



A SCANDALOUS GOSPEL

By Paul David Washer

“For 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

Paul's flesh had every reason to be ashamed of the Gospel he preached because it contradicted absolutely everything that was held to be true and sacred among his contemporaries. To the Jew, the Gospel was the worst sort of blasphemy because it claimed that the Nazarene who died accursed on Calvary was the Messiah. To the Greeks, it was the worst sort of absurdity because it claimed that this Jewish Messiah was God in the flesh. Thus Paul knew that whenever he opened his mouth to speak the Gospel he would be utterly rejected and ridiculed to scorn unless the Holy Spirit intervened and moved upon the hearts and minds of his hearers. In our day, the primitive Gospel is no less offensive, for it still contradicts every tenet or “ism” of contemporary culture - relativism, pluralism, and humanism.

It's Not All Relative

We live in an age of Relativism - a belief system based upon the absolute certainty that there are no absolutes. We hypocritically applaud men for seeking the truth, but call for the public execution of anyone arrogant enough to believe he has found it. We live in a self-imposed Dark Age, the reason for which is clear. Natural man is a fallen creature, morally corrupt, and hell-bent on autonomy (i.e. self-government). He hates God because He is righteous and hates His laws because they censure and restrict his

evil. He hates the truth because it exposes him for what he is and troubles what still remains of his conscience. Therefore, fallen man seeks to push truth, especially the truth about God, as far from him as possible. He will go to any extent to suppress the truth; even to the point of pretending that no such thing exists or that if it does exist, it cannot be known or have any bearing on our lives. It is never the case of a hiding God but a hiding man. The problem is not the intellect but the will. Like a man who hides his head in the sand to avoid a charging rhino, modern man denies the truth of a righteous God and His moral absolutes in hopes of quieting his conscience and putting out of mind the judgment he knows to be inevitable. The Christian Gospel is a scandal to man and his culture because it does the one thing he most wants to avoid - It awakens him from his self-imposed slumber to the reality of his fallenness and rebellion, and calls for him to reject autonomy and submit to God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Everyone's Not Right

We live in an age of Pluralism - a belief system that puts an end to truth by declaring everything to be true, especially with regard to religion. It may be difficult for the contemporary Christian to comprehend, but the Christians living in the first few centuries of the faith were actually marked and persecuted as atheists. The culture surrounding them was immersed in theism. The world was filled with images of deities, and religion was a booming business. Men not only tolerated one another's deities but also swapped and shared them. The entire religious world was going along just fine

until the Christians showed up and declared that, “gods made with hands are no gods at all.” They denied the Caesars the homage they demanded, refused to bend the knee to all other so-called gods, and confessed Jesus alone as Lord of all. The entire world looked on such jaw-dropping arrogance and reacted with fury against the Christian’s intolerable intolerance to tolerance.

This same scenario abounds in our world today. Against all logic, we are told that all views regarding religion and morality are true, no matter how radically different and contradictory they may be. The most overwhelming aspect of all this is that through the tireless efforts of the media and the academic world, this has quickly become the majority view. Nevertheless, pluralism does not address the issue or cure the malady. It only anesthetizes the patient so that he no longer feels or thinks. The Gospel is a scandal because it awakens man from his slumber and refuses to let him rest on such an illogical footing. It forces him to come to some conclusion – “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

The true Gospel is radically exclusive. Jesus is not “a” way, but “the” way, and all other ways are no way at all. If Christianity would only move one small step toward a more tolerant ecumenicalism and change the definite article “the” for the indefinite article “a”, the scandal would be removed, and the world and Christianity could become friends. However, whenever this occurs, Christianity ceases to be Christianity, Christ is denied, and the world is without a Savior.

Man Is Not The Measure

We live in an age of Humanism. Over the last several decades, man has fought to purge God from his conscience and culture. He has torn down every visible altar to the “One True God” and has erected monuments to himself with the zeal of a religious fanatic. He has managed to make Himself the center, measure, and end of all things. He praises his inherent worth, demands homage to his self-esteem, and promotes his own self-fulfillment or self-realization as the greatest good. He explains away his gnawing conscience as the remnants of an antiquated religion of guilt, and he excuses himself from any responsibility for the moral chaos surrounding him by blaming society, or at least that part of society that has not yet attained to his enlightenment. Any sug-

gestion that his conscience might be right in its testimony against him or that he might be responsible for the almost infinite variations of maladies in the world is unthinkable. For this reason, the Gospel is a scandal to fallen man because it exposes his delusion about himself and convicts him of his fallenness and guilt. This is the essential “first work” of the Gospel, and this is why the world so loathes true Gospel preaching. It ruins man’s party, rains on his parade, exposes his make-believe, and points out that the emperor has no clothes.

The Scriptures recognize that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a “stumbling block” and “foolishness” to all men of every age and culture. However, to seek to remove the scandal from the message is to make void the cross of Christ and its saving power. We must understand that the Gospel is not only scandalous, but it is supposed to be! Through the foolishness of the Gospel, God has ordained to destroy the wisdom of the wise, frustrate the intelligence of the greatest minds, and humble the pride of all men. To the end that no flesh may boast in His presence, but just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Paul’s Gospel not only contradicted the religion, philosophy, and culture of the day, but it declared war on them. It refused truce or treaty with the world and would settle for nothing less than culture’s absolute surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We would do well to follow Paul’s example. We must be careful to shun every temptation to conform our Gospel to the trends of the day or the desires of carnal men. We have no right to water down its offense or civilize its radical demands in order to make it more appealing to a fallen world or carnal church members. Our churches are filled with strategies to make them more seeker-friendly by repackaging the Gospel, removing the stumbling block, and taking the edge off the blade, so that it might be more acceptable to carnal men. We ought to be seeker-friendly, but we ought to realize this - there is only One seeker and He is God. If we are striving to make our church and message accommodating, let us make them accommodating to Him. If we are striving to build a church or ministry, let us build it upon a passion to glorify God, and a desire not to offend His majesty. To the wind with what the world thinks about us. We are not to seek the honors of earth, but the honor of heaven should be our desire.