

GAMMA 2017

STUDY 2

1 Cor 1:17-2:16

CASE 1



"I have taken my own life because I have always been an independent person and in control of my life," said Ms Ranke in a statement titled: "End of Life". "No person has assisted me with achieving euthanasia and the decision to end my life is mine alone ... I wanted control over my end of life decision, the same as I had control over the decisions I made during my adult life. Aina Matilda Ranke September 2013

Take a look at this Australian lady who recently committed suicide at the end of a debilitating cancer.

1. Why do you think she did so. Why would people like this consider believing in Jesus as foolishness?

The issue is control she holds on to her life and will not give up control. Believing in Jesus means letting go and allowing God to dictate the terms of life and mould every decision she makes. People like this hate to give up control, no matter what, even if the ship goes down she will go down with it as long as it's her decision. Handing over control to God is foolishness to her

CASE 2

Casey had a friend at his work place with whom he had been trying to reach out to. She was highly intellectual and asked many questions like how do we know that there is a God? Or how do we know that Jesus really rose from the dead? Or how do we know the bible is the Word of God? She also asked "How does Jesus' death save her from her sin?" Her friend did not really understand at all. Casey had no answers but told her that all she needed to know was that Christ died for her and she needed to accept Him as Lord and Saviour. It was all a matter of faith only. She made this conclusion based on 1 Cor 2:14 "*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*"

1. Is Casey's conclusions correct? Is there a difference between not understanding the message of the gospel and rejecting the message as foolishness?

The issue with her friend is not that she has concluded that the gospel is foolishness. What her problem is that she has legitimate questions which remained unanswered. We cannot expect people to come to faith without really giving an explanation about why we believe there is a God or how does Jesus dying actually save us from our sins. We need to provide explanation on how salvation works. If we look at the book of Romans it is a carefully structured argument Paul puts forward as to the need for the world for salvation and how people are to be saved. He uses examples in nature and logic and OT prophesy. What Paul refers to in regard of the natural man not being able to understand or that he regards the cross as folly is simply that after all the explanation the non Christian will initially reject the way of salvation offered on the cross as it will not sound plausible to him. It will sound ridiculous as it relies on a "common criminal's death" whilst it is more plausible to do good works to earn salvation.

2. What should Casey do with her friend?

Give her a good Christian book to read or bring her to Alpha or a more matured Christian for discussions. She should pray for the person.

CASE 3

Thomas was part of the leadership team in a Baptist church where a new pastor had been hired. His preaching was extremely boring and long winded rambling round and round without much structure nor points. He had however preached on the cross as well. He had only a form 5 education and went to bible college straight after dropping out of secondary school. Most of the congregation were graduates or post graduates. He was very defensive when members commented on his sermons. He said that it was they who were unspiritual as they failed to recognise his spirituality and were too used to the worldly wisdom which depended on eloquence. He had however great pastoral skills in ministering to people personally. When some of the leaders suggested he enroll himself for more preaching classes or allow some of the more gifted lay preachers to take the pulpit with him he objected and quoted Paul in 1 Cor 2:1-5 and said that since Paul was not eloquent neither should he be. It was the leaders who were ungodly and using worldly wisdom. The pastor said that eloquent preachers were not godly preachers.

1. Is it right for the new pastor to quote 1 Cor 2 :1-5 as a defense for his poor sermons?

The pastor is using this part of scripture as a defense of his poor sermons. Paul wrote to counter the prevailing problem of disunity in the church as people formed themselves behind their favorite speakers much like the difference schools of Greek philosophers. They relied on sophistication, eloquence and wisdom to gain support and superiority. Paul's admonition was not to depend on these in ministry but to focus the message on the crucified Christ. Hence Paul's ministry showed spiritual success notwithstanding or in spite of his lack of eloquence or poor physical state simply because he preached about the crucified Christ the power of God for salvation. Thus thrust of the passage is not about rejecting eloquence nor organising the sermon along a series of logical steps so people can understand better, it is about focus.

The pastor is culturally dissimilar to his audience and needs to adapt to connect with them. If he has a secondary education and his audience has a tertiary one then even his illustrations of the truth may fail to move his audience as they do not find resonance. We are not only asked to make the truth clear but to make it real too in people's lives.

The letter of Paul to the Romans shows much deliberate rhetorical structure and logic, it is a masterful presentation of the gospel which is clear as well as compelling. We are nowhere told in scripture to be long winded and rambly.

2. Is he right in blocking the lay preachers from preaching?

He is wrong, he should have recruited more gifted people to the pulpit as long as the Word is accurately and powerfully preached that is the goal not his stature and standing in the congregation which will be threatened if he allowed this. The church does not belong to him it belongs to Jesus.

3. Do you agree with his statement that eloquent preachers are not godly preachers? What will happen to this church in the long run?

It is patently not true. The bible always favors content over form as God's using of less endowed people always highlights His power and glory. Godliness and eloquence have nothing to do with each other. We choose godly and gifted people to preach and that order. Not the other way around and certainly his statement is an over generalization based on his feelings of inadequacy in this church. In the long run if nothing is done the church will dwindle down in numbers and ultimately die out or he attracts like minded people whilst the more educated ones move on to other churches. Hence it is always best to have a strong team of leaders both lay and full time to lead the church so no one acts with vested interest.

CASE 4

Alvin was a member of a church which was split over a leadership crisis. A group of young people wanted to start an outreach to immigrants but the leaders of the church had objected on the grounds that the ministry had to have their sanction to be able to function. They quoted the 1 Cor 2:17 and told Alvin that the leaders alone had the "mind of Christ" hence Alvin must support them. They had been an old church and hardly held any evangelistic activity for decades and the young people grew restless and wanted to obey the Lord's commission in preaching the gospel. According to the leaders there are two types of Christians, the carnal types referred to as the natural man in 1 Cor 2 who are just pew warmers who come to church on Sunday and spiritual Christians like leaders who are matured and are able to understand God.

The leaders also discouraged belief in the latest advances in science and banned the use of iPhones or computers as they are the tools of the devil. They believe as leaders they alone have all the knowledge and are accountable to no one.

"The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ."
vv15-16

1. Is it true that these leaders must be right as they are more spiritual and they alone have the mind of Christ?

This is patently untrue because in the passage Paul was making the difference between non believers cast as the natural man vs the Christians , the spiritual man filled with the HS who gives spiritual wisdom. Paul was not making the difference between differences in Christian maturity. All Christians have the HS and the ability to think in a Christ like manner or have the mind of Christ.

2. What do you think about the view that only the leaders have all the knowledge and discourage the belief in science? Do we have to decide between science and God are they mutually exclusive?

The kind of knowledge Paul is writing about here is about spiritual matters in discerning the truth or viability of the gospel message. Paul is not saying only Christians have all the knowledge in the world only spiritual knowledge with regard to salvation. All truth is Gods truth and if one wants scientific knowledge they have to study it does not come automatically when they become Christians.

3. Is it true that the leaders are accountable to no one hence they can rule as they like as they alone have the mind of Christ? One of them said that when he meditates n the word of God, he receives instructions from God even though his ideas deviate from the plain reading of the bible. He needs to be obeyed as he has the mind of Christ.

Again the passage is not about the difference between Christians it is a bout the the difference between Christians and Non Christians. These leaders use it to abuse their power.

CASE 5

If our message is about the cross then the cross must shape our methods in the church's endeavours to reach out to the world. Can you discuss the difference between methods that are spiritual vs methods which are based on human wisdom?

Spirituality rather than gifts
Principle rather than results
Truth rather than loyalty
Kingdom rather than comfort

CASE 6

AW Tozer wrote

" The old cross slew men, the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemns men, the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it"

What do you think he is trying to warn us about?

The temptation in our society is to water down the offense of the cross. When we preach the cross it causes much derision and ridicule hence the temptation is to smoothen out the less popular concepts. We reduce emphasis on sin and the penalty of sin. We do not talk about hell nor much about eternal life. Instead we shift our emphasis toward what Christ can do for us here and now. We talk about how Christ will heal our hurts , our diseases, lift up our shattered self esteem and bring joy in to our lives. Our programs entertain and does not convict. Our teaching encourages us to depend on our own efforts rather than shattering our pride and forcing us to depend on the cross alone. We focus on meeting the felt needs of society, hunger, disease and never talk about eternal death and the true gravity of sin in our lives. We focus on activites but not on holiness and character transformation by the Holy Spirit.