



The Message of the Cross 1:18-31

In a recent survey article Josh McDowell says that *“while 51 percent of evangelical Christians did not believe in absolute truth in an earlier survey, the percentage escalated to 62 in 1994. In 1999, it jumped to 78 percent. “You know what it is now?” asked McDowell. “One of the most staggering statistics in history of the church... 91 percent said there is no absolute truth apart from myself.”* The article goes on to describe a lowered morality that is present today even amongst those who call themselves Christians; especially because of the pervasive influence of the internet where 2.5 billion pornographic emails are circulated each day.¹

In 2006, former president of Kentucky Christian College, Dr. Keith Keeran described trends that were impacting incoming students at the school: 1) Declining level of Bible knowledge. Declining regard for Biblical authority. 2) Decline in spiritual and moral values including lower expectations of high moral standards in top leadership positions. An inability to clearly identify "sin." 3) Declining family values despite popular rhetoric. Growing breakdown of the family unit. 4) Increasing potential for legal challenges to Christian values. Increasing incidence of anti-Christian bias. 5) Rising student demand for personal counselling. Dr. Keeran was writing from the perspective of a Bible college president looking at incoming students who should represent the "cream of the crop" morally, ethically, and spiritually.

The Church today has some serious problems. We have been influenced by the world. Rather than being the salt of the earth and the light of the world which allows us to influence the world, we have allowed the characteristics of the world to dilute the purity of the church. We see problems within the church today which weren't even serious problems within the lives of non-Christians fifty years ago. Sure, the church is better than the world, but the church is not as strong morally or spiritually as it was a generation ago and it is constantly slipping.

The answer to the declining morality in the world and in the church is the message of the cross. It is a message which can change the world. Read now 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

Verse 18 begins with the word “for” showing it is the end result of what was written in the previous verses; that is the power of salvation is in the cross not in eloquent or wise speech. Let us now look at three lessons surrounding the message of the cross.

I. The Message of the Cross Seems Foolish to the World

- 1. Describe the reaction of the world to the cross from verses 18; 22-23.**
- 2. Describe the reaction to the cross you have seen from people in the world.**

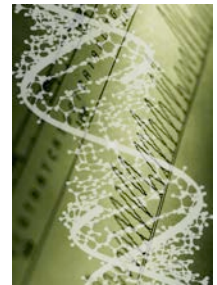


¹ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/apologist-josh-mcdowell-internet-the-greatest-threat-to-christians-52382/>

The message of the cross is synonymous with the gospel. Death is the necessary penalty for every person since the wages of sin is death (Rom 3:23), but on the cross Christ died in our place as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. The cross, the most hideous instrument of death, became a beacon of hope and life.

To the Jews the cross was a stumbling block. They viewed the cross as shameful. To die on a cross was the worst death possible reserved for the vilest of criminals. They believed that to die on a cross showed that one was under God's curse. To think that the Messiah would come and die on a cross was scandalous and unbelievable.

The Corinthians, with their Greek background, lived in a world where thought and reason were important. They had no faith in God. They were masters of their own destiny. The Corinthians loved to speculate and debate various subjects. They believed themselves capable of figuring out the difficulties and important questions about life. Human reason was sufficient to make the right choice in any decision. They needed rational evidence for what they believed before they would believe it. To them the message of the cross was unbelievable, irrational, and foolish.



The Greek word used for foolishness is *moria*. It is the word from which we get the English word moron and means foolish, absurd, irrational, or filled with nonsense. In today's world the message of the cross continues to be seen as foolishness or even moronic by many.

3. Why do many people see the cross as foolish?

II. The Message of the Cross Is Powerful to the Christian

4. How does Paul describe the message of the cross for the Christian in 1:18 and 1:24?

In verse 18, Paul writes about those who are “being saved” showing salvation as a process. Christ paid our penalty on the cross, those who accept his offer of grace by faith are baptised into him, and await their final reward.

In **verse 20** Paul asks four questions, *“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”* Throughout history man has always thought himself quite intelligent and independent of the need for God. Today, scholars, philosophers, scientists, and politicians think they have answers to modern life, but do they? Are we any better off than our parents and grandparents? There have been advances in medicine, but people still die. There is more crime and greater fear than in past generations. We are wealthy, but unsatisfied. Never before have so many people needed counselling. We have not been able to eliminate physical abuse, alcoholism, or drug use from society. Many people are profoundly lonely and unhappy. The answer to all these problems is in the message of the cross. It is the message of the cross that brings hope and joy and POWER to our lives.



Salvation comes to believers through the “folly” of preaching. The world views the message of salvation made possible by the cross of Christ to be folly (1:21). Jews wanted signs (miracles) while the Greeks wanted wisdom (a philosophically satisfying message), perhaps like what had come from Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. Instead the gospel offered the message of a crucified Lord.

5. What does 1:26 tell us about the background of the Corinthian Christians?
6. How did God shame the wise with what is foolish and the strong with what is weak?
7. Read 1:29-31 and describe how a Christian should and should not boast.

III. The Message of the Cross Should Motivate Christians to Evangelism

The word “perishing” in 1:18 should sear our consciences. Our world is lost and our world is perishing. Many of our friends, neighbours, family members, and co-workers are dying without hope.

8. What pictures come to your mind when you think of the word “perishing?”

This passage provides us with two of the most important lessons in evangelism. **First, people come to know Christ through the proclamation of the gospel.** While this may seem like the most obvious statement about evangelism, Christians can act as if they don’t believe it is true.

9. What does 1:21 say leads people to salvation?

Bible preaching, Bible teaching, and Bible study still lead people to Christ. Gimmicks and programs are not what lead to salvation. Peoples lives are changed by the message of the cross. We need to be active in sharing the message of the cross as found in the Bible.

Second, the message of the cross is still powerful. You do not need to be a scholar to share the message of the cross. You do not need to be the smoothest speaker to share the message of the cross, because the power of the cross is in the message not the messenger (1 Cor 1:17). We do not lead people to Christ by our own abilities, or our personality, or our programs. People are won to Christ through the message of the cross.



Christians sometimes try to “dress up” the gospel message in an attempt make it seem more relevant or acceptable to our modern world. We can act as if we believe people will respond to the gospel only if we make it glossy enough and professional enough and palatable enough.

10. What are some ways in which our methods could obscure God’s message?
11. How has the message of the cross changed your life and how can it change the lives of people in this world?