

The Offense of the Cross

“Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense 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. Please note the rebuke of Jesus to Peter **“Get the behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matt. 16:21-23.)** Opposing the cross is a serious mistake! It is Satanic! 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 the cross of Christ as a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. To Christians, however, the cross reflects the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:23-24). To the Philippians Paul warned: **“For, as I have often told you before and now say again to you with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things” (Phil. 3:18-19).** Please note that if you are an enemy of the cross of Christ your destiny is destruction!

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 mistakenly assumed that this kingdom was going to be an earthly kingdom. It was not! Jesus specifically told Pilate: **“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place (Jn. 18:36).** Remember these inspired words recorded by Isaiah: **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Is. 55:8-9).** In order to understand the cross of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven we have to think like God!

Please remember that the disciples who preached that the kingdom was at hand could work miracles! They had been given supernatural powers. 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 probably smiled in their sleep and dreamed of doing even greater miracles in days yet to come. The Kingdom of Heaven was at hand and they expected to be leaders in that kingdom. The teaching of the cross seemed contrary to everything they were expecting. They were thinking like men and totally missed the eternal strategy of God. Some of their confusion undoubtedly came from the fact that the Law declared anyone “cursed” who has hanged on a tree (Gal. 3:13). Instead of being cursed, however, the cross of Christ demolished the curse and turned out to be a blessing. Jesus endured the cross because of the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). As a matter of fact Jesus used the cross to end the Law as a means of righteousness (Rom. 10:4). On the cross **“He forgave us all our sins having cancelled the written code with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:13-**

15). The cross did not destroy Jesus, it destroyed the devil. Remember! It was by his death that Jesus destroyed him who holds the power of death – that is the devil (Heb. 2:14).

Jesus, as you know., not only insisted that He was going to die on a cross, He also demanded that all of His disciples also take up a cross. Just as the cross was the key to the power of Christ, it is also the key to their power. **“Jesus said 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)** It is profitable to take up your cross for by doing so, you do not lose your life, you find it!

The message of the cross is only offensive to those who do not understand its power. The cross did not the end the ministry of Jesus, it enhanced it! In fact, it was by means of the cross that Jesus was glorified. Please consider: **“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me’” (Jn. 12:23-26).** Through His death on the cross Jesus multiplied his ministry and attained new power.

The same beautiful truth is also applicable to us. The Apostle Paul is a good example of the power of the cross. He was once a dynamic leader among the Jews. As a Jew he advanced beyond his peers and obtained impeccable credentials in the Jewish faith (Gal. 1:14). At the height of his fame Paul was “crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20.) He cast his Jewish credentials on the garbage heap and received a powerful new life from the indwelling Christ. As we have said, it is the life of Christ that provides the power for our success. Paul not only “died daily” (1 Cor. 15:31), he also experienced the resurrection power of Jesus every day (Eph. 1:18-23). Taking up his cross did not end his ministry, it actually began his ministry. Paul’s “death” on his own personal cross made manifest the “life” of Christ for it was no longer Paul who lived, but Christ who lived in Paul. Paul’s power was limited, but the power of Christ is not. In Christ Paul was able to accomplish exceeding abundantly above all that he can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20). 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. By means of the cross you can **“Put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24).** By means of the cross we can put to death our old life and allow the Holy Spirit to give us a new and better life. Because of our faith we can allow our old man to be crucified that the body of sin might be destroyed so that we might serve Christ with new dimensions of energy and power. We can humble ourselves so that God can lift us up in due time (1 Pet. 5:7) We can cast all our cares upon Him with the confidence that He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). We can say with Paul: **“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).**

This death to our old self and resurrection to new life is beautifully symbolized by baptism. **“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. If we have**

been united with him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with Him” (Rom. 6:3-8).

In the fall of 1912 Evangelist George Bennard wrote the first verse of the beloved hymn “The Old Rugged Cross” in Albion, Michigan. He wrote it in response to ridicule he had received. He travelled with Ed E. Mieras from Chicago to Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin where they held an evangelistic meeting at the Friend’s Church from December 29, 1912 to January 12, 1913. During that meeting Bennard completed all of the verses of the song and he and Mieras sang it as a duet on the last night of their meeting. When it was sung before a large convention in Chicago its fame spread rapidly through out the Christian world. It was published in 1915 and became a favorite in Billy Sunday’s evangelistic campaigns. It has been performed by a long list of famous recording artists! Its popularity reflects the truth it eloquently conveys.

Here is the first verse and the refrain:

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame;
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

Refrain:

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
and exchange it some day for a crown.

PLEASE DON'T EVER BE OFFENDED BY THE OLD RUGGED CROSS!