

*1 Corinthians 2:1***PREFACE 1**

When I first thought about relating to you what I am about to, it occurred to me that it would be worthwhile, perhaps even edifying, but off-topic from our text. But then I realized that it did indeed fit in, because the “moral of the story” (as it were) involves interpreting the events of our lives by *God’s* wisdom, rather than the wisdom of this fallen world. And that is precisely what we have been studying for some time, and continue now in Chapter Two, in this extended passage from v1:18. [\[listen to the tale in the audio version of these notes\]](#)

PREFACE 2

This first paragraph of Chapter Two completes the three-part outline, suggested by D. A. Carson, of the letter beginning at v1:18.

- Verses 1:18 to 1:25 – The “Foolishness” of the Cross
- Verses 1:26 to 1:31 – The “Foolishness” of the Corinthian Church
- Verses 2:1 to 2:5 – The “Foolishness” of Paul’s Preaching

And again, “foolishness” must be placed in scare quotes. Paul is saying here that the *real* foolishness of human “wisdom” considers the cross, the church, and Paul’s preaching of the gospel to be foolishness. Because some in the Corinth church are beginning to listen to the “wisdom” of the world, they are beginning to question the gospel message. Now Paul, to close out this section, turns to the “foolishness” of his preaching when he was in their midst.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.**v1**

While it is not the best *literal* translation, the most recent NIV captures the idea of Paul’s statement in v1.

NIV: And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

This shows how v1:31 flows right into v2:1 without a break. Here is how Gordon Fee paraphrases the transition, beginning with v31:

By means of the cross and in choosing you, God in effect eliminated human boasting, so that the only boast left is in the Lord. And I, for my part, when I came to you, evidenced the same reality. I was totally stripped of self-reliance, so that God’s power could be manifested and so that your faith might rest on God alone.

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom,

Note: The *new* (2011) NIV is good: “not...with eloquence or human wisdom.” That’s the idea. But for some strange reason the original NIV translated this with the adjective “superior” (or excellence) modifying *wisdom*: “not...with eloquence or superior wisdom.” Not good.

Since v1:18 Paul has been speaking against human wisdom.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:19-20.

In v1, Paul is simply saying that when he came to the Corinthians and ministered God's word to them—the gospel—he came without “superiority of speech” (*logos*), or eloquence—which refers here to the *manner* or *form* of his presentation—and without (human, worldly) “wisdom” (*sophia*)—which refers to the *content* of his message.

In contrast to many preachers and evangelists today, Paul made no effort to impress his audience with glowing eloquence or intellectual gymnastics. He simply delivered the gospel to them in plain language. Just as we do not need to apologize for the gospel—Christ crucified—we do not need to dress it up in the plastic finery of contemporary society for it to do its work in the hearts of people.

In v1:17 Paul wrote, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.” When we try to remake and repackage the gospel into something that we think will make it more palatable for the sensibilities of modern man, we are effectively sucking out of the inherent power of the cross. The picture is of the well-meaning but misguided speaker standing in front of a group of unbelievers with the cross behind him. He drones on and on with happy talk, trying to translate the gospel into the clever, hip vernacular of the day, while all the time the cross is tapping him on the shoulder, saying, “Just move aside and let me do what I do.”

Somewhere we picked up the notion that as wonderful as it is, the gospel—the cross of Christ—has become a bit dated, and doesn't translate well into modern minds. But that notion comes from the lips of Satan. To the apostle Paul, “Christ crucified” was “the power of God and the wisdom of God (vv1:23-24).” We are to deliver, as Joe Friday was wont to say, “just the facts,” and then get out of the way to let the cross do its work.

proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

Commentators are split on the word translated “testimony” in this phrase. They do not argue over the meaning of the Greek behind it—*martyrion*—but they part company based on the original manuscripts being used for the translation. There are earlier manuscripts that have, instead of *martyrion*, *mysterion*, which would be translated “mystery.”

We need not feel forced to pick sides, or to delve deeper into the debate. Both could be true; in a few verses (v7) Paul will use *mysterion* explicitly in a different argument. So if some early manuscripts have it in v1, it does no violence to the overall meaning of the text. “Mystery” would refer to those things hidden before, but now revealed in Christ. Since all of our popular translations make it “testimony,” we will stick with that.

proclaiming = *katangelo* = from <G2596> (kata) and the base of <G32> (aggelos); to promulgate :- **declare, preach**, shew, speak of, teach.

testimony = *martyrion* = neuter of a presumed derivative of <G3144> (martus); **something evidential, i.e. (genitive) evidence given** or (special) the Decalogue (in the sacred Tabernacle) :- to be testified, testimony, witness.

When he showed up in Corinth, Paul's purpose was not to engage in impressive rhetoric or philosophy, but to declare, in simple, unaffected language “what God had done in Christ to effect salvation” (Fee).