

# 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5 PM

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Date: 01 October 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want to begin tonight with a thought experiment. I need some thought from the crowd. I want you to think about something that grew to have a global impact.

I'm thinking of like a successful global movement. Something like democracy. Or a business like McDonald's.

Or a franchise like James Bond or Pokemon. Or religions like Islam or Christianity. Think about something that's grown globally.

So have an example in your head. I want to test out a theory on you. Do you have an example?

Okay, great. Now, why do you think that thing grew to be such a global success?

And my hypothesis tonight is that something grows globally based on three factors. There are three things that make a movement spread.

[ 1 : 03 ] I think first, you need to have a great product. Or an idea. Or a message. I think secondly, you need to have great people behind it. Or a charismatic central leader.

And then I think thirdly, it needs great promotion. Or marketing. Or evangelism. So I am going to call this Chris's Universal Law.

Is that? There it is. So in a hundred years, when all our great-grandchildren are in school learning about Chris's Universal Law, you could sit in your rocking chair and say, you were here when I first announced it.

Global success is based on a great product, great people, and great promotion. So let's look at an example together, okay? Let's think about Apple computers. That was my example in my head. Apple was basically bankrupt 30 years ago. And now it's the largest company in the world. How is that possible? Well, let's test Chris's Universal Law.

[ 2 : 03 ] First, Apple has great products. The Mac, the MacBook, the iPod, the iPhone, the iPad, Apple Watch. Products, when they were announced, were unlike anything else.

And they set the bar for every other company in terms of what consumers wanted in electronic devices. Products that have changed the way we live forever. But it's not just that Apple makes great products.

Other companies make kind of look-alike products, too. They also have great people behind those products. So think of Steve Jobs, the co-founder and former CEO of Apple.

He's this visionary inventor and businessman. And he was charismatic and passionate and personable to the public, but apparently ruthless to his employees and competitors.

He surrounded himself with this great team of people. And together they produce products that change the world. So Apple has great products, great people, and thirdly, really great promotion.

[ 3 : 03 ] Apple are absolute masters of marketing and promotion. From their product launches to their stores to their ad campaigns, they're global innovators in evangelizing the world about the good news of their products.

So, why is Apple the biggest company in the earth? Here we go. Chris's universal law. Great products, great people, great promotion. We're all going to be saying it together by the end of the sermon.

Okay, Apple is a very easy example. But what about the most prolific religion in human history? How has Christianity gone from the humblest of beginnings to becoming the most widespread movement in all of history, where people now from almost every nation, tribe, and tongue worship Jesus as their Lord?

The Christians in Corinth were strong believers in Chris's universal law. They felt the way to grow the church was through having the best product or message, having a church that consisted of the best people, and having a church that was promoted by the best preachers for maximum effect and

influence.

The Corinthians felt the church grows the same way everything else does. Great product, great people, great promotion. And if you look around the world today, there's a lot of Christian organizations and churches that are looking to grow, and I think they see this model working in the world, and so churches try to mimic it.

[ 4 : 35 ] The way to grow a church, they feel, is by first showcasing a great product. You know, phenomenal Sunday services, incredible music, slick graphics, fantastic children's ministry, artisanal coffee, cool building.

Let's make the best product. And if we do that, we'll attract the coolest people. Visionaries, hipsters, the educated elite, celebrities, influencers, young people who are going places.

Once we have the best product and the best people, additionally, let's now hire the absolute best speakers and preachers to promote our message. People, product, promotion.

This is how many churches look to grow. We could list dozens of churches near and far who adopt this model by looking at what works in the world and trying to import it into the church.

And that's what the Corinthian church was doing. But do you know who isn't a fan of Chris's universal law? Paul.

[ 5 : 36 ] In his letter to the Corinthian church, which we're going to look at tonight, Paul writes to show the Corinthian Christians that their thinking is based on worldly wisdom. They're adopting a worldly strategy for success.

But the church, Paul will argue, does not grow like everything else. Its success is not based on its product, its people, or its promotion.

The power of the gospel growing is not found in any of these things. Christianity's spread and the church's growth is not like Apple computers, or Islam, or Taylor Swift's music.

There's a different power source that's propelling the gospel forward. There's a deeper wisdom. There's a supernatural strategy behind this movement that overwhelms all human thinking and ingenuity.

And in three paragraphs, from 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18, to chapter 2, verse 5, Paul completely destroys Chris's universal law as it relates to the church and Christianity.

[ 6 : 43 ] He takes my three headings, product, people, and promotion, and he shows them to be foolish as they relate to the church and its influence. Paul sees in the Corinthian church that this self-serving, arrogant desire within it to be great, to be successful and impressive in the eyes of the world.

It's a church powered by pride. And this worldliness, masked as religious fervor, threatens to destroy and divide the Corinthian church.

And it has destroyed countless churches since Paul wrote these words. And so what Paul does is he presents us with the gospel, the center of the Christian faith. And he shows it to be in total contrast and conflict with worldly wisdom.

Paul argues the Christian message is total foolishness to the world in chapter 1, verses 18 to 25. And he shows in verse 26 to 31 that the people who form the church are not really that great or impressive.

Our power does not come from our people or our ability to influence our culture. And lastly, in chapter 2, verses 1 to 5, Paul speaks of how our own promotion of Christianity, our own preaching, Paul's own preaching, is simple.

[ 8 : 05 ] And he himself was weak and afraid when he was living in Corinth. So it's a ridiculous message, unremarkable people, promoted by a petrified preacher.

And after he's completely dismantled Chris's universal law, he reveals the true source of power that propels the gospel to the ends of the earth. So first, from last week, Aaron showed us the foolishness of the Christian message in 1 Corinthians 1, 18 to 25.

Do you remember how we talked about there the gospel is presented as the simple statement, Christ crucified? The gospel is the announcement that the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Son of God, who is Lord over all, came to earth to be killed.

Jesus showed his power through weakness. He showed us eternal life through death. He showed us the glory of God's love through the horror of human hate.

The sins of the world were exposed and punished in Christ crucified, so that the forgiveness of God may be granted to all who believe. It's a message of weakness, of foolishness.

[ 9 : 19 ] A Christian product, the message of the gospel, sounds silly. So that was last week. Now let's move into our text. Starting in verse 26, Paul writes that the church is made up of unremarkable people.

So first, the gospel itself is foolish, but now secondly, the people who believe it are ordinary. Christianity doesn't grow because incredible people are in the church.

We are not the reason that Christianity spreads. We, the people, are not powering Christianity's growth. Christianity often grows despite the Christians in the church.

You know, this weekend in this country, we're confronted with the reality of the church's past sins and failures. In the name of truth and reconciliation, we repent and we lament how aboriginal children were abducted and abused by Christian churches and leaders in Canada.

It's a sin and it's a scar too deep for words upon the body of Christ in this country. And you'd think a scandal of that scale should have the power to destroy a movement in a country.

[ 10 : 32 ] But it hasn't. Because Christianity is not dependent on Christians for its growth. The people do not power the church.

And this is unique to Christianity. This sets this movement apart from every other movement I can think of. Because what we see in the world is that important people, powerful people, influential people, cool people, attract everyone else.

And losers or nerds or failures or sinners don't attract anyone. I think this is no more obvious than in high school. Were you in a group in high school?

We often dressed a certain way depending on if you thought you were cool or athletic or a loser into alternative music or if you were the editor of the school yearbook, which I might have been.

In high school, cool people gravitate towards a certain sport or a certain class or a certain teacher or whatever. And they attract everyone else by subscribing to that thing. Or look at influencers online today.

[ 11 : 38 ] They're cool people. And millions of uncool people will follow their every move and buy it their every style and all the products that they're paid to promote because they're cool. So if we want to grow our church, the worldly thinking goes, then we should be attracting cool people, influencers, celebrities, right?

Well, the Corinthian Christians thought they were pretty cool. They thought they were pretty powerful. They thought they were the movers and shakers of their society. They thought their church would grow because they were awesome.

And look at what Paul says of the Corinthians who are proud and think that they're important and they're influencing their city. Look at verse 26. For consider your calling, brothers and sisters.

Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. That word is influential. So not many of you were influencers.

Not many of you were of noble birth. Paraphrase here is look in the mirror. You're nobodies. You're average at best.

[ 12 : 49 ] Verse 27. But God chose what's foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what's weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human may boast in the presence of God.

What attracts people to a church should not be how cool the people of that church are. If your church is successful because of the coolness of your people, watch out.

Because the second a better show comes to town, oh, those people who want a piece of the church are going to jump and move to the next hot ticket in town. You see this in Vancouver. I grew up here, so I kind of watched this.

Every two or three years, there's a new cool church. There's a new it church. And everyone kind of flocks to it. And then after two or three years, it kind of gets stale or there's a conflict or a pastor leaves or a cooler church pops up.

And so everyone now jumps to the new thing. If the basis for a church's growth is their people, their power and wisdom and social status and influence, watch out.

[ 13 : 57 ] That is a strategy that will always fail. So what does bring people to church according to Paul? Well, look at our text. Look at verse 26. Paul says, consider your calling.

Or verse 27. It says, God chose. That's three times. And verse 30. And because of him, because of God, you are in Christ Jesus. What brings people to church is God choosing them and calling them

according to Paul.

It's not the coolness or the greatness of the community. We need to recognize that what brings people into Christian community is nothing less than God himself calling them there.

Do you realize you're here tonight because God has called you here? God has chosen you. He has brought you. He has bought you. And he calls you to be a part of his people.

And it's probably not because you're brilliant. It's probably not because you're an influencer or are powerful. It's probably not because you're Vancouver royalty. Certainly not that God needs you to grow his church and to spread his gospel.

[15:08] We're a gaggle of broken, weak, unknown people, likely unimpressive by worldly standards. Yet what makes us one is that God has called us and he has chosen us.

God has united us in Christ and to one another through the death of Jesus to forgive our sins and secure our salvation. And this salvation is offered to everyone no matter how weak or wicked or seemingly unimportant you may feel.

The message of the gospel is for you and it is not dependent on your worthiness to receive it. God initiates this incredible work of saving and uniting unremarkable diverse people to show that the spread of Christianity is based on his power and his wisdom alone.

None of us here can boast in our salvation. We have done nothing to deserve what we have received in Christ. It's all God. It's all grace.

And so let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. Christianity doesn't spread because of us. We're not influencers or powerful or celebrities or sages.

[16:25] We're average at best. The power of Christianity is not based on its people but on God himself who works through his people. So far Paul has shown that Christianity has a foolish message and is believed by unremarkable people.

And lastly he shows that Christianity's spread is not based on the power of human preaching or promotion. This is in chapter 2 verses 1 to 5. Let me read it.

Paul writes, When I came to you sisters and brothers I didn't come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

and I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power so that your faith may not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul dismisses himself here saying the success of Christianity in Corinth was not because of his own eloquence or his brilliant speeches. Instead he came to them ignorant of everything except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[17:44] Paul came in weakness in fear trembling and his preaching was not winsome or wise. See the spread of Christianity doesn't depend on the natural giftings of its leaders and its preachers.

Christianity by worldly standards has a foolish product. Average people and unimpressive promotion. So Chris's universal law is dead.

It had a good run lasted about 14 minutes but it's been decimated by Paul. We should have no confidence in the coherence of the Christian message.

We should expect it to sound ridiculous to people. We should have no confidence in our community. We're pretty average. we're not what's going to bring people to faith. And we should have no confidence in our human leaders.

We don't know that much. We're not giving TED talks on the side or hosting podcasts or writing bestsellers. We're weak often afraid sometimes even shaking as we try to do our jobs.

[18:52] So how do we account for the spread of the gospel? Why is Christianity the largest movement in world history? Well look again at what Paul says in chapters 2.

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power so that your faith may not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

The confidence we have in the Christian faith is a confidence in God and God alone. In the wisdom of God his power is unleashed through a message that sounds like foolishness.

Through the wisdom of God his power is unleashed through people who apart from him are ordinary and unremarkable. And through the wisdom of God his spirit and his power is

demonstrated.

It's put on display. When humans weak and afraid and frail open their mouths to tell others about the good news of Jesus Christ. Here's the wisdom of God.

[ 20 : 07 ] And the reason God chooses to grow his church this way is that so there's absolutely no grounds for any human pride or any confusion as to where the source of Christianity's power lies.

Christianity is the largest growing movement because it's the only movement on earth that is fueled by the spirit of God and propelled by his power.

Our confidence is in God exclusively and our confidence in him should be unwavering because we see with our own eyes what he's done.

This is the source of our confidence. This is the ultimate answer for how Christianity has grown globally as nothing else ever has before it or ever will since. Because this gospel, this message contains within it the power of God for the salvation of the whole world.

This message, although it sounds like such foolishness, works. It unleashes the spirit of God and the power of God on earth. It gathers unremarkable people and unites them in one in Christ forever.

[ 21 : 21 ] And it uses unremarkable leaders to spread an unimaginable message. We see this in human history again and again as the gospel continues to go forth and grow.

So our confidence is in God and in his gospel. It is powerful. It is potent. It is working in our world today to bring people to Jesus.

Jesus. The gospel gives us no grounds upon which to be proud and no ability for us to be ashamed.

So if you want to see the power of God and the spirit of God unleashed upon our city and upon our families and upon our friends, proclaim the gospel faithfully.

Share Christ with your city. Love this fellowship of believers, weak and frail as we are. Celebrate the goodness of God revealed in the word of the cross and trust that as we gather and worship and serve and share, the power of God will be unleashed upon the earth.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.