) would have caused the rulers of this world not to crucify the Lord of glory.”⁵⁷

Twice Paul refers to “the rulers of this” age (αἰῶνος) (1 Cor. 2:6, 8). The difference between the world (κοσμος, *cosmos*) and age is significant. The world encompasses *space*. The age incorporates *time*.⁵⁸ The rulers of this age refer to human leaders not demonic forces. In the context, Paul contrasts divine and human wisdom, not divine and demonic wisdom. And the rulers who crucified Christ were human and ignorant. Besides, demons are spirits that believe in Christ and even tremble in His presence (Mark 1:24, 34; James 2:19). The same Greek word used for ‘rulers’ is found in Acts 3:17, which clearly designates the Jewish and Roman authorities.⁵⁹ Paul says elsewhere that the Jewish religious leaders did not recognize Jesus as their long awaited Messiah (Acts 13:27). In contrast upon the return of the 72, Jesus praised the Father with these words, “‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things [acts of divine power over Satan] from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children’” (Luke 10:21).

Søren Kierkegaard writes along these lines: “When one preaches Christianity in such a way that the echo answers, ‘Away with that man, he does not deserve to live,’ know that this is the Christianity of the New Testament. Capital punishment is the penalty for preaching Christianity as it truly is.”⁶⁰ The wisdom of God in the gospel of

Christ humbles human pride. If people do not repent, they usually respond by spurting out wrath upon the source of their humiliation (i.e., the Messenger, or His messengers).

Principle 2: Scripture—Spirit-Inspired Scripture Empowers Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:9-10a).

The quote in 1 Cor. 2:9 may have come from Isa. 64:4 with a possible allusion to Isa. 52:15 and 65:16 (cf. Jer. 3:16). The statement, “No eye has seen,” means no one has seen. Paul uses the eye to refer to a person’s vision mentally or physically.⁶¹ The quotation from Isa. 64:4 does not pertain to heavenly glories but to present realities.⁶² This verse reminds believers of their need for the illumination of the Spirit to understand the Scriptures. As Jesus explained the Old Testament Scriptures to His followers, the Holy Spirit provides the same service for the contemporary Christian (1 Cor. 2:10; cf. Luke 24:45; Acts 15:28).⁶³ All preachers need this illumination before they attempt to instruct others.

Gordon MacDonald tells about one of his experiences as a frequent flyer. He was sitting in an aisle seat near an exit. But before take-off, the flight attendant asked him if he had read the instruction card that explained how to open the exit door. He ‘fudged’ the truth a little and said, “Yes.” But she came back, “In case of an emergency, would you know how to open that door? The lives of a lot of people on this plane will depend upon you. Are you certain you know what that card says?” By then she had his full attention.⁶⁴

Many people in this world depend upon us to know the Scriptures well enough to explain to them how to escape safely from this world and enter the heavenly one to come. The information in the Bible explains to preachers and people alike how to open the door of eternal life.

Principle 3: Knowledge—Spirit-Inspired Knowledge Empowers Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:10b-13).

“The Spirit searches all things” does not mean that there are things “that He does not know, but that He may make others know.”⁶⁵ He searches out all things for the believer’s sake. Grammarians refer to this as an example of anthropopatheia, the ascription of human characteristics to God.

Morris explains the searching of the things of God by the Spirit as “a way of saying that He penetrates into *all things*” (emphasis his).⁶⁶ The Spirit knows everything. The perfect tense of γινώσκω (*ginōskō*) in this 1 Cor. 2:11 shows that the Holy Spirit knew the ‘things of God’ in the past and continues to know up to the present time.⁶⁷

“The spirit of the world” means “the spirit which animates the world” (1 Cor. 2:12).⁶⁸ By his use of the first person, plural personal pronoun, “we,” Paul emphasizes that believers have not received ‘the spirit of the world.’ Then the apostle indicates that the Spirit the Corinthians received came from God as a source (i.e., ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ). The purpose for the bestowal of the Spirit is so believers might know and understand the things God has freely given to them.

Paul uses the continuous tense of the verb to show that he habitually speaks in terms taught by the Spirit not human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:13). He has learned this terminology primarily by comparing spiritual things with spiritual things.⁶⁹ (The noun in the accusative case serves as the direct object of the verb, while the noun in the dative case provides the indirect object. I account for the differences in the endings of these two occurrences of the same noun in this way.) Morris prefers the translation, “Combining spiritual things (the words spoken) with spiritual things (the truths expressed) ... (Paul is explaining that Christian preachers use words taught by the Spirit).”⁷⁰ By way of application, Pentecostal preachers should not use words taught by ‘human wisdom’ (i.e., a subjective genitive).⁷¹ The words of human wisdom originate in the human intellect, take shape by the laws of rhetoric, and expand through philosophical reasoning.⁷²

The story has been told of a man who went to see a doctor. He told the doctor, “You have to help me. I’m dying. Everywhere I touch it hurts. I touch my head and it hurts. I touch my leg and it hurts. I touch my stomach and it hurts. I touch my chest and it hurts. You have to help me, Doc, everything hurts.” After the physician examined him, he said to Mr. Smith, “I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is you are not dying. The bad news is you have a broken finger.”⁷³ Only the Holy Spirit really knows the needs of any particular human heart and what God wants to do for that person. People may think they know the will of God for their lives, but too often the instruments (i.e., human wisdom, etc.) they use to determine the will of God are broken.

Principle 4: Discernment—Spirit-Inspired Discernment Empowers Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

In spite of the baptism in the Spirit, Pentecostal preachers are never omniscient, of course. The Greek word for ‘things’ in 1 Cor. 2:14 has the definite article. This grammatical construction specifies that believers understand the

things concerning Christ, the cross, and the Spirit. However, Spirit-filled ministers and believers do see things from a different perspective than non-Christians see things, i.e., they have a heavenly rather than an earthly viewpoint.⁷⁴

The Spirit reveals the gospel of Christ. Humans unaided can never understand the good news or fully appreciate it. The Spirit's assistance is mandatory. No one can plumb the 'depths of God' without His help. The Spirit initiates the search for God as well as satisfies it. No one can comprehend the gospel without the Spirit enabling them.⁷⁵

The 'things' that belong to the Spirit of God are always spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).⁷⁶ This spiritual discernment does not suggest that the Holy Spirit cannot enable unbelievers to understand the gospel message in the Bible. However, it does suggest that unbelievers and believers alike, for that matter, cannot comprehend the message by their own unaided efforts.⁷⁷ On one hand, we are not able to understand and appreciate that Jesus Christ died for *our* sins, without the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The responsibility for this lack of reception of spiritual things lies with the 'natural' person who does not 'receive' them.⁷⁸ And on the other hand, Paul places emphasis on the impossibility of unbelievers discerning spiritual persons with his addition of the first person singular pronoun to the verb of the main clause (1 Cor. 2:15).

Even E. Earle Ellis, a Baptist scholar, concedes that 1 Cor. 2:12-14 refers to "certain believers [that] have inspired speech and discernment. They are called pneumatics and, broadly speaking, they exercise the role of prophets."⁷⁹ This observation corresponds with the traditional Pentecostal understanding of the preacher.

At a pastors' viewing of *The Passion of the Christ*, David Neff heard Mel Gibson explain why he used a veiled woman to represent evil in his film. "[Evil] takes on the form of beauty... It is almost beautiful. It is the great aper of God. But the mask is askew; there is always something wrong. Evil masquerades, but if your antennae are up, you'll detect it."⁸⁰ Because spiritual things are not always clearly black and white, Pentecostal preachers require discernment to be effective. It is simply impossible without the Holy Spirit to discern spiritual things or truths.

Principle 5: Minds—Spirit-Inspired Minds Empower Pentecostal Preaching (1 Cor. 2:16).

The quote in 1 Cor. 2:16 comes from Isa. 40:13. In its Old Testament context, the prophet proclaims the incomparable greatness of the Lord. Nevertheless, Paul adds to this proclamation the fact that all believers share in the mind of Christ by the addition of the first person personal pronoun, 'we.' Walter Bauer maintains that Paul uses νοῦς (*nous*, "mind") interchangeably with πνεῦμα (*pneuma*, "spirit") in 1 Cor. 2:14, 16. This correspondence is possible because Paul's mind was filled with the Spirit.⁸¹ To be more specific, Paul may equate 'the mind of the Lord' with 'the mind of Christ.' Or he might imply that the mind of Christ is as close as we can come to the mind of God. Dunn concludes, "The mind of Christ gives a clearer insight into the mind of God than otherwise would be possible (cf. Phil 2:5)."⁸² When believers think with the mind of Christ, they think the thoughts of God.

All scholars agree that believers have the mind of Christ, at least to some extent. However, Calvin suggests that it might be possible for ministers of the gospel to be given an added portion, so that they might better understand the gospel and preach it more courageously.⁸³

Believers obtain the mind of Christ (or God) by the agency of the Spirit beginning at conversion, but that mind can expand. Godet provides a helpful analogy: "The minister of a sovereign could say, after an intimate conversation with his king, I am in full possession of my master's mind. From this moment, therefore, to criticize the servant is to criticize the master."⁸⁴ By spending time in prayer and the Scriptures, ministers can improve their understanding of God's mind or will. Then, they can speak with an exceptional sense of divine authority.

Phillip Yancey points out how animals have means of interacting with the world that humans know nothing about. For instance, bats locate insects by sonar. Pigeons fly by magnetic fields. And bloodhounds detect smells we never notice. But how do Christians pick up on the things of God? The mind of Christ.⁸⁵

Conclusion

In summary, the overall context of the Bible suggests several general principles for Pentecostal preachers to follow. Their preaching should be expositional, illustrative, kerygmatic, and didactic. The unique content of 1 Cor. 2:1-16 provides specific guidance as to the material and means for Pentecostal preaching. The material derives from a Christo-centric mystery, message, and methodology. The means include Spirit-inspired wisdom, Scripture, knowledge, discernment, and minds. If Pentecostal preachers are to preach in the power of the Spirit, they must follow these principles in the preparation and delivery of their sermons.

Pentecostal preachers may very well incorporate the rules of logic and rhetoric in their discourses. But, their ultimate effectiveness for the kingdom of God depends upon the extent of their focus and reliance upon the authority of the Father, the atonement of the Son, and the anointing of the Spirit.

Notes

- ¹ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 130.
- ² Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 35.
- ³ All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible.
- ⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 138.
- ⁵ David H. Bauslin, "Preacher, Preaching," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 2434
- ⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 151-59.
- ⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 248.
- ⁸ James A. Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit: An Investigation of 1 Corinthians 1:18-3:20 against the Background of Jewish Sapiential Traditions in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: University Press of America, 1984).
- ⁹ Wilhelm Wuellner, "Haggadic Homily Genre in 1 Corinthians 1-3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (June 1970): 199-204.
- ¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 90.
- ¹¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians: Translated with an Introduction and Interpretation*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 26.
- ¹² Leland Ryken, *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 131.
- ¹³ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 457.
- ¹⁴ Michael A. Bullmore, *St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 in Light of First Century Greco-Roman Rhetorical Culture* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1995), 220-21.
- ¹⁵ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 85.
- ¹⁶ J. Goetzmann, "Wisdom," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 1031.
- ¹⁷ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 51.
- ¹⁸ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*. ed. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 390.
- ¹⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 545.
- ²⁰ Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 500.
- ²¹ J. Sidlow Baxter, "The Staggering Miracle of Christ," 1; available from www.PreachingToday.com; Internet; accessed 5 April 2004.
- ²² Barclay, 26.
- ²³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 2003), 97.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.
- ²⁵ Bruce, 245.
- ²⁶ Oswald Chambers, "God's Supreme Love," 1; available from www.PreachingToday.com; Internet; accessed 5 April 2004.
- ²⁷ Morris, 52.
- ²⁸ Keener, 457.
- ²⁹ D. R. de Lacy, "Corinthians, Epistles to the," in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed., ed. J. D. Douglas et al (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1982), 232.
- ³⁰ Godet, 127-28.
- ³¹ Barclay, 27.
- ³² Calvin, 101.
- ³³ Godet, 128.
- ³⁴ Zerwick et al, 501.
- ³⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 657, 666.
- ³⁶ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1981), 550.
- ³⁷ Calvin, 100.
- ³⁸ Fee, 95.
- ³⁹ Robertson, 1206.
- ⁴⁰ Keener, 457.
- ⁴¹ Fee, 94.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 96-97.
- ⁴³ Stephen R. Holmes, "Why 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' Worked," 1; available from www.PreachingToday.Com; Internet; accessed 5 April 2004.
- ⁴⁴ E. Earle Ellis, "'Wisdom' and 'Knowledge' in 1 Corinthians," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 95.
- ⁴⁵ Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963) 157.

- ⁴⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1968), 71.
- ⁴⁷ Goetzmann, 1031.
- ⁴⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 423.
- ⁴⁹ Morris, 53.
- ⁵⁰ Godet, 134.
- ⁵¹ Bullinger, 679.
- ⁵² C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2d ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 79.
- ⁵³ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), 153.
- ⁵⁴ Rienecker, 391.
- ⁵⁵ Zerwick et al, 501.
- ⁵⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 682, footnote.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 683.
- ⁵⁸ Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1880), 214.
- ⁵⁹ Morris, 54-55.
- ⁶⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, “Kierkegaard on the World’s Hatred of the Gospel,” 1; available from www.PreachingToday.com; Internet; accessed 6 April 2004.
- ⁶¹ Bullinger, 647.
- ⁶² Godet, 145.
- ⁶³ Stanley M. Horton, *1 & 2 Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion, 1999), 36.
- ⁶⁴ Gordon MacDonald, “Your Responsibility to Read the Instructions,” 1; available from www.PreachingToday.com; Internet; accessed 5 April 2004.
- ⁶⁵ Bullinger, 884.
- ⁶⁶ Morris, 57.
- ⁶⁷ Rienecker, 392.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ The noun in the accusative case serves as the direct object of the verb, while the noun in the dative case provides the indirect object. I account for the differences in the endings of these two occurrences of the same noun in this way.
- ⁷⁰ Morris, 59-60.
- ⁷¹ James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, *Syntax*, by Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 211.
- ⁷² Calvin, 114.
- ⁷³ David Holdaway, “Why Does It Hurt?” 1; available from www.PreachingToday.com; Internet; accessed 6 April 2004.
- ⁷⁴ Horton, 39.
- ⁷⁵ Guthrie, 555-56.
- ⁷⁶ Rienecker, 392.
- ⁷⁷ Horton, 38.
- ⁷⁸ Bullinger, 163.
- ⁷⁹ Ellis, 86.
- ⁸⁰ David Neff, “Mel Gibson Believes in Spiritual Warfare,” 1; available from www.PreachingToday.com; Internet; accessed 6 April 2004.
- ⁸¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. and aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 545.
- ⁸² James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 250.
- ⁸³ Calvin, 119-20.
- ⁸⁴ Godet, 163.
- ⁸⁵ Phillip Yancey, “Seeing the Unseen,” 1; available from www.PreachingToday.com; Internet; accessed 6 April 2004.

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