

# APOLOGETICS

## The Role of the Word of God in Reaching the Lost

### Lesson # 4

---

So far we have looked at the effects of sin upon fallen humanity and the internal and external barriers which prevent people from coming to Christ. Next we looked at various apologetic methods, discussed their shortcomings and usefulness. We learned that the method of doing apologetics which best fits the Bible is the “presuppositional method of apologetics.” While all other methods presuppose certain truths, the commonality is that they presuppose ability in man to help or assist God in their salvation or arrive at God on their own unaided by the Holy Spirit and/or the Word of God. The presuppositional method, on the other hand, presupposes man’s inability to achieve or aid God in arriving at salvation. The presuppositional method assumes as of first importance that God exists and the Bible is His Word. Presuppositionalists also assert that the Bible teaches that a fallen man must first “believe in order to know.” Therefore, the Christian does not try to prove that God exists, or convince his hearers that the Scriptures are true and accurate before sharing the gospel. Instead, the truth of the gospel is declared, proclaimed, presented with boldness, clarity, and absolute confidence. Complete trust is placed not in man, but in the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God preached to bring sinners to repentance. In this lesson we will survey the true power behind the presuppositional method and why it is the method we should rely upon when seeking to evangelize the lost.

#### I. THE POWER OF GOD FOR REACHING THE LOST IS THE GOSPEL

The obvious question to ask at this point is, “What message is to be proclaimed?” or “What is the gospel?” This one question has been the subject of many volumes and we can only address it superficially. We will examine a few key texts, the first being **I Cor. 1:18-25**. In order to understand the text accurately it is helpful to have some understanding of the cultural background and context of **I Corinthians**.

The Corinthian church was steeped in Greek culture. The Greeks prided themselves in philosophy, logic, and rhetoric. In fact, it was a form of entertainment. People would gather to hear expert orators, rhetoricians, and debaters discuss issues using slick philosophies, logic, and oratorical finesse in an attempt to win the argument. Truth was rarely the issue. Powerful argumentation was what won the day. It was in this context that Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Corinthians. In writing **I Corinthians** Paul explains his methodology for reaching the lost. We will go through the text line by line and make some brief observations.

A. **I Cor. 1:18**, *“For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*

1. The phrase “*word of the cross*” is a reference to the gospel message which centers on Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. Paul might just as well used the term “gospel” or “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The gospel includes two primary categories of information.

- a. The first category of information concerns the person of Jesus Christ, who He is, that He is both God and man, born of a virgin, sinless, the Son of God, etc. When the gospel is preached, Jesus' person must be presented.
- b. The second category of information contained in the gospel is about what Jesus did or accomplished. This includes His never having sinned, His willingly offering Himself up as a sacrifice for sins, His atoning death on the cross, subsequent resurrection, etc. There has been great debate as to what exactly must be included in the message of the gospel preached. We learn from Scriptures that gospel messages with very minimal content have been used by God to save sinners such as, "*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*" (**Acts 16:31**).

This may seem like a message that hasn't enough information to earn the title of "the gospel," especially when one considers what else could be said. Yet even this short message includes the facts that Jesus is "Lord," Master, Sovereign, and King, that He is "Jesus," Yahweh's salvation, and "Christ" the anointed Messiah or deliverer of God, and that in believing these truths about Jesus, one can be saved or delivered from the consequences of one's sin. Clearly this is not all that could be said. The Bible furnishes proof that more detailed gospel presentations have also been used by God to bring sinners to salvation in Christ. Yet the point we wish to make is that the gospel, long or short, is "*the word of the cross*" which includes information about Jesus' person and Jesus' work.

2. We also see in **vs. 18** that there are two groups of people being contrasted, the first group is, "*Those who are perishing.*" The perishing hear the "*word of the cross*" but see the message as "*foolishness.*" Literally moronic, stupid, silly or idiotic. Their rejection of the gospel causes them to be in a state of perishing. They are headed for hell. The fact that hell is the destination for those who see the gospel as foolishness tells us that by contrast it is those who believe the gospel as true that escape hell. This is exactly what Paul goes on to say.
3. The second group of people mentioned are, "*those who are being saved.*" Saved from what? From the consequences of their sin which ultimately is the lake of fire where the holy wrath of God expresses itself upon unrepentant sinners for all eternity. Those who "*are being saved*" are being saved by one thing the "*word of the cross*" which to them is "*the power of God.*" Paul emphasizes here the process of being saved. Even after repenting and believing in Christ unto salvation we are still in process moving towards glory and freedom from the presence of sin.
4. The phrase "*the power of God*" is also critical as it tells us that there is only one power that can save sinners. The "*power of God*" is a functional

description of *“the word of the cross”* and explains that the *“word of the cross”* is the message which God uses to display His power in saving sinners.

B. **I Cor. 1:19**, *“For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and I will set aside the cleverness of the clever.”*

1. Here the phrase *“it is written”* is a synonym for the Word of God.
2. *“The wise”* and *“clever”* are those who think they are wise. They are those who scoff at the gospel, thinking it is foolish.
3. However, God *“destroys”* what the world thinks is wisdom by using the gospel to save sinners.

C. **I Cor. 1:20**, *“Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”*

Paul asks these rhetorical questions not because there were no wise men, scribes, or debaters to be found in Corinth but because none of them, without exception, came to know God through their worldly wisdom.

D. **I Cor. 1:21**, *“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”*

Here Paul contrasts two methods of trying to achieve salvation. There are those who rely on their own wisdom, reject the gospel, and are ultimately lost. And there are those who rely on God’s wisdom. What is perceived as foolish in the sight of man is the message God uses to bring sinners to salvation.

E. **I Cor. 1:22**, *“For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom. . .”*

As is already explained the Greeks loved wisdom, knowledge, and rhetoric. The Jews loved to see miracles, signs and wonders. Yet neither miracles from God nor worldly wisdom bring people to salvation. Jesus constantly did miracles yet was rejected by most. The Israelites saw miracles for forty years but the entire generation dropped dead in the wilderness because of unbelief (**Heb. 3:19**).

F. **I Cor. 1:23**, *“but we preach Christ crucified to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.”*

1. Here Paul sets up a contrast “*but*” with the signs and wisdom which Jews and Greeks seek. This is something different, something antithetical. Paul didn’t give either Jew or Greek what they wanted but what they needed to come to salvation in Jesus Christ “*we preached Christ crucified.*” This is another one of Paul’s synonyms for the gospel. Notice the two general categories of truth, “*Christ*” Jesus’ person, and “*crucified*” what Jesus accomplished or did.
2. Paul then describes the normal response to the preaching of the gospel. To most Jews, Christ crucified is a stumbling block, literally a scandal. It was highly offensive to hear that they participated in having their own long awaited Messiah crucified! Thus the gospel caused them to stumble. The Gentiles, on the other hand, saw it as foolishness. They didn’t believe in one God. They didn’t believe in the resurrection. They didn’t believe that Jesus was the only way and that all you had to do is believe in Him for salvation. That seemed ridiculous to them.

G. **I Cor. 1:24**, “*but Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God to those who are the called both Jews and Greeks.*”

1. Paul then contrasts the unbelieving responses of Gentiles and Jews with the message of Christ crucified which he describes again as “*the power of God,*” and “*the wisdom of God.*”
2. Yet God’s power of salvation realized through the gospel is not displayed in everyone but to a select group who “*are the called both Jews and Greeks.*” Thus God is pleased to save a remnant of both Jews and Greeks through the message preached.

H. **I Cor. 1:25** “*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*”

1. Here Paul speaks facetiously. He now describes the gospel as “*the foolishness of God.*” At least this is how unbelievers see it. Yet even though men may see the gospel as “*foolish*” it is in fact “*wiser than men*” for it is the means by which God saves sinners.
2. Paul also uses the phrase “*the weakness of God*” to describe the gospel which from the perspective of unbelievers, and even many who profess to know Christ, is not powerful enough to bring sinners to repentance. This is why men devise other methods for bringing people to Christ. They believe the gospel is weak, by itself, to bring people to salvation. However, Paul asserts what men perceive as “*the weakness of God*” is in fact “*stronger than men.*” It is stronger than men in that it confounds man’s wisdom and is in fact the means by which God saves sinners and it is stronger than men in that God’s grace is irresistible to those who are called.

3. We see in this text that the word of the cross, the gospel, Christ crucified, the foolishness of the message preached, and the weakness of God, is what God has chosen to save sinners. The gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit is what God uses to save sinners.
- I. **Rom. 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
- J. **I Cor. 2:1-5** *And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*
- K. **I Cor. 15:1-5** *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*
- L. **II Tim. 1:8-11** *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.*

## II. THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD

- A. **Isa 55:7-11** *Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So will*

*My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

- B. **I Tim. 4:12-16** *Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. 15 Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.*
- C. **II Tim. 3:14- 4:4** *You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*
- D. **Heb. 4:12** *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*
- E. **I Pet. 1:22-25** *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, 25 But the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you.*

- F. We learn from texts like those above that the gospel, being the Word of God, is energized by the Holy Spirit and this is why it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, whether Jew or Greek.

### III. APPLICATION OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

In order to fulfill the great commission we must work hard at evangelizing the lost. Many well-intentioned people with a passion for the lost have put a great deal of time and effort into presenting scientific evidences, historical proofs, and rational arguments in an attempt to prove God exists or the Bible is true. Their motives are pure, their goal is honorable, but their methodology is faulty. It assumes that we can, apart from the gospel and the Holy Spirit, bring people to saving faith. But as we have learned, salvation is a gift of God and is not “rational” to man. In fact, Paul says unbelievers see it as foolishness. Self-governing men want to earn their salvation. They want to do something to gain heaven. But God will have none of man’s efforts added to the work of Jesus Christ. God has chosen one simple method of saving the lost – the foolishness of the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified preached. The gospel is the one and only power that can overcome the internal and external barriers that keep men from coming to Christ.

This does not mean there is no place for creationism, historical proofs, rational arguments, and scientific evidences. These things can be used to encourage those who already know Christ. They can also be used to build friendships and encourage dialogue with the lost. ***But if we want someone to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, we must share the gospel message.*** We must use the wisdom of God which is foolish to men. If they are unwilling to believe the gospel, nothing we can do or say will bring them to salvation. It is only by God's Spirit working through God's Word which has the power to bring sinners to salvation in Christ Jesus. The gospel is the power of God for all who believe.

If you want to see people saved, don’t worry about the culture, don’t worry about the degree of their biblical knowledge, don’t try to convince people that God exists or that the Bible is God’s Word. Tell people about God, about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, explain the gospel and call sinners to repentance. This is our job as Christians. Though unbelievers may wish to argue with you or deny God exists or that the Bible is God’s Word, get the gospel out. That is the power of God to overthrow their arguments and excuses. Let God speak the message of the cross through you and then trust God to save whomever He will through that message.