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THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS

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The offence of the Cross is always with us. It was an offence to our Lord's own disciples, even when it was He that preached it. There is good reason to believe that it was not without its difficulties to our Lord. The set face was not set without reason. The soliloquy in the presence of the Greeks reveals a mind in conflict. Their coming greatly moved Him. He saw in them the first-fruits of His inheritance of the Gentiles, and He saw also in them the severest test of the Kingdom of the Cross. He rejoiced in that hour, and in that hour His soul was troubled. What should He say? He could not, and would not, shirk the Cross. It was inevitable. Death is the universal law of life. The seed must die if it would bring forth fruit. Every man must lose his life if he would find it. Should He pray that He might be spared? Death was inevitable if He would save the world. The manner of His dying He would leave to the wisdom and love of His Father. That is the meaning of His prayer. It is as if He had said, "Father, never mind Me, do according to Thy good pleasure. Glorify Thy Name." It is the greatest prayer put into human speech, and the crowning triumph of Faith. The conflict and the conquest centered in the Cross. Calvary staggered His followers. It killed their hope. "We had hoped," sighed the bewildered disciples on the way to Emmaus. The Risen Lord restored their faith by interpreting the Cross, and by showing by "many infallible proofs" that He was indeed risen from the dead. The Cross became the Gospel to them that believed, but wherever Jesus was preached, the Cross was a difficulty and an offence. It was foolishness to the Greek and a stumbling-block to the Jew, and the word of the Cross is still foolishness and a stone of stumbling.

It Is Foolishness To Them That Are Perishing

The Cross is the gospel for a perishing world. That is a central fact that is essential to the gospel. If the Scriptures are wrong in their interpretation and estimate of sin, then there is nothing they have to teach that really matters. They interpret the Cross in relation to sin. The soul that sins dies. Death is not so much a penalty as an issue. It is automatic, immediate, inevitable. Christ died for our sins, and if He died for sin He died the death that sin involved. If sin did not involve His death that we might be redeemed, then the Cross is a tragedy and a blasphemy, and of all men the Christian is most pitifully deceived. The Cross is God's remedy for sin. It has no meaning for any but sinners. The perishing make a mock of sin, and for that reason they despise the Cross.

The Cross is God's witness that He is not willing that any should perish. He gave His Son to be the Saviour of the world, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." The Son of Man was "lifted up" that men might be saved. In spite of all that God has done, or can do, some will choose to perish. To them the Cross

is moonshine madness, a stupid superstition, a foolish and ignorant blasphemy. "For the word of the Cross is to them that are perishing foolishness."

The Offence To The Cultured Greek

To the sensitive mind of the cultured Greek the Cross is repulsive. It shocks his taste, offends his logic, and outrages his philosophy. The faith of a Greek in the gospel with a cross for its sign was, and is, indeed, a miracle of grace. To the preacher to the Greeks it was a constant difficulty. Paul felt it. At Athens he reasoned about the philosophy of religion, but when he came to Corinth he "determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Athens is the popular school of modern theology. Those whose quest is the "wisdom of the wise" still find the Cross an offence. They disdain its gospel, and speak mockingly of it as the religion of the shambles. They cannot believe that God has declared the wisdom of the world to be foolishness, and they cannot understand how anything can be hidden from them. To the wisdom of this world the Cross is nothing but folly. It cuts clean across all its canons of taste, justice, and reason. There is no philosophy of the Cross that can make it acceptable to the wisdom of this world. Paul knew that. He never rested its claim upon its philosophy, but always upon its power.

The trouble with the Church is that it has an abundance of philosophers and a scarcity of apostles, pastors, and evangelists. There never were so many wise men who gloried in their wisdom. They have done much to destroy the faith of many in the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. It is said that in Methodism two gospels are being preached. There is only one gospel, and it is the gospel of the Cross. The apostle Paul said there was no other, and if angel or man preach any other, let him be anathema. It is said that there are preachers who deny that Christ died for sinners, or that His death is in any way necessary for salvation. They avoid hymns that speak of His death as an atonement for sin, and they do not appeal to sinners to avail themselves of the sacrifice of the Cross, but to take the side of Jesus to range themselves along with Jesus, to trust themselves to the love of God as Jesus Himself did. The thinking of these wise people errs for lack of depth and perspective. They think in blinkers, and forget the Godward side of Calvary.

The Stumbling-Block To The Jew

The Cross was a greater difficulty to the Jew than to the Greek. It was an offence to the sensitized mind of the Greek, but to the Jew it outraged his religious pride and his Messianic hope. The Greek sought for truth; the Jew looked for a kingdom. It made them angry when Pilate wrote on the Cross that Jesus was the King of the Jews. In their indignation they swore allegiance to a foreign potentate. They preferred Barabbas to Jesus, and a Caesar to the Messiah. They hated Jesus, but even if they had loved Him it would have seemed impossible to believe in a crucified Messiah. They cursed the Cross.

It is small wonder that Jewish Christians sought to evade the Cross. They saw in it the end of the temple and all its Mosaic order. What would become of the priesthood, if neither priest nor sacrifice were necessary?

They were as concerned for the kingdom as for the temple. It was folly to seek to establish a kingdom with a Cross for its symbol, and it would never come if regeneration were the only way to reconstruction. Men identify the Kingdom with law and circumstance. They want the short cut to the millennium, and the Cross is off the track. Human nature does not need a change, but a chance! Give it a chance! It does not ask for a redeemer. It is its own saviour. All it needs to do is to take a good look at itself and say with Nehemiah, "Such an one as I." Every man's salvation lies deep down in the subliminal depths of his own personality. Try pschuggestion! Instead of a gospel that tells a man that he must depend upon the death of Another, tell him to buck up and have a talk with God, that is, his inner self, on equal terms. Did not Nietzsche say that the Cross was a gospel fit only for "poor devils"? The superman needs no Cross, and the Kingdom of Heaven does not come by way of Calvary. The Cross! The Cross of Christ! The gospel that Christ died in the place of sinners!

The Power of God to Them That Believe

The answer to all this would require a volume, and yet it can be put into a few sentences.

The first thing to be said is that there is no interpretation of the Cross of Christ, but "according to the Scriptures," and their interpretation is that Christ died for our sins.

The second is that if there is no doctrine of substitution in the death of Christ, there is no meaning in words, and the New Testament can no longer be the infallible guide and standard of Christian truth.

The third is that the gospel of the Cross saves sinners. The religion of Christ is not a cult. Its fellowship is not a mystery society. The fact never to be forgotten is that the gospel of the Cross is a gospel of redemption. It is for sinners. Jesus did not come to call the righteous. He came to seek and save that which was lost. The gospel of the Cross saves sinners. I have preached it for more than forty years. It has been my privilege to see all sorts of sinners come to Jesus. There is power in the Cross. I have knelt by the side of despairing men and women who could find no potential salvation in themselves, but the gospel of the Cross gave them peace and deliverance and joy. It all came with the realization or faith that Christ died for ME. "He loved ME; He gave Himself for ME."

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In MY place condemned HE stood,
Sealed MY pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Mrs. Geo. Tedlie, Feb. 40