

Is There Christian Eloquence? Clear Words and the Wonder of the Cross

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I begin by showing why this question is urgent for me, and in the process I hope to clarify what the question means and what eloquence means. The question is urgent first and foremost because the apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says in 1 Corinthians 1:17, “Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and *not with words of eloquent wisdom*, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Christ sent Paul to preach, *not with eloquence*, lest the cross be gutted. That’s why I am asking the question *Is there Christian eloquence?*

Even if you use the NIV (“not with words of human wisdom”) or the NASB (“not in cleverness of speech”) or the KJV (“not with wisdom of words”), the point remains the same. There is a way to speak the gospel—a way of eloquence or cleverness or human wisdom—that nullifies the cross. I dread nullifying the cross, and therefore it is urgent that I know what this eloquence-cleverness-wisdom of words is, so I can avoid it.

An Urgent Question

Or consider 1 Corinthians 2:1 where Paul says, “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God *with lofty speech or wisdom*.” Or the NIV: “I did not come with *eloquence or superior wisdom*.” Or the NASB: “I did not come with *superiority of speech or of wisdom*.” Or the KJV: “[I] came not with *excellency of speech or of wisdom*.”

For a pastor, or anyone who wants to speak the gospel to others without emptying the cross of its power, this is an urgent issue. “Is there Christian eloquence?” means first, for me, if I choose words, or ways of putting words together, or ways of delivering them, with a view to increasing their life-giving, pride-humbling, God-exalting, Christ-magnifying, joy-intensifying, love-awakening, missions-mobilizing, justice-advancing impact, am I doing with my word-selection and word-arrangement and word-delivery what is only supposed to be done by the cross of Christ, and so emptying it of its power?

In other words, is Paul saying that the pursuit of impact on others through word-selection, word-arrangement, and word-delivery preempts Christ’s power and belittles the glory of the cross? Answering this is urgent for any of us who would speak or write about the truths of the gospel.

Is the Bible Eloquent?

Complicating the question is this: Most Bible scholars throughout history have drawn attention to the fact that the Bible itself has many eloquent parts. For example, John Calvin said, “Let us pay attention to the style of Isaiah which is not only pure and elegant, but also is ornamented with high art—from which we may learn that eloquence may be of great service to faith.”¹

Or similarly consider what the poet John Donne said: “The Holy Ghost in penning the Scriptures delights himself, not only with a propriety, but with a delicacy, and harmony, and melody of language; with height of Metaphors, and other figures, which may work greater impressions upon the Readers.”² In other words, Donne is saying that there is eloquence of language in the Bible, and some of the impact of the text on readers is owing in some way to that eloquence.

Spirit-Led Eloquence?

Or consider what Martin Luther says on Galatians 4:6: “The Spirit makes intercession for us not with many words or long prayer, but only with a groaning . . . a little sound and a feeble groaning, as ‘Ah, Father!’ . . . Wherefore, this little word ‘Father’ . . . passes all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and of the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world.”³ So Luther says the Holy Spirit himself leads us at times to a kind of eloquence—even in prayer.

So if these observations of Calvin, Luther, and Donne are right, what did Paul mean when he said he renounced eloquence for the sake of the cross? Or are Calvin and Luther and Donne missing something?

The Eloquence of George Whitefield

Another way to feel the urgency of the question *Is there Christian Eloquence?* is to compare what was said about two giants of the First Great Awakening, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. These two men were deeply unified theologically and significantly different in the way they preached.

In the Spring of 1740, George Whitefield was in Philadelphia preaching outdoors to thousands of people. Benjamin Franklin attended most of these messages. Franklin, who did not believe what Whitefield was preaching, commented on these perfected sermons,

His delivery...was so improved by frequent repetition, that every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well turned, and well placed, that *without being interested in the subject, one could not help being pleased with the discourse*: a pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music.⁴

Here is preaching that is so eloquent you can like it without believing anything in it. In other words, the language itself—the word-selection, word-arrangement, and word-delivery was such that it was pleasurable to Franklin who cared nothing for what the language meant. Franklin loved his eloquence and rejected the cross. Was Whitefield emptying the cross of its power?

Eloquence in Our Day

And just in case the generation of younger preachers, who don't give a fig about this so-called eloquence, think you have this one solved, because you don't care about that kind of eloquence, beware. There is an "eloquence" of "hip" and "dress" and "slang" and "savvy" and "casual" and the "appearance of artlessness" that can have the exact same mesmerizing effect in our day that Whitefield's eloquence had in his: People like it without sharing any of the convictions. In other words, none of us escapes the urgency of this question. We all need an answer.

The Eloquence of Jonathan Edwards

But now consider Jonathan Edwards, Whitefield's contemporary and friend. Edwards did not receive such accolades for dramatic eloquence like Whitefield's. But he did have another kind of eloquence. One eyewitness answered the question whether Edwards was an eloquent preacher like this:

If you mean, by eloquence, what is usually intended by it in our cities; he had no pretensions to it. He had no studied varieties of the voice. And no strong emphasis. He scarcely gestured, or even moved; and he made no attempt, by the elegance of his style, or the beauty of his pictures, to gratify the taste, and fascinate the imagination. But, if you mean by eloquence, the power of presenting an important truth before an audience, with overwhelming weight of argument. And with such intenseness of feeling, that the whole soul of the speaker is thrown into every part of the conception and delivery; so that the solemn attention of the whole audience is riveted, from the beginning to the close, and impressions are left that cannot be effaced; Mr. Edwards was the most eloquent man I every heard speak.⁵

In either case—Whitefield the dramatic orator or Edwards the motionless, intense logician—the question remains: Were these forms of eloquence an emptying of the cross of Christ? Were they following Paul's example when he said that he preached the gospel "not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power"?

James Denny's Haunting Statement

There is a statement that James Denney made over a hundred years ago that haunts me. Whether we are talking about the more high-brow eloquence of oratory or the more low-brow, laid-back, cool eloquence of anti-oratory, Denney's statement cuts through to the ultimate issue. He said, "No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save."⁶ This has been one of the most influential sentences I have ever read regarding how we talk about Christ. Does this mean that any conscious craft or art in writing or speaking elevates self and obscures the truth that Christ is mighty to save?

Eloquence as an End in Itself?

There is one last angle that shows the urgency of this question *Is There Christian Eloquence?* Earlier this year in the journal called *Books and Culture*, there was a review of a book by Denis Donoghue, Professor of English and American Letters at New York University. The title of his book is *On Eloquence*. It was just published this year. I was so aggravated by the review that I got the book and read it over the Summer.

Donoghue's contention is that eloquence is a surprising, impacting style that is an end in itself. He says, for example,

A speech or an essay may be eloquent, but if it is, the eloquence is incidental to its aim. Eloquence, as distinct from rhetoric, has no aim: it is a play of words or other expressive means. . . . The main attribute of eloquence is gratuitousness.⁷

Eloquence does not serve a purpose or an end in action. . . . In rhetoric, one is trying to persuade someone to do something: in eloquence, one is discovering with delight the expressive resources of the means at hand.⁸

He agrees with E. M. Cioran that this notion of aimless eloquence began with the sophists 2,000 years ago.

The sophists were the first to occupy themselves with a meditation upon words, their value, propriety, and function in the conduct of reasoning: the capital step toward *the discovery of style, conceived as a goal in itself, as an intrinsic end, was taken [by the sophists].*⁹

So eloquence is a style of speaking or writing that is intrinsically pleasing without any reference to other aims. It has no aim. It's gratuitous. That's what makes it eloquent. If it had an aim, it would be rhetoric and would stand in the service of some cause or ideology.

An Enamored Reviewer

What aggravated me about the review of Donoghue's book in *Books and Culture* was that the Christian reviewer was so enamored by this view of eloquence that he thought all thinking evangelicals should be reading this book. Donoghue himself thought that the Bible—and Jesus in particular—put significant obstacles in the way of this view of eloquence as aimless, gratuitous, pleasing language.¹⁰ But the reviewer, on the contrary, was effusive about how this view shed light on the way God lavishes the world with superfluous, gratuitous eloquence:

Is it really so hard to make the case for eloquence on Christian terms? What could be more eloquent, more blessedly superfluous, than Creation itself? All those beetles, those unseen creatures of the deep, those galaxies upon galaxies—all unnecessary. Shakespeare was unnecessary. My new grandson Gus is unnecessary.¹¹

I don't think so. This is too cavalier about the purposefulness of God. Did God create this little boy Gus, and Shakespeare, and the galaxies, and the thousands of species of plants and animals we have yet to discover—did God create them whimsically, or purposefully? If purposefully, they are not gratuitous. And they are not superfluous.

Not Deep Enough

The problem with Donoghue and his reviewer is that they haven't gone deep enough into the implications for eloquence of the existence of a God who governs all things and does all things *purposefully*—indeed, with the purpose to magnify the glory of his Son. "All things were created through him and for him" (Colossians 1:16). Galaxies and grandsons are not gratuitous or superfluous. They are created for the glory of Jesus Christ. Even the galaxies we have not yet seen will serve to magnify of the greatness of Christ.

So what shall we make of all these varied witnesses to the goodness of eloquence when, in view of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:17, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and *not with words of eloquent wisdom*, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power"? And what of 1 Corinthians 2:1, "When I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God *with lofty speech or wisdom*"?

An Interesting Link

There is an interesting link between Donoghue's reference to the sophists and the context of Paul's words to the Corinthians. Donoghue traces his view of eloquence back to the sophists. They were the first to treat style "as a goal in itself, as an intrinsic end." One of the most compelling books on the background of Paul's words about eloquence in 1 Corinthians is Bruce Winter's *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*. Winter's argument is that it is precisely the sophists and their view of eloquence that form the backdrop of what Paul says about his own speech and how he ministered in Corinth.¹²

So consider with me Paul's words in 1 Corinthians to see if he gives us enough clues to show what sort of eloquence he is rejecting and what sort he is not only not rejecting but using.¹³

Clues from 1 Corinthians

Notice first in 1 Corinthians 1:10-12 that the Corinthian believers were forming divisions by lining up behind their favorite teachers, and there is pretty good evidence that the divisions had to do with the kind of eloquence the teachers had. It says in verse 12, "What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' or 'I follow Apollos,' or 'I follow Cephas,' or 'I follow Christ.'"

We know from 2 Corinthians 10:10 that Paul's opponents mocked him as lacking eloquence. They said, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and *his speech of no account (ho logos exouthenemenos)*." And we know that Apollos, one of the favorites at Corinth, was eloquent because Acts 18:24 says, "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures." The fact that he is from Alexandria is significant. Philo worked in Alexandria and tells us how prominent the sophists were there in training people to be eloquent.¹⁴

Opposing the Sophists

We know from at least six sources that the sophists were also present in Corinth.¹⁵ They put a huge premium on style and form as evidence of education and power and wisdom. They had probably influenced some in the church to admire their kind of eloquence and look for it in Christian teachers. Apollos probably became their celebrity because he was so good with words. Bruce Winter says, "Paul deliberately adopts an anti-sophistic stance and thus defends his church-planting activities in Corinth against a backdrop of sophistic conventions, perceptions and categories."¹⁶

That's what we find in verse 17, which is where we began this message: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and *not with words of eloquent wisdom*, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." So the way Paul is going to oppose the eloquence of the sophists is to show that it empties the cross. Why is that? Why does this view of eloquence empty the cross of power?

Undercutting Pride and Exalting Christ

Verse 18 gives part of the reason: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The reason the cross can't fit in with the eloquence of the sophists is that it is folly to them—that is, it is so destructive of human pride that those who aim at human praise through "rhetorically elaborated eloquence"¹⁷ and "an elitist educational system"¹⁸ could only see the cross as foolishness. The cross is the place our sin is seen as most horrible and God's free grace shines most brightly. Both of these mean we deserve nothing. Therefore, the cross undercuts pride and exalts Christ, not us, and that made it foolish to the sophists.

We see this confirmed in verse 20: "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?"—the debater, the man who is so nimble with his tongue he can take either side and win. He is smooth and clever and verbally agile. Truth and content are not the issue; rhetorical maneuvering is. Paul says at the end of verse 20, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" The wisdom in view is not any deep worldview over against Christianity; it's the sophistry of using language to win debates and show oneself clever and eloquent and powerful.

So the eloquence Paul is rejecting is not so much any particular language conventions but the exploitation of language to exalt self and belittle or ignore the crucified Lord. Notice the contrast again in chapter 2, verses 1-2: "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not 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.” The point is: Wherever I meet scribes and debaters who bolster their ego with language jousting and leave the cross in the shadows, I am going to bring it out of the shadows and showcase it totally. I will refuse to play their language games.

A Two-Pronged Criterion

Notice one more thing in this context which gives us the two-pronged criterion of good and bad eloquence. In 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, Paul turns the tables on the sophists’ love affair with boasting.¹⁹

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is 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 being might boast in the presence of God.

1) Self-Humiliation

God’s design both in the cross and in election is “that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” That is the first prong of our criterion of good and bad eloquence: *Does it feed boasting? Does it come from an ego in search of exaltation through clever speech?* If so, Paul rejects it.

Then he continues in verses 30-31:

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

2) Christ-Exaltation

The second design of God, not only in the cross and in election, but also in the sovereign grace of regeneration (v. 30, “*Because of him* you are in Christ Jesus”) is that all boasting be boasting in the Lord Jesus—the one who was crucified and raised. “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

So the second prong of our criterion of good and bad eloquence is: *Does it exalt Christ—especially the crucified Christ?*

So here is my understanding of Paul’s two denunciations of eloquence. In 1 Corinthians 1:17 he says, “. . . *not with words of eloquent wisdom*, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” And in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 he says, “. . . [not] *with lofty speech or wisdom*. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The point of both is this: Pride-sustaining, self-exalting use of words for a show of human wisdom is incompatible with finding your life and your glory in the cross of Christ. So let your use of words be governed by this double criteria: self-humiliation and Christ-exaltation.

I think, if we put these two criteria in front of all our efforts to make an impact through word-selection and word-arrangement and word-delivery—that is, if we put them in front of our attempts at eloquence—we will be guarded from the misuse of eloquence that Paul rejected. And now I see more clearly what was behind James Denney’s dictum, precisely, these two criteria: “No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save.”²⁰ Self-exaltation and Christ-exaltation can’t go together.

The Bible Is Eloquent

So when we go back to Calvin and Luther and John Donne—all of whom said that the Bible is filled with eloquence—I conclude they are right. The Bible is filled with every manner of literary device to add impact to the language: acrostics, alliteration, analogies, anthropomorphism, assonance, cadence, chiasm, consonance, dialogue, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, meter, onomatopoeia, paradox, parallelism, repetition, rhyme, satire, simile—they’re all there, and more.

And it seems to me that God invites us to join him in this creativity of eloquence. He beckons us with words like:

To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is! (Proverbs 15:23)

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. (Proverbs 25:11)

Like a lame man's legs, which hang useless, is a proverb in the mouth of fools. (Proverbs 26:7)

And whatever you do, in *word* or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17)

In other words, give thought to the aptness and seasonableness and fitness and timing and appropriateness of your words. And make all of them an honor to the name of the Lord Jesus.

What Difference Does It Make?

There is one last question I want to take up. If we are permitted to pursue eloquence (powerful verbal impact), indeed if we are invited to, and if the Bible is an abundantly eloquent book, and if we are guided in our pursuit of this impact by the double criterion of self-humiliation and Christ-exaltation, what would be our hope for our speech or writing if we succeeded? Since only the Holy Spirit can perform the miracle of new birth and actually raise the spiritually dead, and since he can do it with mundane, pedestrian witnesses to the gospel or eloquent witnesses to the gospel, what difference does it make if we strive for any measure of eloquence or increased impact through language?

Five Benefits of Christian Eloquence

Here is a starter list of five things that we may hope for, knowing that anywhere along the way, God may step in and make our words instruments of salvation with or without eloquence.

1) Keeping Interest

Artistic, surprising, provocative, or esthetically pleasing language choices (that is, eloquence) may keep people awake and focused because they find it interesting or unusual or pleasing for reasons they cannot articulate. When the disciples fell asleep in Gethsemane, Jesus said, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). We need to help people's weaknesses.

This is not conversion or even conviction or sanctification, but it is a serious means to those ends. Sleeping people or distracted people do not hear the word, and faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word. Therefore, eloquence is like a good night's sleep. It won't save your soul, but it might keep you awake to hear the word which can save your soul. So a person's style may keep you interested and awake to the same end.

2) Gaining Sympathy

Artistic, surprising, provocative, or esthetically pleasing language may bring an adversarial mind into greater sympathy with the speaker. If the language is interesting and fresh enough, obstacles may be overcome—boredom, anger, resentment, suspicion—and replaced with respect and attraction and interest and concentration. These are not conversion, or conviction or sanctification, but they don't drive a person farther away like boredom does. They may in fact draw a person so close to the light that Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (Mark 12:34).

For example, return to George Whitefield and Benjamin Franklin for a moment. Whitefield's eloquence overwhelmed Franklin. He did not think Whitefield was a sham. He admired him. He became one of Whitefield's closest friends. Whitefield's biographer, Harry Stout says, "Franklin allowed himself to be drawn out on the subject of personal religiosity with Whitefield as with no one else, finding in Whitefield a listener he could trust—if not agree with."²¹ Therefore, Whitefield could speak to Franklin about Christ as no one else could. He explained to Franklin with a smile: "I must have

something of Christ in all my letters.”²² Who knows how close Whitefield came to winning Franklin to the faith—and all this because Whitefield’s eloquence overcame Franklin’s disdain for the Revival.

3) Awakening Sensitivity

Fresh, surprising, provocative, esthetically pleasing speech may have an awakening effect on a person’s mind and heart that is short of regeneration but still important as an awakening of emotional and intellectual sensitivity for more serious and beautiful things. If a poetic turn of phrase can cause a person to notice the magnificence of the sun, their next step might be to see that the heavens are telling the glory of God (Psalm 19:1), and then they might confess Christ as the great sun of righteousness (Malachi 4:2).

Is that not why David, the great poet of Israel, first says, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalms 19:1), and then says, “In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy” (Psalms 19:4-5). Why compare the rising sun to a bridegroom and a runner? To help the dull mind awaken to the joyful beauty of the rising sun in the hopes that this natural kind of awakening might lead to the spiritual sight that nature is all about the glory of God.

4) Speaking Memorably

Certain kinds of eloquence—cadence, parallelism, meter, rhyme, assonance, consonance—may not only interest and awaken the heart, but increase that impact by making what is said memorable, that is, more easy to remember or memorize. Consider the title of this conference. I am very picky when it comes to cadence and consonance and assonance. I worked on the title the same way I work on a poem: “The Power of Words and the Wonder of God.” I want it to be pleasing and memorable.

So first, there is an intentional *cadence* or meter that I find pleasing: -/ -/ -/ -/ (The POWER of WORDS and the WONder of GOD).

Second, there is *consonance* or alliteration between the W’s in *Words* and *Wonder*. Compare “The Power of Language and the Wonder of God” or “The Power of Words and the Majesty of God.” Both cadence and alliteration are lost.

Third, there is assonance. Six of the nine words are dominated by the sound of the letter *O*: *power, of, words, wonder, of, God*. Compare: “The Strength of Language and the Marvel of Deity.”

Finally, I think the juxtaposition of “words” and “wonder” and “God” is unusual, provocative, and attractive.

All of that I think helps people remember the title, not because it is displeasing the way nine-eleven is remembered because it hurt, but because it is esthetically satisfying. (Next year: “With Calvin in the Theater of God”—iambic pentameter—so we can’t add “John,” Calvin’s first name.)

I presume that this mnemonic purpose is why some parts of the Bible are written in acrostics. For example, Psalm 119 is 22 stanzas of 8 verses each and each stanza begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and all 8 verses in each stanza begins with that letter. That is not careless, but intentional, artistic, eloquent.

5) Increasing Power

The attempt to craft striking and beautiful language makes it possible that the beauty of eloquence can join with the beauty of truth and increase the power of your words. When we take care to create a beautiful way of speaking or writing about something beautiful, the eloquence—the beauty of the form—reflects and honors the beauty of the subject and so honors the truth.

The method and the matter become one, and the totality of both becomes a witness to the truth and beauty of the message. If the glory of Christ is always ultimately our subject, and if he created all things, and if upholds all things, then bringing the beauty of form into harmony with the beauty of truth is the fullest way to honor the Lord.

Or another way to think about this unity is this: If a person sees and delights in the beauty of your language, but does not yet see the beauty of the Lord Jesus, you have given them not only a witness to his beauty but an invitation. You have said, “It’s like this, only better. The beauty of my words is the shadow. Christ, who created and sustains and mercifully accepts imperfect beauty, is the substance. Turn to him. Go to him.”

Creating Eloquence for His Name's Sake

Yes, there is Christian eloquence. It is not the decisive factor in salvation or sanctification; God is. But faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word. That word in the Bible is pervasively eloquent—words are put together in a way to give great impact. And God invites us to create our own eloquent phrases for his name's sake, not ours. And in the mystery of his sovereign grace, he will glorify himself in the hearts of others in spite of and because of the words we have chosen. In that way, he will keep us humble and get all the glory for himself. Amen.

Bibliography:

- ¹ Quoted in "Calvin and the Bible," from [*Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*](#), vol. 1, pg. 7-8
- ² John Donne, [*The Sermons of John Donne*](#), vol. 6, pg. 55
- ³ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1953), 369-370
- ⁴ Harry Stout, [*The Divine Dramatist*](#), 104, emphasis added
- ⁵ [*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*](#), vol. 1, p. cxc
- ⁶ Quoted in John Stott, [*Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*](#), 325
- ⁷ Denis Donoghue, [*On Eloquence*](#), 3
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 148
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 136 emphasis added
- ¹⁰ "The most forceful rejection of eloquence I am aware of is Christ's: 'Get thee behind me, Satan.'" *Ibid.*, 143
- ¹¹ John Wilson, "[Stranger in a Strange Land: On Eloquence](#)"
- ¹² "The wise, the well born and the powerful epitomized the class from which the sophists came and which the latter helped perpetuate through an elitist educational system which emphasized the art of rhetoric. Given the great sin of the sophistic movement was it boasting . . . Paul made the Jeremiah prohibition against boasting about wisdom, status and achievement a primary text in this critique of the Corinthian sophistic movement." Bruce Winter, [*Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*](#), 2nd ed., 253-254
- ¹³ For example, 1 Corinthians 1:25 is eloquent for its conscious shock value because it refers positively to "the foolishness of God" and "the weakness of God."
- ¹⁴ "There are . . . forty-two references to "sophist" (*sophistes*) in Philo, apart from fifty-two references to cognates, and numerous comments on the sophistic movement." Winter, [*Philo and Paul*](#), 7. "There can be no doubt . . . that sophists and their students were prominent in Corinth and played an important role in the life of the city." *Ibid.*, 140
- ¹⁵ Winter, [*Philo and Paul*](#), 7-9 gives six sources for our knowledge of the sophist movement in Corinth.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 141
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 144, note 16
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 253.
- ¹⁹ "The great sin of the sophistic movement was its boasting." *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ Quoted in John Stott, [*Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*](#), 325
- ²¹ Harry Stout, [*The Divine Dramatist*](#), 228
- ²² *Ibid.*