

# The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

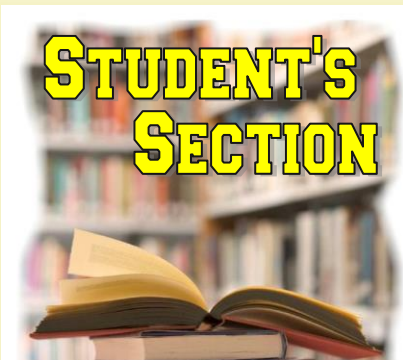
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~ All articles are written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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## The False Necessity of Eloquence

--By Drake Faulk

Although I'm not actively pursuing a career in anything remotely relating to ministry, over the course of my time in Seminary I have preached a few times. I haven't had many experiences with it, but the ones I have, haven't been very encouraging. The newness of public speaking, the feeling of duty to speak the truth, the fear of getting something wrong, and the added pressure of familial legacy have caused me to fear and not enjoy preaching. Though a few have told me otherwise, the biggest factor in my reluctance to preach is simply that I don't feel I'm a very good speaker.

This fear of mine is indicative of a widely held sentiment, in all matters of public speaking - that is the idea that to be an effective and persuasive speaker one must be eloquent of speech. We judge the quality of our Presidential candidates by the impact of their speeches

rather than their policies and qualities of leadership. We judge our teachers and professors by the sharpness of their tongues rather than the content of their lessons. In the same way, we judge our preachers by the eloquence of their speech instead of more important features.

This is not to say at all that speaking ability is a bad thing. Quite the contrary. The ability to speak is a gift, even God and the apostles believed that, but the theatrics of a message are only decorative. They are tools to connect with your audience to convey an idea effectively, many of which can be learned.

George Lucas, the creator of Star Wars, was once asked about the special effects in his movies and how heavily he relies on them. He said, "*Special effects are just a tool, a means of telling a story. People have a tendency to confuse them as an end to themselves. A special effect without a story is a pretty boring thing.*" In just the same way, an eloquent speaker is just as pointless without knowledge and character. A well-spoken message that lacks any content is useless.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is responding to many accusations the people of Corinth had about his sincerity and apostleship.

One of the things that was brought into question was his speaking ability. Apparently, to the Corinthians

(and admitted by Paul himself, though he likely sold himself short as a man of great humility) Paul was not the great orator they expected after reading his letters.

In their Hellenistic culture, and in those days in particular, humility and meekness were seen as weakness and flaw in character. The Greeks clearly admired men more for their speaking ability and the grandiosity of their presence rather than their content. In a way, things have not really changed.

Appeal to emotion and grandiose displays of speech have always and will always capture the hearts and minds of the easily manipulated, the young, the unfocused, the unscrupulous, and the downtrodden. Look at every cult throughout history. Look at most mega-church leaders and their devoted members. Look at Nazi Germany. While addressing these concerns (very sarcastically) Paul shows three distinct characteristics of great preachers that he, and every effective and worthwhile speaker possess.

### Knowledge

First, great speakers have great knowledge. Earlier in the previous chapter, Paul stated how the Corinthians considered his speech "contemptible". I am told this word is translated from the Greek word "*Exoutheneo*" which means "to be utterly despised" or "to be counted as nothing". Paul's response to their criticisms of his speaking ability is short and concise. Paul replies,

“Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge.” Though Paul was not oratorically trained to the liking of the Greeks, Paul shows that he is not lacking in content.

Though Paul was admittedly not the best speaker, he had always been an effective one. This was evident from his effect not just on the Corinthian church but on all Christianity. Paul found this statement so ridiculous he barely responded to it.

Paul had been taught under Gamaliel and under Jesus Christ Himself. His apostleship was clear and obvious. Paul wanted to impress upon the people of Corinth that a speaker's value was in their content and their knowledge of the Scriptures. We see many politicians and celebrities on television every day that speak eloquently and vividly and yet say nothing at all. A truly effective preacher, one God shines on and blesses, is one that knows the Scriptures and seeks the truth to the best of his ability.

### **Humility, Service, and Generosity**

Second, a great preacher is one of great generosity, sincerity, and one with a servant's heart. God has told us that those who humble themselves shall be exalted. Paul went out of his way to show his integrity and sincerity through his life and style of ministry. He worked as a tent maker to survive instead of taking money from the churches.

In the Greek culture, one that survived through the work of his hands and great toil did not show the nobility and majesty they expected of an apostle. They considered that sort of work beneath such a holy man. Paul showed how hypocritical they were with this accusation, as they and others in the church falsely claimed to be apostles and took money for their false teachings.

An effective preacher is a man that seeks to elevate the Church and above all Christ, instead of himself. Much like the Greeks, we today find

small town preachers and speakers less “successful” as the mega church leaders with their private jets, expensive houses, and large attendances. Paul dashes this misconception. Our focus and goal should be on magnifying Christ, His Church, and serving our fellow brothers and sisters in service to that goal.

Those that believe that great speakers are exclusively the wealthy, the luxurious, the well-spoken, and the well-liked, are missing the point entirely and likely have an ulterior motive.

A truly effective speaker is one known for selfless acts of service and great kindness (one that works and sacrifices for the good of his flock; one that sees himself as an equal to his brothers and sisters in Christ.) Paul humbled himself so that the Church of Corinth could be exalted. A great preacher is one that puts the needs of Christ and his church above his own.

### **Of Christ Not of Satan**

Thirdly, a great preacher ought to be a man of God, not of Satan. What do I mean by this? This idea builds upon the ideas of the last principle I mentioned: the principle of truly being a follower of Christ and having the right intentions for the Church.

Paul, at the end of this section, lays into his critics calling them false brothers and not truly of Christ. They claimed to be apostles and teachers of the truth, but their true motivation was not to be aligned with the will of God, to ensure growth of the church, or the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but rather the inflation of their own egos and wallets. They were serving Satan not Christ.

Just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive us, false teachers project an attractive shiny veneer of faith and holiness on the surface but work only in service of themselves. Their goal is to magnify themselves and subvert the purpose of the Church, which of course is Satan's ultimate goal.

A man of God, and a great preacher and servant, is one that seeks the Will of God for the Church and seeks it out as well as he can. Seeks it out not for his own glorification but for the edification of his brother and sisters in the faith, to spread the Gospel, and to exalt Christ above all else.

### **Conclusion**

For so long, I have been fearful and discouraged by my own abilities as a speaker. I wondered what possible value I could have for God and the Church.

My attempts at teaching the Word always seemed so pitiful and pathetic when so many others surpass me in knowledge and skill. But this chapter of **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians** has opened my eyes to the true nature of a speaker that God admires.

- × I don't need the presence and respect of George Faull to send a worthwhile message that convicts.
- × I don't need to have the natural oratory skills and vocabulary of Jeff Faull to move my audience.
- × I don't need the emotional appeals, humor, and people skills of Kendall Faull to save a soul.
- × I don't need to be the greatest speaker in the world to make a world of difference in someone's life.

If I seek to be a man of knowledge through study of the Scriptures, if I work to be a man of generosity, humility, and sincerity by serving my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, if I seek to be a man of God instead of Satan, seeking the goals and Will of God that glorifies Christ and His Church rather than myself, then I can be effective. I don't need to be eloquent of speech to share God's mercy and love, and neither do you.

As **2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16** tells us, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” His Word holds all the power.