

The Offense

of the

Cross

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## THE OFFENSE OF THE CROSS

"If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offense of the cross ceased". Gal. 5:11

The word here translated "offense" is the Greek "skandalon", which first meant the trigger of a trap or snare, then an occasion of stumbling. Our word "scandal" is derived from it. The offense of the cross is the stumblingblock that keeps people from becoming Christians. It is the offense of the cross that makes Christianity different from all other religions. Only Christianity presents a crucified Saviour as the center of its system. It is the presence or absence of the offense of the cross that determines whether a movement or organization is truly Christian or not. If the offense of the cross is by-passed or toned down, it is not Christianity but a counterfeit.

It is the cross of Christ, not our cross, that is spoken of. The "cross" means the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners. This implies human guilt, depravity, inability to save self. It implies that salvation is not an attainment but a gift of free grace. It reduces us all to paupers before the holy God.

The cross of Christ is not a sentimental idea, but a horribly realistic one. There is nothing beautiful or lovely about the cross of Christ in itself; it is

unspeakably dreadful. It stands for the righteous judgment and awful wrath of God against human sin. It stands for the curse of God upon the sinner. Christ was made a curse for us: for it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). But the cross also stands for the love and mercy of God. At Calvary, divine love and divine wrath meet. God so loved this wicked world that He gave His Son to suffer and die for sinners on the accursed cross.

The cross is an offense not merely because of its crudity, its cruelty and its shame. It is an offense to unsaved sinners even more because of what it implies concerning them. It cuts the root of human pride, pretension and self-righteousness. It eliminates all ground of human boasting. It leaves us nothing to claim, nothing to congratulate ourselves about. The cross will not let a man stand on his own feet before God. It will not let a man claim salvation by "doing his best" or "keeping the golden rule". All this is cut off at the root.

The cross is an offense to all non-Christian religion, to all apostate religion, to all pseudo-Christianity, to all legalism or moralism, to all formalism, to all Christless schemes of "character building", and to all the rest of the dismal array of human substitutes for salvation by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Today, more than ever, the cross is an offense. Men seek to

evade it by theories that take the blood out of salvation and leave us a Jesus who was only an example, a martyr, a teacher. Hundreds of theological books have been written in these attempts to get rid of the offense of the cross—the bare, bald truth that the Son of God suffered and died, His blood was shed, in bearing the wrath and curse of God as the Substitute of guilty and helpless sinners. Our age retains the name of the cross, but explains away its reality and power. Modern religion is really a bloodless faith. Because it is bloodless, it is also hopeless, and cannot save guilty men from sin and hell.

What the world hates, the saved Christian glories in. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). The offense of the cross, the hated sign of the substitutionary atonement, is the sign of genuine Christianity. We should never tone it down, minimize it, soft-pedal it, apologize for it. It must always be dominant in our religion. Christ is not preached aright unless His shed blood is emphasized as the only way guilty human beings can find peace with the righteous God. We can never advance beyond the cross; we can never outgrow it and go on to other things. It will always be central.

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