

February 18, 2018 | Corinthians 2:1-5

The Body of Christ (5): Resting on God's Power

The Apostle Paul was a man for whom it can literally be said, *he was all about Jesus, and Him crucified*. Vs.2: **"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."** But *what does that mean PRACTICALLY?* WHAT DOES THAT MEAN PRACTICALLY FOR PAUL? AND WHAT CAN THAT MEAN PRACTICALLY FOR US, IN OUR DAILY LIVES?

Now, for one thing, I know what that *doesn't* mean. And to illustrate what it *doesn't mean* let me tell you about something that happened to me at the gym, lifting weights about two, three years ago. I was gonna start out with what they call t-bar rows. And what one does with t-bar rows is you take an Olympic barbell, you put weight plates on just one end of it. And you take the other end and anchor it on the floor in a corner someplace. And you load the *other end* with plates—like you see in this picture ... then you take an implement that's usually used for cable-pull-downs, sling that around the weighted end of the bar bell, then proceed with your rows.

I had already put one plate on, when in walked a very large, very muscular new friend of mine. He asked if he could work in with me on what I was doing. Naturally, I was delighted. Then we added a second plate. No problem. We added a third plate. A bit more weight to be sure, and he was impressed, but I usually finished with particular exercise with four plates in my final set. When I racked on the fourth plate, my friend, whom I guess you can say I admired and was probably secretly trying to impress, said to me something to the effect of, "Wow, four plates, if you can lift that ten times, you got me beat!" *Now, he didn't exactly put it that way... but he said words to that effect.*

... everything was fine up until about the eighth repetition ... going for ten ... I just did something like this (... move slightly...)—and that was it— **MY BACK WAS POOCHED!** ... my workout was done before it had barely started ... excruciating back pain for at least four or five days after that ... plus the constant ribbing from my beautiful wife and daughter.

I've been weight training for about 15 years now. I love it... I still do. But anyone who's lifted weights for any time will tell you ... it's not some "macho" thing you do ... instead, I like to called a continuously flirtatious dance ... with injury.

Why am I telling you all this? Because it is my humble opinion that human strength ... any human strength ... be it strength of mind, strength of determination or even strength of body ... any merely human strength ... is over-rated.

And do you know who'd agree with me? The Apostle Paul!

So he writes in vs.1, **“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.”** Paul goes on to say in vs.3, **“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words,”** The Corinthians loved dynamic, witty, talented speakers. They posted all their intellectual, athletic and personality heroes on Facebook and Instagram constantly.

But Paul's saying when he came into their midst, he didn't come with eloquence or superior wisdom nor wise and persuasive words. Instead, came “in weakness and fear, and with much trembling”. The translator J.B. Phillips, who himself had a personal history of brokenness and mental breakdown, translates vs.3, **“I was feeling far from strong, I was nervous and rather shakey.”**

Ever felt like that? Broken? Not exactly, as they say, on top of your game? Injured? Far from strong? Maybe it came from injury. Maybe it came from an even more personal injury of the heart, the soul or the mind. Perhaps you or someone you love has been dealt the hand of chronic pain or disease. Perhaps it isn't any of these, it's just that life has just gotten a bit too much for you—because of a significant loss or failure, or it's just simply the blues.

Scholars tell us that when Paul first came to influential, accomplished, trendy Corinth, he came a broken man—fresh off the boat of failure. It's a roller-coaster of a tale told in the book of Acts chapters 16 through 18, but after experiencing a promising beginning of ministry in Philippi, a lot of that work was smashed by fanatical opponents in that city. The same thing happened in Thessalonica and Berea, and then Paul had a little success in Athens, but not much. So New Testament scholar Leon Morris reports that by the time Paul gets “busy, proud, intellectual” Corinth, he arrives having experienced already a great deal of discouragement. In this, his second missionary journey, he'd already experienced a vicious flogging, imprisonment, and much, much opposition to his message and

his ministry. Furthermore, Morris surmises, Paul's companions in ministry at this point, Silas and Timothy, were occupied in Macedonia—so by the time Paul arrives in Corinth he comes most likely alone, and almost certainly lonely, broken, discouraged and weak.

Ever been there? I have. Many have. Many are living it right now. I love how Nick Foley recently put it. Foley, himself a committed Christian, fresh off his Superbowl win as a second-string quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles, put it well. He said that we all like the success stories, the first-stringers, the best, the strongest, the brightest, the most talented. And folks love to post their stories on social media. But, Foley commented, social media is a highlight reel—it isn't reality-- it's not even that honest, either. We aren't always at our best. Sometimes we're broken. Sometimes we fail. That's certainly the case here for the great Apostle Paul.

We may be tempted to think that after suffering, or even in the midst of suffering, even in the midst of failure, even in the midst of pain and brokenness that we cannot be used of God—that we're damaged goods! The fact is human strength really is over-rated! And God may well see us in the midst of that suffering or pain or failure and say to Himself, *Good! Now I've got you right where I want you!*

In his great book, *When Life Falls Apart*, I think Warren Wiersbe put it well when he wrote, "When you and I hurt deeply, what we really need is not an explanation from God but a revelation of God. We need to see how great God is: We need to recover our lost perspective on life. Things get out of proportion when we are suffering, and it takes a vision of something bigger than ourselves to get life's dimensions adjusted again." (W. Wiersbe, *When Life Falls Apart*, pg.53)

Where can we get that revelation? Where can we transform our *bitter* into *better*? Where can we go, as Lecrae says, to "switch them letters"? *Paul's answer is emphatic—LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE CROSS!!!*

Vs.2, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Isn't that amazing? For Paul, the pain, the failure, the discouragement didn't matter. What matter most of all was his *outright determination* to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. For Paul, it was *all about Jesus!* It's as if he's saying here, *the only thing that I made it definitely my business to know was Jesus Christ, and Him*

crucified. Now, scholars have made it abundantly clear that while Paul *says* in vs.1 and 3 that he did not preach with eloquence or superior wisdom, or that his message was not with wise and persuasive words, the fact of the matter is that there were many occasions when Paul *actually was quite eloquent*, when *he really did* use persuasive words. But what he means here is that he didn't make those skills the basis of his ministry amongst the Corinthians. Paul was rejecting all of that and relying solely and only on the simple, straightforward message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul *was preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. That participle in the Greek, *crucified*, in that little phrase "and Him crucified", is the same phrase used in 1:23. And it has the force of the fact that not only was Jesus *once* crucified for you and for me—but it points to the fact that Jesus *continues* to be the One in the character of the Crucified One. The crucifixion of Jesus is *permanent* and *on-going* in its efficacy and its effects. I don't know about you, but I mess up all the time. I can safely and confidently tell you that in no time in my life personally than now that I have been more serious to follow whole-heartedly after Jesus—I am more serious about living a holy, sold-out, all-out life for Him than I ever have before!

... but the truth is, the closer I get to the Light, the more I see my rough edges before God. Can anyone relate? ... the truth is ... my fight with sin continues ... truth is ... I mess up ... on a regular basis ... I'd love to tell you I got it all together ... truth is ... I don't ... and I need God's grace more than ever before. ... truth is ... I'm becoming somewhat of an expert at repenting ... because I need to be good at it ... because I need to do it so often. ... So what happens? ... what happens when I mess up *yet again* ... and through faith I go back to the foot of the Cross and say, ... *Lord, I messed up ... I sinned AGAIN! ... I'm so sorry! ... How I need Your grace and Your help!!!*

...what do you think God says? ... *Well, that's it for Carter! He's a lost cause ... NEXT!!!* ... no, ... no, ... He doesn't give up on me ... He won't give up on you either ... as we come to the Cross and repent in real sincerity ... He won't give up ... ever ... why? Because He's the Crucified One. Risen again?!? Yes!! Ascended to the Right Hand of the Father Almighty!?! You betcha He is!!! ... But He's ALSO, STILL the Crucified One ... His BLOOD STILL pleads and earns our forgiveness!! His death STILL atones! He IS AND WILL ALWAYS BE *THE REDEEMER!!!* And I fancy that the

Crucified One lovingly and passionately says to me and to every weak follower exactly what He told Paul in II Corinthians 12:9: **My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.** *When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look, and see Him there who made an end of all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.* (Charitie Lees Bancroft)

What's this got to do with you? What's this got to do with me? Without Jesus and Him crucified... we got nothing ... we got no salvation ... no forgiveness ... no relationship with God ... no peace ... no ... nothing. *Jesus is EVERYTHING!*

The great Scottish theologian and pastor P.T. Forsyth said that the church is *most* effective when "she did not lead the world, nor echo it", but when she "confronted it." Forsyth goes on to write, "The Christian preacher is not the successor to the Greek orator, but of the Hebrew prophet. It is one thing to have rouse or persuade people to do something. ... It is another to have to induce them to trust somebody and renounce themselves for him. ... The orator stirs men to [action], *the preacher invites them to be redeemed.*" (quoted in Keller, pg.96) Don't you wanna be *redeemed? Bought back? Purchased at a precious, precious, unspeakably precious price?*

Didn't matter if Paul was weak. Doesn't matter if you're weak. Doesn't matter if I'm weak (and trust me, I am *so weak!*). What matters is this: **For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.** *THAT'S* what matters most of all!!

Sinclair Ferguson laid it down like this: "Underline this thought: assurance, peace, access to God, knowledge that He is our Father, and strength to overcome temptation all depend on this—the Son of God took our flesh and bore our sins in such a way that further sacrifice for sin is both unnecessary and unintelligible. Christ died our death, and now in His resurrection He continues to wear our nature forever, and in it He lives for us before the face of God. He could not do more for us than He has done; we need no other resources to enable us to walk through this world into the next." And then Ferguson goes on to say, "You and I need a Savior Who is near us, is one with us, understands us. All of this the Lord

Jesus is Fix your gaze on this Christ and your whole Christian life will be transformed." (S. Ferguson, *In Christ Alone*, pg.47)

He uses old language, so we'll leave in on the screen for you to really digest it. Samuel Rutherford said this of the Cross: "Those who can take that crabbed tree handsomely upon their back, and fasten it on cannily, shall find it such a burden as wings unto a bird, or sails to a ship." (quoted in Ferguson, pg.181)

So ... *PRACTICALLY* what could all this mean for our own lives, and even for the life of our church? ***It can mean enabling the wonderful ability of RESTING ON GOD'S POWER as opposed to merely depending on human strength.*** Look with me at vs.4 & 5. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul writes, ***"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words," but then he goes on to say, "but with a demonstration*** (I'm emphasizing that for a reason, we're going to come back to that) ... ***but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."***

... Why would Paul do all this? Come to them not with strength but in weakness and much trembling? Why doesn't he sweat the fact that he looks weak? And then, (we're going to get back to *this* as well!), why change up his style? He *had the ability* to use eloquence and superior wisdom and persuasive words in his preaching and teaching—but he abandoned all that for the simple gospel message of nothing but Christ and Him crucified. Why would he do that?

Look with me once again at vs.4 & 5:

It was all so that there would be ***"a demonstration of the (Holy) Spirit's power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom, but on God's power."*** That little word in the Greek for *demonstration* actually communicates *inconvertible proof* in a court of law. So in an argument you may contend that to get "D", you have to establish "A", "B", & "C"—and you may not be so sure about A B & C *to get* "D", but you kinda get talked into it. But to reflect the kind of power and force behind this word "demonstration", "A", "B" & "C" aren't things anyone has to get talked into—they're obvious! It's as plain as the nose on your face!! So it's *gotta* be "D", *it has to!* You got no other choice!!! It's rock solid proof!!!! It isn't just that there's a smoking gun! No, the gun's smoking, it's all on video surveillance in HD, the victim is groaning "why'd you do it?", and the

culprit is still standing there with a hot gun in his hand growling, *'cause you double-crossed me you dirty rotten creep!* ... it's an open and shut case.

So ... why sweat looking weak? Why resolve to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified? ***For an incontrovertible DEMONSTRATION of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.***

... *One more reason* ... and if we don't mention this, we're not being faithful to the Word this morning ... did you notice vs.5? Why was Paul doing all this? For the glory of Jesus, to be sure. But there's another reason. Paul writes, ***so that YOUR FAITH might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.*** *YOUR FAITH* ... he's talking about the faith of the Corinthians here. In other words, Paul's doing all this *for others*. In fact, that motivation runs through our entire text—it runs through the entire New Testament to boot!

But look with me at our present passage: ... ***I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed TO YOU the testimony of God ... I resolved to know nothing WHILE I WAS WITH YOU except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came TO YOU in weakness and fear ... but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that YOUR FAITH might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.***

It is *all about others* ... we serve a Risen and Crucified Savior Who said, ***Do unto OTHERS what you would have them do to you.*** (Matthew 7:12) It is *all about others!* ... *for the saving of many lives!!!* A couple of weeks ago we shared a bit of a Holy Spirit moment together when we talked about the importance of unity and setting aside our own self-interest to further serve others and lift up and glorify Jesus. And we quoted that memorable saying of Thomas Merton who said, *To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell.* (Wiersbe, pg.57)

This morning I'd like to build on that a bit. Right now our leadership is looking very seriously at changing up our worship service and the order of worship. I can assure you, using a blended style of worship using both contemporary and traditional music *will stay*. The organ *stays*. The piano *stays*. But we're going to change up our worship. Why change? Why would be upset the apple cart? This is why we need to change ... we

need to change *for others*. We need to get better at *reaching the next generation*. We should strive to be a hundred year church. We need to strive to do things, conduct our worship, get serious about evangelism, get serious about discipling others, get serious about actively supporting Isaac and our youth and young families ministries so that we can be used of God *to raise up future generations of Christ-followers and Christ-exalters for the saving of many, many MORE lives!* The changes may not come for another couple of months or so ... but please pray for us, please *support us* in the midst of these changes because *we're doing them for the sake of OTHERS*. Why did Paul change? Why did he not sweat looking weak? Why did he opt for the simple yet powerful message of the gospel of Jesus and Him crucified? He did it for the glory of God—make no mistake about it. But he also did it *for Corinth ... he did it FOR OTHERS. ... so that YOUR FAITH might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.*

... I love weight training ... I love everything about weight training. But most of all, I'm weight training not to look all big and tough (though admittedly, that may happen). I do it so I can be a healthy Chris Carter ... for my wife, for my family, for my church, ... but most specifically and most importantly ... for the glory of God. I like to think I'm doing it *FOR OTHERS*. So much so that Pastor Leon at the Pentecostal church has *repeatedly* offered me to use their church gym in their basement for free. But I just as consistently turn him down. Why turn that down? More importantly, why fork out the four or five hundred dollars a year to work out at a community gym? Because over years I have had many and varied significant conversations with some very big, very tough looking people—people I wouldn't normally have the opportunity to befriend cooped up in a church some place—and with God's Spirit strengthening me, I've had the great opportunities to tell them that God Almighty loves them, that Jesus died for them, and that He is the *only* way, truth and life. ... And I just won't want to give that up.

Practically speaking ... what can we do, not for us, but for the people *beyond these walls, ... what can we do FOR OTHERS? WHAT CAN WE DO FOR PARRY SOUND? ... FOR THE GLORY OF JESUS? ... FOR THE SAVING OF MANY, MANY LIVES?* Folks ... **to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified is what it's all about.**