



1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The Scandal of the Cross of Jesus Christ

The recent movie, *The Passion of the Christ* has brought the scandal of the cross into clear focus once again, and the result is there are those who trip over the message of the cross.

Modern secular writers do not have the foggiest idea of what Christianity and the death of Jesus Christ is all about.

The modern media presents the wisdom of the world as the solution to all of our problems. The writers of the news magazines, TV news networks, radio and TV talk shows refuse to accept the word of the cross as the means of God's saving power. The cross of Jesus Christ is a scandal to them. They rationalize it as being too cruel, X-rated, anti-Semitic, etc. Their attitude is let's get rid of the message that Jesus Christ was indeed the atoning sacrifice of God to deal with the punishment of our guilt.

The apostle Paul wrote centuries ago, For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. . . . God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong . . . (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21-25, 27).

Paul says, As far as we are concerned, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the non-Jews.

The scandal for Jews

The cross of Jesus Christ is a scandal to the modern sophisticated mind. It is a stumbling block to many who try to explain it.

The *skandalon* is that which trips us up or that which lures us into sin. The Greek word *skandalon* is translated offence, "stumbling block," occasion for stumbling, and the thing that offends. The cross of Jesus Christ for 2000 years has tripped people up. For those who refuse to believe on Jesus Christ it is a stumbling block, something set in a man's path to trip him, to stumble over.

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The ancient Greeks used the word when referring to the movable stick or trigger of a trap, a trap stick. It was a trap, a snare, and any obstacle placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall.

It is always used in the New Testament metaphorically of anything that arouses prejudice, or brings hindrance to others, or causes them to fall by the wayside.

The figure is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose person and career were so contrary to the expectations of His contemporaries concerning the Jewish Messiah that they stumbled over Him.

The Jewish person thinks that it is incredible for a person who ended his life on a cross could possibly be the Anointed Messiah of Yahweh. They turn to Deuteronomy 21:23, "He who is hanged is accursed of God." But that is the whole point; Jesus Christ was cursed of God because of our sins. The idea of a suffering Messiah as the Suffering Servant of the LORD in Isaiah 53 was a scandal to them.

The apostle Paul said they were seeking signs which would prove that a political Messiah had come to deliver the Jews from their servitude to the Roman powers. However, the true Messiah came as a meek and lowly Servant of Yahweh. To the Jewish people this was an offense, and to this day a stumbling block. "

The mass media is once again stumbling over the scandal of the cross. The preaching of the cross is still a stumbling block and foolishness to many people. However, God was pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). We preach Christ crucified (v. 23). If you have been saved it is only because you have chosen to believe in the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary. There is no other way to be saved.

The cross of Jesus Christ is still a stumbling block to anyone who wishes to be saved any other way. The Judaizers in the early church at Galatia would have accepted the cross with circumcision, but not the cross instead of circumcision. But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished" (Galatians 5:11, NASB 1995). Is there something that you want to add to the cross of Jesus Christ in order to be saved? Baptism by immersion, or sprinkling, church membership, good works, faithful church attendance, etc. will not save you. And they will not save you if you think they will add anything to the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

A crucified Jewish Messiah was a stumbling block to the Jewish people (Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8; 1 Cor. 1:23). The idea of a suffering messiah was an offense even though it is according to the divine plan (Isaiah 53; Acts 2:23-24).

The foolishness of pseudo-intellectuals

The Greek gods were insular to any feelings of humans. They could not identify with mankind's suffering. Their philosophy taught that God was totally unable to feel and any idea of God being involved in human affairs

totally unable to feel and any idea of God being involved in human affairs was an insult to God. They had no idea of God entering into the affairs of men. They could never accept the idea of the apostle John about the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

As at Athens the Greeks were ready to listen to charismatic language and sharp intellectual minds and stunning rhetoric. They were in to the latest philosophies and debates. Talk shows would have been their in thing. They split hairs over the latest fad every day.

Can you imagine how the apostle Paul appeared to them with his honest, open, genuine communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

This is just where the Gospel clashes with the modern mind. God is holy and He cannot tolerate sin. It is repulsive to His holiness. Wrath is His reaction to sin. The wages of sin is death. He demands that the penalty to the violated law be satisfied. In righteous love He provided the very payment that His law demanded. Propitiation is not pagans appeasing a pagan god. It is a God of love providing a perfect sacrifice for the sinner's guilt that turns away His own wrath toward the sinner. The Son of God provides the very sacrifice that is demanded. This is entirely contrary to the sophisticated Greek's way of thinking.

The cross is a stumbling block and an offense to the ancient and modern world system.

HUMAN WISDOM IS POWERLESS

Human wisdom is insufficient to lead anyone to God (1 Cor. 1:21). The new age movements are excellent examples of humanistic philosophies. The LORD God ordained that the good news of Jesus Christ is the means to a saving knowledge of God. God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the preaching of the gospel to save those who believe. ”

Human wisdom could never discover the method of salvation, nor the compliance to receive it. Lost sinners are saved not because they are wiser, better or distinguished in some way, but simply because God chose them and called them by His Spirit (vv. 26-30). God's purpose of saving sinners by grace through faith in Jesus Christ was so He would receive all the glory (v. 31). If you have anything to glory in let it be in the LORD. Wisdom that comes from God leads to man's salvation. Preaching must always be centered in God's wisdom.

It is unscriptural to make baptism or any other religious rite essential to salvation. The quickest way to render the Gospel powerless and inoperative is to mix it and confuse it with legalism and humanism. The good news is powerless when men try to make a philosophy of religion out of it. Human words will not glorify the cross of Jesus Christ. Humanism mixed with Christianity causes the saving gospel to lose its divine element and become nothing more than human wisdom devoid of God's saving grace.

Whatever you mix with the gospel obscures the cross and deprives the gospel of its saving power.

The cross does not make sense to the rational pagan mind. It is foolishness to him (1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6; 1:26; 3:18). The worldly wisdom has no idea of eternal verities.

WISDOM OF THE CROSS

We are commissioned to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God (vv. 17-18).

The preaching of the cross is the doctrine of salvation through substitutionary death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sins. Those individuals who listen to the messages on the cross and think it is foolishness perish. However, those who put their trust in Jesus Christ experience the power of God and are saved.

The word of the cross (v. 18) is the thing preached. It is the message God uses to bring us to Himself. Those who believe in it are saved because it is the power of God unto salvation (v. 18).

It is through the preaching of the cross that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. People turn their noses up at the very thought of a crucified savior. They made political hay of those who are responsible for crucifying Christ. But the simple fact is there is no other way in which to be saved except by means of the death and resurrection of Christ.

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12, NASB 1995).

Christ the power of God

Jesus Christ is the power of God from all eternity. By His word were the heavens made, and all the host of them. "The Word was God, and the Word was with God. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. He is the Creator of the universe, and by Him all things exist.

He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is the sovereign of the universe.

That Jesus Christ is the power of God is seen in the wind, the waves yielding to the abundant power of His voice saying, Peace, peace be still. The lame man jumped with joy at the command of Christ to get up and walk. The rooster crowed at exactly the right moment when Peter denied Christ. The deaf man could hear the voice of God speaking to Him, and the dumb man could sing praises to God, and testify before men what the power of God in Jesus Christ had done in him.

Lazarus, come forth! was proof of Jesus' divine power and Godhead. The dead rose by the power of God. And it was by the power of God that Jesus gave up His own life at God's appointed time and after three days rose from the dead.

Moreover, Jesus is the power of God now because He sits at the right hand of God. He is sovereign, and He reigns with power and dignity. And on the appointed day He will come to judge the living and the dead.

Christ is the wisdom of God

He planned the way of salvation; He devised the system of atonement and substitution; He laid the foundations of the great plan of salvation. There was wisdom, says Spurgeon.

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It was by wisdom Christ made the heavens and earth. With His infinite wisdom He created man, and even became a man. At the age of twelve He taught the leading Jewish scholars and rabbis in the Temple. They dialogued with Him in amazement at His wisdom.

Today as He reigns in heaven He is the infinite wisdom of God ruling the universe. He is the Mind behind the tiniest element in nature and the vast solar systems. He is the Designer of the universe and He is the super glue that holds it all together.

Jesus is the Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Christ in you

Christ in you, the hope of glory is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Jesus Christ is the wisdom and power of God in the Christian's life. He sets us free and puts a song in our lives. Do you sing of Christ? Have you experienced His saving power? Have you sat at His feet and absorbed the wisdom of His teachings?

Christ in me is the power and the wisdom of God to be all that God wants me to be in His grace. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen (vv. 19-20).

Upon the occasion of the death of a child, a mother spoke with the wisdom and power of God in her life. Christ is my Lord, I trust in Him; surely I can give this child to Him who gave Himself for me. "

Have you learned to appropriate the power and the wisdom of God in your daily life? Make yourself available to Him and let the power and the wisdom of God be demonstrated in your life. Let your Christian experience be a steadfast witness to the power and the wisdom of God.

Put Jesus Christ in the right place in your life and you will find Him to be your wisdom in your own experiences. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you " (Matthew 6:33).

Get the Gospel and you are a wise person. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Give the Holy Spirit freedom to apply the wisdom of God in your daily life and you become a man of wisdom. He gives direction as we commit our lives to Him. He leads us in the paths of righteousness. That is a wise person.

Yield to Him and He breaks the power of cancelled sin in your personal life and sets you free. He breaks the iron chains in our lives and gives us freedom. He will deliver you from sin today if you will listen to Him and yield to Him.

It was by the power and wisdom of God that Jesus Christ died as your substitute on the cross. There is no greater power than the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us of all our sins (1 John 1:7). Only the divine wisdom of God could provide a perfect cure for our sin problem.

YOUR DECISION TO BECOME A WISE PERSON

All of the hearers of the gospel down through the ages are divided into two groups. One group consists of those who are saved by the effectual work of the death of Christ. The other group is lost because they are without Christ. He who does not believe is judged already. What they need to do is believe in Christ and be

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without Christ. He who does not believe is judged already. What they need to do is believe in Christ and be saved. To do nothing is to die and go to hell without Christ.

Those who are saved are now in a state of salvation. They have trusted the message of the good news and believed on Christ and are now saved.

The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. However, the wisdom of the world will not lead you to an intimate, personal relationship with the LORD God. No one has ever been saved believing in the wisdom of the world. It only leads to eternal perdition.

To the great sophisticated intellectual minds the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ only appears to them as something foolish. The cross of Jesus is still a scandal, and a foolish suggestion.

However, the word of the cross is the wisdom of God and the power of God to those who are being saved. The good news of the crucified Messiah is the awesome wisdom of God and supernatural power of God.

God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). The message is the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ changes lives, and you cannot argue with a changed life. Jesus Christ changes people's lives for the better.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16).

Jesus changes lives because He is the power and the wisdom of God.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved (Acts 16:31).

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