

I Corinthians 1:18-25
The Offense of the Cross

Introduction

1. The church has often unnecessarily offended people with its message and behavior.

- Preaching law without grace.
- Preaching discipline without restoration.
- Preaching conformity without community.
- Preaching personal salvation without social compassion.
- Preaching rules without relationships.

Some Christians take pride in offending all men "in the name of Christ" and then feel like martyrs when rejected.

2. The new fundamentals of the faith for some churches.

- Thou shalt not offend anyone.
- Thou shalt respect all spiritual paths.
- Thou shalt give people what they want.
- Thou shalt do whatever it takes to bring'm in.

3. Some churches have over-reacted to the offensiveness of other churches by avoiding any offense including the offense of the Gospel.

- We preach forgiveness without the Cross.
- We preach community without Baptism.
- We preach grace without discipline.
- We preach the Kingdom without the King.
- We preach salvation without an exclusive Gospel.

These churches dare not offend any man and no longer fear offending God.

A. The Gospel will be controversial and divisive.

I Corinthians 1 “¹⁸ 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.”

- **Matthew 10:34** “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
- The contrast in human responses to the gospel is great ranging from “foolish” to the “power and wisdom of God.”

B. Paul sees false religion as much a problem as secular values.

I Corinthians 1 “¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ 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.”

The nature of the world's wisdom.

- **Secular Humanism** (defining reality and making decisions as though *God* didn't exist). To the secularist "Man is a sophisticated animal."
- **Religiosity** (making *god* in our image) The religious leaders (who share Paul's moral values but not his *Gospel*) are in view. To the religionist "God is a sophisticated man."
 - a. In verse 19 Paul quote from Isa.29:14. In its context (vs.13) it speaks of Jewish leaders who pay lip service to *God* with their rules, but don't know *God*.
 - b. The word "scribe" and "debater" both fit a Jewish context.
 - c. There are few things worse than bad religion. It is toxic to the human soul in that it pays lip service to *God* while stumbling at the only door to the Kingdom and scoffing at the grace and guidance of the cross.

C. God's plan is not to ignore the world's wisdom but to mock it.

1. God intends to leave the world's wisdom looking silly as it is challenged to address the deep questions of life apart from *God*.
2. Not everything the world teaches is false. But apart from *God* it cannot answer the most important questions of life.
3. Christians can look foolish as they embrace the cross and they can be foolish if they deny everything the world says.
4. **What does it mean to be human? (Genesis 1-2)**
 - Man is a part of the natural world in that he is formed from the dust of the ground. Worldly wisdom tends to see life from this perspective only.
 - Man is a part of the spiritual world in that he bears the image and likeness of *God*.
 - True wisdom respects both these facts.
5. Christ is "the power of *God*" in that he conquered death and he is "the wisdom of *God*" in that he gives meaning to life. These are two issues that the wisdom of this age cannot address without looking foolish.
 - a. The evolutionary model is often cited as authoritative by the world's wisdom.
 - b. It suggests that "physical survival" is the basic goal of human life.
 - c. It does not have an explanation for "death" but is trying hard to find ways to prolong life.

D. When the Gospel is preached, three things will happen - two of them are bad.

I Corinthians 1 "22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

- The Gospel will disrupt our plans.
- To many it will be "foolishness" (silly)
- To many it will be a "stumbling block" (insulting)
- To others it will be the "wisdom and power of God."

E. What should we learn from this passage?

1. We should not be surprised when the Gospel is not popular with many.
2. We can win people to and with something other than the Gospel.
3. We must be sure that we are not foolish or the stumbling block rather than the Gospel.
4. While we can and should debate the world, we should remember that the power is in our lives not just our words.

F. Rules of engagement in culture warfare.

1. **Don't hide the Cross.** Boldly and confidently proclaim the Word of the Cross.
2. **Expect to offend many.** Graciously accept the rejection, misunderstanding, and persecution that will come to the Gospel.
3. **Do not foolishly offend.** Be sure the source of the offense is the Gospel not your lack of sensitivity and love.
4. **Show and tell.** Let people see the end of the Gospel in your faith, hope, and love.