

The Offence of the Cross

“Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecute³d? In that case the offence of the cross has been abolished” (Gal. 5:11.)

There is, perhaps, no more offensive doctrine in Christianity than the doctrine of the cross. It is diametrically opposed to human wisdom. When Jesus first announced this doctrine, Peter was so offended that he began to rebuke His Lord and Master (Matt. 16:21-23.) Later, when Jesus made other references to His death, the disciples were incapable of understanding or even asking questions about what He meant (see Mk. 9:31-32 ; Luke 9:44-45; 18:31-34, etc.) Paul described this doctrine as a stumblingblock to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23.) The Law declared anyone “cursed” who has hanged on a tree (Gal. 3:13,) and yet this is precisely what the “offence of the cross” required.

John the Baptist came preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matt. 3:2.) Jesus also came preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Matt. 4:17.) The disciples “signed up” with Jesus to become a part of this kingdom. They experienced the miraculous and tasted the powers of the age to come. They healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, and cast out demons (Matt. 10:8.) They were, no doubt, somewhat intoxicated by their new found powers. They smiled in their sleep and dreamed of doing even greater miracles in days yet to come. The teaching of the cross called for them to die. It seemed to fly in the face of everything the apostles were accomplishing. It seemed to be in direct contradiction to their dreams for the future and their hopes for a better tomorrow.

Jesus, as you know., not only insisted that He was going to die on a cross, He also demanded that all of His disciples take up a cross. Please prayerfully consider these words : **“Then said**

Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt 16:24-26)

This was a difficult message to receive. If you were Peter, for example, which would you rather think about - healing the sick, or your own death? Cleansing the lepers - or your own death? Casting out demons - or your own death? The message of the cross was offensive then, and it is still offensive now.

The cross of Christ, however, was not the end of His ministry, it was the beginning. Through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. Through death Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God. Through death Jesus attained new power. There is life inside of a grain of wheat, but the power of that life is not realized until that grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies. In the same way Jesus attained new power by means of His cross.

The same beautiful truth is also applicable to us. The Apostle Paul is a good example of the power of the cross made manifest in human flesh. He was a dynamic leader among the Jews. He advanced beyond his peers and obtained impeccable credentials in the Jewish faith. Paul, however, was "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20.) He cast his Jewish credentials on the garbage heap and "died daily." His self sacrifice was not the end of his ministry, it was the beginning. His "death " made manifest the "life" of Christ. It was no longer Paul who lived, but Christ. Paul's power was limited, but the power of Christ is not. In Christ we are able to accomplish exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or imagine. The doctrine of the cross was not offensive to Paul, he gloried in it (Gal. 6:14.)

We too can glory in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We

can put to death our dreams and allow the Holy Spirit to give us new and better dreams. We can allow the old man to be crucified that the body of sin might be destroyed.

May we today deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ!