

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at [pastorpat@waukeshabible.org](mailto:pastorpat@waukeshabible.org).

**Date:** March 29, 2009

**Title:** The Word of the Cross

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5

**Theme:** The Word of the cross “proclaims release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, it sets free those who are oppressed, and proclaims the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18, 19).

**Author:** Patrick J. Griffiths ©2009

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

## The Way of His Cross

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**Theme:** The Word of the cross “proclaims release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, it sets free those who are oppressed, and proclaims the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18, 19).

### **Introduction:**

Our passage contains this vital statement, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). Verse 17 speaks of “cleverness of speech.” The King James Version translates this “wisdom of words.” Verse 18 explains the difference between God’s word and that of the world by means of a contrast. What the cross says about life and God’s worldview is markedly different than that of those who absent God from their thinking.

Emphasis is placed on the “word.” It forces us to reflect back and remember the word of God speaking and it was so (Gen. 1) and in John 1:1 when our author tells us the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.

Throughout our narrative the Greek word “logos” is used. Logos is an idea impregnated with meaning and significance. One author provides the historical development of the word in various cultures and philosophies and concludes,

“If it is true that there is a single, unifying principle eternally at work in the universe, through which all things come into being and by which all things are ordered, one would expect that it would be attested to by other sources. That is in fact the case. The Logos became flesh at a particular time in history: about 4 BC; in a particular place: Palestine; as a particular man: Jesus Christ; and for a particular purpose: to reconcile humankind with God through his human life, death, and resurrection. <http://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Personal/logos.html>

The Word of God is that from which, through which, and for which all things created exist. It is this Word that makes sense of all things existing. In the absence of this Word the world, the flesh, and the devil concoct their own word to explain from which, through which, and for which all things created exist. These two Words are antithetical and competing. They cannot and will not co-exist.

Last week we noted how those who come to the cross by way of His cross change in their identity, their priority and in their economy. Christ changes our world. He quite literally turns it upside down or perhaps for the first time right side up. Unfortunately we fail to understand what it means to be Christian. The world, the flesh, and the devil have subtly crept in and changed the Christian into something they were never meant to be. There appears to be no resistance, only conformity, in our stance as Christians. We have placed the convenience of the individual and the freedom of the will over the

sanctity of life. We close our eyes to injustice, oppression, and the contrasting pictures of greed, gluttony, poverty, and famine.

When we read that “the cross is foolishness to those who perish, but to those who believe it is the power of God”, we tend toward disbelief. It is hard to stay the course and to maintain the purity of the gospel. Yet this is what we who are saved are called to do. N.T. Wright correctly notes how, “The first challenge comes from within, in the temptation to water down the message of the cross so that it becomes less offensive, more palatable to the ordinary sensible mind.” “The Word of the Cross,” 1 Corinthians 1.18 [Isaiah 61.1-9; James 5.13-16a; Luke 4.16-20]. A sermon at the Sung Eucharist with the Blessing of Oils and Renewal of Ordination Vows, Durham Cathedral, Maundy Thursday, 5 April 2007 by the Bishop of Durham, Dr N. T. Wright. [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/sermons/Word\\_Cross.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/sermons/Word_Cross.htm)

What is “The Word of the Cross?” The Word of the cross is Christ-crucified. But the death of Christ also presupposes His real burial and physical resurrection. Yet this Word **from God about God for God** is not to be held in the abstract. It is not merely intellectual assent. It has flesh and bones. “What is the Word of the Cross? It is the supreme **Work** of God for men. When God speaks, His word is always more than a declaration. Something happens.” (<http://www.abkog.org/lamont.htm>. Sermon preached by Daniel Lamont, Helensburgh, Scotland, 1920). The Word of the cross calls across cultural taboos, social mores, and political parties. The Word of the cross has something to say to where we live and how we live. The Word of the cross speaks to . . .

- Racial inequality
- Religious bigotry
- Abortion
- Euthanasia
- Infanticide
- Chauvinism
- Feminism
- Greed
- Gluttony
- Immorality
- Gender inequality
- Political oppression
- Judicial injustice
- Welfare states
- Government induced poverty
- Marriage
- Parenting
- Living and Dying

The Word of the cross speaks to . . .

- Relativism
- Pragmaticism
- Materialism
- Consumerism

Every area of life is sacred. How we govern, who governs, and what we stand for as a government is not outside of the Christian's responsibility and influence. Christians have no biblical right to overthrow governments on the one hand or silently concede from the public arena on the other. If we are not careful we will portray a false Christ to the unbelieving world. It is equally possible that in our causeless Christianity we place ourselves in a position of becoming the target of concentrated persecution; simply because we failed to live biblical Christianity. Regardless as to what governments do we have a voice as to the pressing concerns of our unbelieving community. The word of the cross speaks to all of the issue presently engaging our world and will continue to speak to these concerns 200 years from now if the Lord delays His return.

The Christian as a follower of Christ speaks the truth about the world in which they live. There is a worldview that is Christian. We've studied what our Lord's worldview was in Mark's Gospel. What is a worldview?

"A worldview refers to a comprehensive conception of the world from a specific standpoint. A Christian worldview, then, is a comprehensive conception of the world from a Christian standpoint. An individual's worldview is his "big picture," a harmony of all his beliefs about the world. It is his way of understanding reality. A worldview is the basis for daily decisions and is therefore extremely important."

<http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-worldview.html>

Yet a great tragedy has befallen the Church of Jesus Christ. We have so individualized the faith that we fail to comprehend the concept of community.

"Ancient Christianity was not the privatized faith it has become today. Today the influence of secularization has pushed the Christian narrative away from public matters. Christian faith, having become private and narcissistic, has very little influence in the university, the marketplace, law, politics and even ethics. It no longer plays a significant role in the foundational matters of Western civilization." (Robert E. Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?: Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals*, [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2008], 67). It is time for us to remember who we are.

The Word of the cross "proclaims release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, it sets free those who are oppressed, and proclaims the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19). It is the Word of the cross that brings hope to the depressed, healing to the diseased, and wholeness to the dysfunctional. It is the Word of the cross that declares sinners righteous, reconciles enemies, accepts outcasts, redeems slaves, satisfies wrath, forgives the unworthy, blesses the undeserving and adopts the orphaned. The Word of the cross declares that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:14, 15).

**THE BIG PICTURE:**

- March 1 - The Relationship of the Cross to the Hero's Work  
 March 8 - The Wisdom of the Cross  
 March 15 - The Work of the Cross  
 March 22 - The Way of the Cross  
**March 29 - The Word of the Cross**  
 April 5 - The Weight of the Cross  
 April 12 - The Wonder of the Cross

**Its Eternal Value:**

There will be no heaven without Jesus and no hell with Jesus. He is the element on which all things rest. Whatever we crave or desire, He answers to.

**The Problem:**

Like the unbelieving, His people often reject the simplicity and sufficiency of the cross for the ways of man. His people tend to silence the Word from the Cross.

**The Storyline:**

God has written into His story everything that exists. All of the turmoil caused by living under the curse is addressed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The tragedy that unfolds around us each and every day is a part of His one story. Everything and everyone has been masterfully woven into His narrative. There can be competing narratives since the rebel seeks to write His own story, but all of it from the martyr's death to the rebel's tyranny is a part of this one story.

**Questions:**

1. What is the word of the cross to those who are perishing?
2. What is the word of the cross in contrast to in verses 17, 18?
3. What is meant by "word"?
4. How have you seen the word of the cross compromised through cultural accommodation?
5. Does the word of the cross have something to say to our most pressing needs?
6. What do you believe this word is to racial inequality, abortion, greed, immorality, religious pluralism, and ideological relativism?
7. Does the word of the cross speak to our government, its people, and the economy?
8. What does the word of the cross say concerning God's priority?
9. What is God's priority? Do you believe that part of our problem is a reversal of God's priority and that man has made himself the center of his existence?
10. What does the word of the cross say concerning man's inability?
11. How significant is man's inability when addressing the concerns caused by living under the curse?
12. What does the word of the cross say concerning Christ sufficiency?
13. How sufficient is Christ in addressing the concerns of humanity at large?
14. Is Christ speaking only to the salvation of souls or does He have something to say to those who suffer physically and emotionally?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that He speaks to life under the curse.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose His word above our own and that of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His word rather than our own.

Our present passage was considered earlier in our study as we consider the wisdom of the cross. Here we are picking up the idea of the word of the cross. The cross speaks to many things. I desire for us to note three of those areas. First, the cross speaks the truth about God's priority; secondly the cross speaks the truth about man's inability, and finally, the cross speaks the truth about Christ's sufficiency. We will begin by noting the truth about God's priority.

### **Outline:**

#### I. The Word of the Cross speaks the truth about God's priority

I believe this is the point in verses 29 and 31.

<sup>29</sup> "so that no man may boast before God. . . <sup>31</sup> so that, just as it is written, 'LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD'" (1 Cor. 1:29, 31).

I believe this is the same idea in 2 Corinthians 4:7 when Paul speaks of Christ within the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:7).

If God wrote the story, then all of this is a part of His one purpose. God designed to do what was necessary to bring Him glory. His glory is His priority. He is His priority. We cannot afford to live discombobulated lives. Remember that everything is from Him, through Him, and for Him (Col. 1:16). Everything will come together and make sense as it is placed in Him (Eph. 1:10). Nothing exists that will fail in fulfilling this end. Everyone and everything will bring Him glory. Those who reject Him will bring Him glory in the displaying of His justice; those who receiving Him will bring Him glory in the displaying of His grace. Creation has been redeemed from the curse and reconciled to its Creator. Creation is the arena in which God's glory is displayed. True art provides a canvass for the glory of God to be portrayed.

You and I are not the ultimate means or end. God is. Our happiness is neither God's highest good nor His ultimate goal. God is.

Everything God wrote into His story is for the purpose of unfolding His immeasurable person and the mystery and majesty of His unfathomable purpose. Biblical Revelation and General Creation all tell this one story. The cross speaks of God's priority. The cross tells us of a holy, just, gracious, and merciful God. The cross speaks of His immeasurable person and the mystery and majesty of His unfathomable purpose. What the cross says about these things is true and in direct contrast to the word of the world.

## II. The Word of the Cross speaks the truth about Man's inability

The cross exists because there was and is a rebellion by the created against their Creator. The cross is God's corrective. All of the sins noted earlier are expressions of the rebel to correct the problem. Each inadequacy highlights inability. All of our sins are Christ-less and cross-less responses. Although we might have considered responses to each of the following ideas, I really wonder how we have thought out each of these areas as it relates to the person and work of Jesus Christ?

- Racial inequality
- Religious bigotry
- Abortion
- Euthanasia
- Infanticide
- Chauvinism
- Feminism
- Greed
- Gluttony
- Immorality
- Gender inequality
- Political oppression
- Judicial injustice
- Welfare states
- Government induced poverty
- Marriage
- Parenting
- Living and Dying

Until and only when we turn to the person and work of Jesus Christ can any of these "issues" be addressed correctly. Our text tells us that the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. It is to our shame that we allow the world to think for us in each of these areas. If we have no biblical response, then perhaps it is because we have refused to think for ourselves. Our non-thinking condition is a blight to the image of God in us. He made us to think critically and to learn eternally. Do not tell me you do not like to read. You will read whatever holds your attention or you consider important. If you read only 15 minutes a day, you can read 20-30 books a year. Some of you are masters at figuring out mechanical problems. Nothing is too hard for

you. We need to put that creative power to work in wrestling with the issues of our day from a biblical perspective.

Robert Webber correctly notes how, “Social action is an essential aspect of the church’s work in the world – peace and justice and caring for the poor, widows, orphans, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized arise from true faith. But these actions are to result from the embodiment of God’s full narrative, not from a Christianity accommodating itself to Western culture’s doctrine of progress and utopia.” (Robert E. Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?: Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals*, [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2008], 85).

Perhaps you might accuse me of being naïve. Perhaps rightly so you would call me out and say I am immature, inexperienced, and ignorant and perhaps I might concur, but this one thing I know, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7) and that “in Christ are stored all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

God has a response to all of our misguided answers and it is Christ.

### III. The Word of the Cross speaks the truth about Christ’s sufficiency

<sup>17</sup>“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. <sup>18</sup>For **the word of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:17, 18).

“For I determined to know nothing among you except **Jesus Christ, and Him crucified**” (1 Cor. 2:2).

In this initial passage Paul uses synonymous parallelism to clarify and expose what the word “gospel” means. The gospel (v. 17) is the word of the cross (v. 18). And the word of the cross is “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). As Christians, our first response is to Christ. To whom or to what do we turn when we are faced by the life taking demons of hell?

What do I do in the face of cancer?  
 What do I do in the face of unemployment?  
 What do I do in the face of alcoholism?  
 What do I do in the face of irreconcilable differences?  
 What do I do in the face of divorce?  
 What do I do in the face of worry?  
 What do I do in the face of a consuming anxiety?  
 What do I do in the face of a rebellious child?  
 What do I do in the face of foreclosure?  
 What do I do in the face of war?  
 What do I do in the face of premature death?  
 What do I do in the face of adult care?

What do I do in the face of mounting debt?  
 What do I do in the face of loneliness?  
 What do I do in the face of rejection?  
 What do I do in the face of uncontrollable anger?  
 What do I do in the face of spousal abuse?  
 What do I do in the face of neglect?  
 What do I do in the face of Racial inequality?  
 What do I do in the face of Religious bigotry?  
 What do I do in the face of Abortion?  
 What do I do in the face of Euthanasia?  
 What do I do in the face of Infanticide?  
 What do I do in the face of Chauvinism?  
 What do I do in the face of Feminism?  
 What do I do in the face of Greed?  
 What do I do in the face of Gluttony?  
 What do I do in the face of Immorality?  
 What do I do in the face of Gender inequality?  
 What do I do in the face of Political oppression?  
 What do I do in the face of Judicial injustice?  
 What do I do in the face of Welfare states?  
 What do I do in the face of Government induced poverty?  
 What do I do in the face of excessive compulsive disorders?  
 What do I do in the face of shattered expectations and dreams?  
 What do I do in the face of a failing marriage?  
 What do I do in the face of problematic parenting and rebellious children?  
 What do I do in the face of both Living and Dying?

Please hear me out. I am not negating anything that God might use to bring deliverance to those who suffer, but there is an ultimate. What do we do? We call out, "Lord Jesus, Son of God, help me!" Friend, no matter what we do or to whom we turn, we must ultimately come to Jesus. He alone and only is sufficient for these things.

In Robert Webber's most excellent book, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?*, he argues that Radical Islamic Fundamentalism and American Narcissism stand as dual threats to the Christian Faith. He proves convincingly that modern Christianity has been so saturated by recent history and present American culture that Christianity is currently powerless to define morality for and meaning to life. Let us listen as he calls the reader to an authentic faith.

"The Radical Islamic way is a completely different paradigm [i.e., way of thinking] of thought than any of the Western paradigms. They skipped the modern paradigm and were never affected by the attempt to prove their faith through reason and science. Therefore, to assume that they will reason with Western Christians and come to tolerate our paradigm and way of thinking is futile. It is story versus story. Holy Spirit versus *jihad*. Standing up to be counted is not just standing for Jesus but for the whole story of God, of which Jesus is the centerpiece. But that is not easy in a post-Christian,

postmodern, neo-pagan world.” (Robert E. Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?: Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals*, [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2008], 87, 88).

The cross has a word for life under the curse. “It is important to remember that a worldview is comprehensive. It affects every area of life, from money to morality, from politics to art. True Christianity is more than a set of ideas to use at church. Christianity as taught in the Bible is itself a worldview. The Bible never distinguishes between a “religious” and a “secular” life; the Christian life is the only life there is. Jesus proclaimed Himself “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) and, in doing so, became our worldview.” <http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-worldview.html>

Let the world call us fools and weak; so be it. Let us settle once and for all that we are Christians and as such followers of the Lamb, a community of faith, the brotherhood and sisterhood of the cross. Let us not shirk nor shrink from this towering object. Let us embrace it; let us embrace Him. I am Christian, see me stand.

### **Shepherding the Sheep** (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

1. Do you and God have the same priority?
2. Are you still placing your confidence in self or have you been able to see just how spiritually bankrupt you truly are?
3. Is Christ enough or do you seek more?
4. Jesus Christ is enough in this life and in the life to come. He is not only necessary, but enough.
5. It is only as we place Him as the priority that we will find peace and rest in this life and in the life to come.
6. THINK, CHOOSE, and FEEL.