

7 QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER BIBLE UNDERSTANDING

1 CORINTHIANS 2:4-5

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*4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.
1 Corinthians 2:4-5 ESV*

1. WHAT DID IT MEAN TO THE ORIGINAL READERS?

If you start with today you're twenty centuries too late.

Paul is reminding the Corinthian believers of how his original message of salvation came to them. He's contrasting his message with what would have been very familiar to Corinthian believers: the man-made religions of the Greeks and Romans, especially the state sponsored worship of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Aphrodite's temple was located in Corinth and was a major cultural and economic driver for the city. It shaped their identity as a city.

In contrast to another man-made religion, Paul reminds the believers that he didn't simply introduce a new idea for them to consider, he proved the reality of the power of God through the Holy Spirit. What he specifically did, whether a healing or other miracle, is left unsaid. The account of Paul's time in Corinth (Acts 18) doesn't record a specific miracle but does note that his time was extensive and fruitful there. Whatever demonstration(s) Paul did was powerful enough to be referred to several years later.

The purpose behind the demonstration of the Spirit's power was so that their faith would not rest in Paul or even his message, but in God. Paul was fallible and sinful and could have done something later in life that might have discredited him or his work. Paul wanted to ensure that the faith of the Corinthian believers did not rest on a man or a personality, but on the unchanging, eternal power of God. That is a lesson very much needed today in the Christian culture of celebrity pastors and their ministries.

GREEK WORD OF THE WEEK

ἀπόδειξις (*apodeixis*) is the Greek word translated "demonstration" and is fascinating in that this is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. This makes it a little harder to translate without Bible cross references but we get an idea from other Greek writings of the day. This word is a noun and means a pointing out, a showing as by argument, a demonstration, proof. The way the Greek sentence literally reads "a demonstration of Spirit and power." The Gospel cannot simply be spoken; it has to be lived, proved, demonstrated.

2. WHAT'S THE CONTEXT?

Scripture without context makes no sense.

The context for 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 is a larger conversation Paul is having about the foolish nature of the 'wisdom' of the world. God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. So when Paul references wise and persuasive words, it's the greater understanding of worldly thoughts, ideas and philosophies. Their faith is based on something else entirely because their faith is not man-made, it comes from God directly, proven by by demonstrations of power that are unexplainable yet undeniable.

3. WHAT TIMELESS TRUTHS ARE THERE?

Since the Word doesn't change it still matters today.

- For our preaching and teaching to have effectiveness, it must be accompanied by and demonstrated with power.
- What our faith is built on/rests in determines the strength and longevity of that faith. If it is built on worldly wisdom or a human personality, it is built on shifting sands.
- The power promised in Acts 1:8 to believers is absolutely foundational to preaching, witnessing, faith and salvation. That will never change; power is continually needed today.

4. WHERE ELSE IN SCRIPTURE DOES IT SAY THIS? *The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture.*

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses. *Acts 1:8 ESV*

20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. *1 Corinthians 4:20 ESV*

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. *1 Corinthians 1:17 ESV*

5. HOW DOES IT APPLY TODAY? *Information without application becomes stagnation.*

- There is a stark warning not to build a gospel message presentation based around worldly wisdom, ideas or techniques.
- Much of the recent emphases in evangelism and evangelism training has been built around memorizing a prepared presentation. No emphasis is given on a demonstration of the Spirit's power. This is a direct contradiction of 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.
- Pastors must be extremely wary and must actively work not to build a ministry based around their own personality and gifts. Jesus must remain the focus and the power.

6. HOW SHOULD THIS CHANGE THE WAY I LIVE IN COMMUNITY? *The Bible comes alive in me when I live it in community.*

- What (if any) evangelism training have you had as a Christian? Were you taught how to demonstrate the Spirit's power or simply to present the arguments for the gospel?
- A practical way to demonstrate the Spirit's power is through exercising your spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12). What are your spiritual gifts? How can you be more intentional to discover them, develop them and leverage them for the Kingdom?

7. HOW CAN MY LIFE GET BETTER BECAUSE OF THESE VERSES? *If I trust God and step in faith, what kind of life will God create?*

The world is sick and tired of hearing another argument for Christianity. They've heard them all before. As logical as rational arguments might seem, they have little power to change a stubborn human heart. If we as Christians began to live in and demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit through our lives, that would be the spark that would set the world ablaze for Jesus. Since the easiest onramp to demonstrating the Spirit's power is our spiritual gifts, if we discovered, developed and leveraged our spiritual gifts, the gates of Hell would crumble before the power of the Spirit demonstrated in our lives!