

The Word of the Cross

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Offended by Jesus? That seems incredible to us. Yet, there have always been those who found Him and His teaching offensive: that there is only one way (John 14:6) in a world that preaches tolerance; that this way would be narrow (Matt. 5:13-14), restrictive to the few who find it; that the way would involve surrender and submission to a higher authority instead of freedom to go your own way. That pushes some away.

But many are also offended by Christianity because it involves going the way of the cross. It is a way that includes suffering and death. Not just for Jesus, but for any who wish to come after Him (Matt. 16:24).

The cross was Paul's unifying message in 1 Corinthians 1. In a church where the members were claiming to be of Paul, Cephas, Apollos, and Christ, he asked, "Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he" (1 Cor. 1:13)? It was in fact the cross of Christ that reconciled both Jew and Gentile to God (Eph. 2:16).

What should be our unifying message in a world of division and chaos? What word will draw people to the Lord? The word of the cross.

We must preach the cross. "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23). This was the message that was preached by the apostles as they went into all the world (Acts 2:22-24; Acts 3:13-15; Acts 4:8-12; Acts 10:38-43). Even when it became apparent that the word of the cross was foolishness to some and offensive to others, still Paul said with all boldness, "We preach Christ crucified."

In today's religious world, there is the insatiable desire for something "new." People think we need something different, something more modern, something less controversial. The prevailing thought seems to be, "What was preached in the 1st Century doesn't address the needs of people in the 21st Century." But it is still the cross that tells us about the nature of sin and its consequences. It is still the cross that shows us the love and mercy and forgiveness of God. It is still the cross that reminds us of our responsibility to give our life as a living sacrifice. We cannot say we "preach the gospel" if we do not preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We must preach the cross as the power of God. "For indeed Jews ask for signs" (1 Cor.

1:22). There were occasions when they came to Jesus seeking a sign (Mark 8:11) and even demanding a sign (Lk. 11:16). In John 6:30-31, it was obvious that they were looking for a Messiah to come in the power of Moses or Elijah and perform some mighty work. They wanted to see something in the likeness of manna from heaven, and they completely missed the Bread of Life and His saving death.

The cross is to some “a stumbling block” (1 Cor. 1:23). The Greek word “stumbling block” (skandalon) is where we get the word “scandal.” That’s what the cross was to the Jews: a scandal. They couldn’t imagine a suffering Savior, that the Son of God would be a man of sorrows. The Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that “crucifixion was the most wretched of all ways of dying.” But the power of God is seen in that He was able to turn this seeming defeat into stunning victory. The gates of Hades could not overpower His Son or His plan. We need not be ashamed of the word of the cross. It is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16).

We must preach the cross as the wisdom of God. To the Gentiles, the cross was “foolishness” (1:23). “Why would a “god” become a man? How could a woman be with child of the Holy Spirit? An immaculate conception? Foolishness!” The Greeks “search for wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:22). They had Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. They had education and intellectualism. They could explain anything. Except the wisdom of God.

Paul wrote that he did not come to Corinth with “superiority of speech or of wisdom” (2:1). He did not come to impress them with his own understanding or worldly wisdom. He rested on the wisdom of God as seen in the cross of Christ. As the hymn Wonderful, Merciful Savior asks, “Who would have thought that a Lamb could rescue the souls of men?” But this plan was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world. His wisdom worked it out.

“May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:4). The best way to do that is to preach the cross as the power and wisdom of God. Anything less is offensive to the Lord.