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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
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### **God's Power of Persuasion**

1 Corinthians 2:1-12

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#### **1 Corinthians 2:1–12**

- 1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.*
- 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*
- 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.*
- 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,*
- 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*
- 6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*
- 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,*
- 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
- 9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*
- 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*
- 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*
- 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

Grace and peace to you in Jesus name, who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, dear fellow redeemed,

The power of persuasion is a great power; and for Christians – an intimidating concept. We know we are supposed to be spreading the gospel, ready to give a defense for the hope that is in us, but so often we just don't know what to say. And when we do say something, we might find resistance, even outright opposition. When someone doesn't agree with our beliefs or doesn't agree with what God's word says it often seems impossible to convince them otherwise. We wonder what it will take to persuade them. How can we convince someone that God's Word is Truth? We end up figuring we have

done something wrong; we have said something wrong; and we decide that the power to persuade is just not in us.

What you see before you is our baptismal font. It has eight sides, a cover, a bowl inside; it is made of wood – some sort of wood. I know little about wood or how to build something so beautiful. But what I do know something about is what is inside.

What is inside is what matters most. It is big – bigger than the world itself. Yes, it is the greatest wisdom the world has ever known; it is the greatest power the world has ever known. It is the answer to all your questions; the solution to all problems. Yes, what is inside is even bigger than the world itself. And yet this greatness fits into this eight-sided piece of wood, into the little bowl which is under this cover. Do you believe me? How might I persuade you? How can I convince you to believe that what I say is true – that in this font is something as wiser, more powerful, and bigger than anything the world has ever known?

The power of persuasion is a great power. And today God is here to persuade you with great power. God is here to persuade you, that you might in turn, have that power to persuade others. Today God's power of persuasion is at work and He places this power into weak, trembling hands like yours and mine. The method is simple; the message needs to be uncovered; and the results are Spirit-given.

### **1. the method – simple**

The power of persuasion is a great power and many would say it take years of practice to learn. People spend years and years learning the right skills and style to become effective public speakers. If you've ever watched a good motivational speaker, you know what I'm talking about – the power of persuasion.

I don't know if you had a chance to see it, but this last week there was a debate at the Creation Museum in Cincinnati. CNN moderated a debate which pitted the beliefs of Creation against the beliefs of Evolution. This debate featured two speakers: Ken Ham the Creationist and Bill Nye the Science Guy. Ken Ham, the founder of Answers in Genesis, represented the view of creation science – that is, he defended the idea that science can be rightly practiced under the Biblical assumptions of a six day Creation, a Creator God, and the fall into sin. Bill Nye represented the view of evolution science – that is, he argued that science can only be practiced under the assumptions that there is no Creator God, that the universe is the result of random chance, that we are all descended from one primordial substance, and that death is a natural part of our evolution toward a superior species. You can find more about it online.

There are various views about who won the debate. Some say Bill Nye was more persuasive, presenting challenges that Ken Ham did not answer. For a while, even I was getting the feeling Ken Ham was coming up short in responding to Nye's challenges. There was a difference in styles. Ham seemed to look at his laptop more. He was more soft spoken. He wasn't as flashy or pushy as the man in the polka dot bow-tie. So who won?

I wonder what the critics would say of the Apostle Paul. Paul faced debates in his day. As Paul addresses the congregation in Corinth, he addresses a city well known for its philosophers and for the power of good oratory. He faces off with men well trained in the skills of public speaking; he does battle against the persuasions of human philosophy and reasoning. Paul wasn't a flashy motivational speaker. Quite the contrary – I picture him more like you and me – trembling and nervous as he addressed the congregation in Corinth.

*1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.*

Like Paul, we often tremble at the thought of talking to someone else about our faith. He was no great philosopher. He was no motivational speaker. He was an Apostle. An Apostle sent by Christ to demonstrate God's power – not in lofty speech, not in compelling speaking skills; his power of persuasion was to be found in nothing else but Christ and Him crucified.

Don't get me wrong, Ken Ham did an amazing job. He was calm and organized in his presentation. But we should remember, it's not about the polka dot bow tie or making the crowds laugh. It's about keeping the spotlight on one thing – this mysterious font, and the hidden thing which is inside. So if you've ever been nervous, if you've ever trembled at the thought of telling someone else about Jesus, or stumbled over words while witnessing – then you are using the right method. Just like Paul – it is in our fear and trembling, in our humility that God's power is made known. That is to say, God persuades sinners to believe, not by the wisdom of men, but by the power of Christ and Him crucified. We determine to know nothing else. The method is simple.

## **2. the message – needs to be uncovered**

I think we can agree, however, it is more than just style that persuades. A good public speaker needs a compelling message.

So how should I go about convincing you that what is hidden away in that baptismal font is the power to change the world? I suppose I could describe what it is exactly. I could give you the measurements, the shape, the substance. And yet, even if I did, you would not believe me. Even if I told you exactly what was inside, you would not be convinced. That is because the power I'm talking about really cannot be measured, it cannot be quantified, it cannot be reasoned. The message is hidden from eyes, ears, and human reasoning. Our text calls it "a mystery." That is, something that needs to be uncovered, revealed.

Even if I told you, you wouldn't believe me. This is because our natural way of thinking is based on observation. We measure, we calculate, and we learn. The most basic elements of learning are observational – seeing, hearing, and thinking. This is where the wisdom of man naturally will find confidence. And so, if I've never seen it, heard it, or reasoned it – then you are going to have an awfully tough time convincing me that what you say is true.

This is exactly why Bill Nye ended up unpersuaded. And this was demonstrated in two questions which came from the crowd. First was the question: assuming the Big Bang is true – where did the matter come from that produced the Big Bang? Second was the question: if we are products of matter, then where did conscience come from?

In both cases, Nye's response was: "this is a great mystery." Seriously. Whether it was matter or consciousness, he had no answer. He could not say what created the matter needed to create the big bang in the first place. And he could not say how human consciousness came to be. He just could not see, hear, or reason enough evidence to answer.

In both cases, Ham responded with basically the same statement. In both cases, Ham responded: "Bill, let me tell you: there's a book out there..." Whether it was the question: 'where did matter come from?' or 'where did conscience come from?' – Ham argued that the answer is to be found right here in the Bible – the origin of matter, of consciousness, of life, of marriage, of family, of sin, of death – it is all there. This Bible documents the beginning of a world which agrees with what we observe and expect in science today.

As I listened carefully to Ham's presentation – I realized something. Again and again, Ham returned to the simple message: the true God has revealed Himself in the Bible.

There was nothing too complicated about his message. He spoke of a world which was created in six days, a world which fell into sin and a curse; a flood which caused catastrophic changes to the environment and fossil records; and – most importantly – a world for which God sent His only Son to die and rise that we might believe in Him and be saved.

Was Ken Ham persuasive? Maybe not. Many will see Nye's presentation as much more persuasive. After all, evolution is the majority opinion. It fills our public schools. It is the opinion which dominates the media. It even shapes the decisions of our own government. Who is being persuaded by the message of the Bible?

It is only natural to be left unpersuaded. It is only natural to trust only in what we can see with our eyes and reason with our mind. It is only natural to suppose that the power of persuasion is something within us. By nature we think I'm in control, What I say, do, and reason will be enough to persuade myself into the truth and even enough to persuade God. Yes, the majority opinion thinks that the power is within us to persuade God to like us, to accept us, and to allow us into His eternal presence.

But of course, has the majority always been right? It was also the majority opinion which crucified the Lord of glory. The decision to kill this innocent man came from the crowds, from the Jewish Council, and from the greatest power world power in that day – Rome. The majority said: "Crucify Him!"

*7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

Bill Nye's response is correct: "This is a mystery."

The message of salvation is a mystery that needs to be uncovered. By our natural observation, we just cannot see it, hear it, or reason it. It is not found in the reasoning of this age or in the leaders of this age or in the most popular books or in the public schools; it may even be missing in the most popular churches.

But when laid bare before the wisdom of God, such human wisdom will perish. All that will be left is the power of God's wisdom. You see, there's a book out there. And that book is the source of God's wisdom. In the Bible God uncovers the concealed message. In His word, God uncovers what is hidden in this baptismal font.

### 3. results – Spirit-given

Have I persuaded you to believe? Well, it is what is hidden inside that matters most. What is inside this baptismal font is something important. How might I persuade you of this great wisdom; this great power; this greatness that is bigger than the world itself? If it is not by lofty speech, nor by the reasoning of this age, then I am beginning to think the power to persuade is just not in me. And that is exactly the point right. The power is not in you and is not in me. It is not my well practiced method nor in my well-crafted reasoning; I cannot persuade you and you cannot persuade others. Instead all we can do is uncover the font.

[uncover font revealing a small wooden cross sitting in water]

*2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

God's power of persuasion produces results. His persuasion produces results which can only be given by His Spirit.

*10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

Right here is the answer. The cross of Christ standing in the waters of baptism. This is the power which persuades. This is firstly the power to persuade God Himself.

This cross and your baptism persuades God to forgive all your sins. It is bigger than the the world itself, yes. For when the cross is uncovered, the sins of the world are covered. From the greatest of your sins to the least of them, the death of Christ on the cross was the death for all sin. And the water in which that cross stands is the water which brings this give to you – washing and cleansing you from all sin.

It persuades God to accept you into His kingdom. In the cross God sees the righteousness of His Son – a righteousness which does exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, of you and me, of all people. A righteousness which is yours so that God now accepts all that you do by faith – your worship, your prayers, your offerings, and your family life, your relationships, are washed, cleansed, and God accepts them as very good in His eyes.

The cross does change the world. It persuades God to right all that has gone wrong. It solves all problems. It brings to the world the promise of a New Creation through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In Christ's resurrection is hidden something so powerful it can change the world itself. And it is this power which takes hold of you and me, which lives in you and me right now. It changes hearts so that we begin to look at the world around us differently. We no longer think like Bill Nye. We no longer see the world evolving and revolving around me, but we see God and His creative work revolving around the world.

God's persuasion produces results. In the love of God's redemption the Spirit persuades us to live a new life; a life of repentance and love. And although we fall into sin, it persuades us repent, to strive to live a life that agrees with the Spirit of God. The cross stands in the font, persuading us to think no longer of ourselves first, but to think of the will of Christ and the needs of others. And so we live a new life and let our light shine before men, that God may be glorified. *12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

You are right; the power to persuade is not in us. And that is the perfect starting point for evangelism. What you see before you is a baptismal font with a cross sitting in water. It is not your method, your message, or your power that will persuade others to believe. We can do nothing more than uncover the font, open the Bible, and reveal what God has done for the world. For we determine to know nothing else, but Christ and Him crucified. The method is simple, the message needs to be uncovered, and the results are Spirit-given.

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Amen.