**Are you sure you love the gospel,**

**or do you love a philosophy?**

*by Jeremiah Cox*

It is encouraging to see younger generations develop a zeal for God and His word. It is paramount with regard to the future of the church. We do not want to make the same mistake Israel made – *“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel”* (Judges 2:10). We certainly shouldn’t make numeric growth a priority over spiritual growth, but when there is opportunity to attend a gospel effort, and many young are present, it is cause to rejoice. However, as spiritual growth is the priority, we must ask ourselves why we see so many young people so enthusiastic about attending such events. As I have grown I have witnessed a problem rise beneath the surface in the lives of those in my generation. This issue is far from unknown, and does not only involve the youth, but also the older Christians. However, as being a part of the youth in the present, I feel a sense of responsibility to address this imminent threat.

**What’s the problem?**

My concern is regarding preachers, and their listeners, who have seemed to develop a similar mindset to that which plagued the church in Corinth. The apostle Paul opened his first letter to the church in Corinth by addressing, in part, their love for philosophy, and its effect on their understanding of the gospel message which he preached to them.

Verses 10-17 of 1 Corinthians 1 discusses the problem of sectarianism. *“Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* (1:12-13). This problem did not find its origin in Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ. Their message was the same. Paul wrote later, *“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God”* (4:1). While their message was of *“the mysteries of God,”* the Corinthians viewed it as something else.

*“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect”* (1:17). *“Wisdom of words”* was the desire of the pagan society in which the Corinthians lived. It consisted of *“excellence of speech…[and] persuasive words of human wisdom”* (2:1,4). However, it is not limited to excellent or persuasive words. A big part of the problem was the tendency for the Corinthians to identify the *“message of the cross”* as *“words of human wisdom.”* This is what Paul spent the first two chapters refuting. Regardless of the content of his message, if the Corinthians misunderstood it as being from his own wisdom and ability, their faith would not be in the power of God, but in the wisdom of men (cf. 2:5). If the *“message of the cross”* was taken as *“words of human wisdom”* it would be *“made of no effect.”* Man’s wisdom cannot save souls! That power resides in, what seems to the world as, *“the foolishness of the message preached”* (1:21).

To eradicate this erroneous view of the *“message of the cross,”* Paul explained its origin. *“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory”* (2:7). The message was not from Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas. It was from God! *“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual”* (2:13). The only reason the message Paul preached was able to save sinners was because it came from God!

**Application**

We are fooling ourselves if we think the only threat coming from the pulpit is false doctrine. The devil has deceived many by planting the false notion that if it is true then it is scriptural. A trending method of preaching is one which uses less scripture, and more stories, jokes, philosophy, etc. This is problematic even if what is being said is true. The apostle Paul’s message to the Corinthians was true – *“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”* (2:2). The problem was the Corinthians thinking that message, although true, was from Paul himself. Conversely, upon hearing a sermon with little to no scripture, although perhaps true, a person may misunderstand the message as being from God. Yet, how could it be from God if God’s word was nowhere to be found in the content of the sermon?

We reach a fundamental, yet forgotten, requirement for spiritual growth – it finds its origin with God, not man (2:13-16). Paul told Timothy, *“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 1:13). The pattern did not find its origin with Paul. Paul was merely an agent of communication from God to Timothy, as were the rest of the prophets, and apostles to mankind (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-21). Only scripture can make the man of God complete, and thoroughly equip him for every good work (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). A message is only scriptural if it is from scripture!

If we continue to make the mistake of preaching with less scripture, and accepting preaching with less scripture, our faith will not be in the power of God, but in the wisdom of men. This cannot possibly be pleasing to God, for our faith must be in Him (cf. Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17). **Furthermore, it is only a matter of time until what is being said is in fact false doctrine, yet misunderstood as being from God, because what the preacher was saying before, although not directly from scripture, was true.** There is a reason God gave us an unchanging standard by which we will be judged (cf. John 12:48). We must only be satisfied by a message preached from God! Preachers, remember what your job is – preaching the message of the cross which comes from God (cf. Galatians 1:11-12). Listeners, remember what your job is – determine the origin of the message as being from God, or man, and listen to that which is divine (cf. Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1; James 1:21).