

Sunday, August 9, 2015—I Corinthians 1:17: Not With Wisdom of Words

Introduction/Review

- Last Sunday we continued our exposition of I Corinthians 1 by looking at the first half of verse 17, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.”
- As part of last Sunday’s message we made a series of contrasts between the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the 12 Apostles, and Paul. In summation, we observed the following points:
 - Water Baptism was Part of the Gospel of the Kingdom.
 - John is calling Israel to repent because the kingdom of heaven is at hand, i.e., near (Matt. 3:12-6).
 - John was the forerunner of the Messiah, i.e., the one preparing the way of the Lord (Matt. 3:1-6).
 - John was baptizing people with water in the Jordan River (Matt. 3:1-6).
 - John’s baptism was required for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4-5).
 - John’s message was called the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15).
 - Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom, which included water baptism (Matt. 4:17, 23).
 - Jesus Sent the 12 to Baptize.
 - Jesus commissioned the 12 and sent them to preach the gospel of the kingdom, which included water baptism (Matt. 10:5-8).
 - Under the so-called Great Commission, Jesus sent the 12 to baptize all nations (Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:15-16).
 - The 12, in fulfillment of their commission, teach baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).
 - Paul’s One Baptism
 - Christ did not send Paul the apostle of the Gentiles to continue Israel’s program and commission among the Gentiles. Rather, Paul was sent forth with a different message and purpose (Rom. 11:13).

- During the period of Israel diminishing recorded in the book of Acts Paul did baptize on a limited basis as part of God’s purpose to provoke Israel to jealously and cause them to understand that a great dispensational change had already occurred in God’s dealings with his favored nation (Rom. 11:11-12; I Cor. 1:17).
 - The baptism that matters today has nothing to do with water and is not made with hands. Rather it deals with the spiritual process whereby, God the Holy Spirit places the believer into the church the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-13, Col. 2:11-12, Rom. 6:3-4).
 - There is only one baptism that matters today in the dispensation of grace (Eph. 4:4-6).
- This morning we want to continue our exposition of the text by looking at the second half of I Corinthians 1:17.

I Corinthians 1:17

- **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.**
- As we just reviewed, in the first half of the verse we encounter a contrast; Christ did not send Paul to baptize, but to preach the gospel. So what was Paul to be more concerned with, baptizing or preaching the gospel? Obviously, preaching to gospel because that is what Christ sent him to do.
- The second half of verse 17 elaborates on how this preaching of the gospel was to be conducted. Paul’s preaching of the gospel was not to be done “with wisdom of words.”
- The Greek word translated “wisdom” by the King James translators is the word *sophia*. The word *sophia* occurs 51 times in the Greek text supporting the King James Bible and is rendered as “wisdom” all 51 times.
- According to *Strong’s Concordance* the basic definition of the Greek word *Sophia* is “wisdom, broad and full of intelligence; used of the knowledge of very diverse matters.” *Strong* goes on to further subdivide or delineate between two types of “wisdom:” 1) “the wisdom which belongs to men,” and 2) “supreme intelligence, such as belongs to God.”
- The wisdom which belongs to men
 - Acts 7:22—“the wisdom of the Egyptians”
 - II Corinthians 1:12—“not with fleshly wisdom”

- Colossians 2:23—“shew of wisdom”
- James 3:15-18—two types of wisdom: 1) “earthly, sensual, devilish” and 2) “wisdom from above”
- Supreme Intelligence, Such as Belongs to God
 - Acts 6:3—“full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom”
 - Acts 7:10—“and gave him favour and wisdom”
 - Ephesians 1:8—“abounded toward us in all wisdom”
 - Ephesians 3:10—“the manifold wisdom of God”
 - Colossians 1:9—“and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”
- I Corinthians 1:17—which type of “wisdom” is Paul talking about in verse 17? The wisdom of God or the wisdom of this world? Well with type of “wisdom” would make the cross of Christ of “none effect?” Obviously, it would be the wisdom of this world.
- Remember the context and setting. First, Corinth was second only to Athens in the ancient world when it came to Greek philosophy and learning. The Corinthians were steeped in a society and culture that placed a high premium on the “wisdom of words.”
- Second, recall from verse 12 that one of the man following factions that had developed in Corinth held the great Alexandrian orator Apollos as their chief authority.
 - Acts 18:24
- Paul was the exact opposite of Apollos in terms of physical presence and style.
 - I Corinthians 2:1
 - II Corinthians 10:10
- I Corinthians 1:17—this verse begins a lengthy section of I Corinthians where Paul is going to address the utter failure of the words wisdom when compared with the wisdom of God.
 - I Corinthians 1:19-22, 24, 30; 2:1, 4-7, 13; 3:19

- Contextually, this section comparing the “wisdom of God” with the “wisdom of this world” in chapters 1 through 3 is part of Paul’s beseeching of the Corinthians that began back in I Cor. 1:10 to be of the same mind and judgment.
- The culture and mindset of the Corinthians valued and esteemed the wrong things, i.e., eloquence, “wisdom of words,” and “wisdom of this world” over the “wisdom of God” regardless of how it was presented.
- I Corinthians 1:17—Christ did not send Paul to preach the gospel “with wisdom of words” because doing so risked making “the cross of Christ of none effect.”
- According to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* the English word “lest” means “that not; or for fear that.”
- The English phrase, “should be made of none effect” is a translation of one Greek word *kenoō*. The Greek word *kenoō* is variously rendered as follows by the King James translators:
 - Romans 4:14—“is made **void**” notice how that is coupled with the phrase “made of none effect” which is a translation of a different Greek word.
 - II Corinthians 9:3—“lest your boasting should be in **vain**”
- I Corinthians 1:17—is Paul worried that the “wisdom of words” will void or cancel out the power of the crosswork of Christ to save men from their sins? No, he is worried that the preaching of the gospel would be made of none effect via the “wisdom of words.” Why?
- I Corinthians 1:18—because the gospel Paul was preaching had everything to do with “the preaching of the cross.” The “wisdom of words” could never make of none effect what Christ accomplished on the cross, however, they could make its message of none effect if they interfere with the simplicity of the cross and its message.
- I Corinthians 2:5—our faith, as well as that of the Corinthians is not to stand “in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” The power of God is found in the preaching of the cross. Anything that obscures the message of the cross is to be banished regardless of how wise and eloquent it might appear.