

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

By

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“The word of The Cross...is the power of God” (I Cor. 1:18).

When Paul wrote of the power of the gospel, he was speaking of the fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus. To the Corinthians he said he was determined to know nothing among them “save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). He was greatly concerned that the “cross of Christ should be made void” (I Cor. 1:17).

The basis of the Christian faith is Christ’s death and His resurrection. There were two common and easily recognizable elements which were open to examination by all: the cross and the empty tomb, one representing death and the other life. Neither one has any value without the other.

To the prophets and apostles and all early Christians the cross had specific theological meaning which was commonly understood by all. In our day, however, its message has been drowned in emotion and obscured by sentiment and mystery. One may wear a cross around his neck or on his lapel without understanding the necessity and the powerful result of what happened on the cross. It is easy to sing about “The Old Rugged Cross,” but not so easy to face its implications.

JUDGMENT AT THE CROSS. For the most part modern man rejects any concept of God as having prejudged any act of His creatures, and therefore the thought that God would prejudge man himself is inconceivable. Nicholas Van Hoffman points out that “God is no mush God,” the “mush god” being the modern god who fits all tastes, requires no creed, no theology, no doctrine and makes no demands, but allows everyone to do whatever is right in his own eyes. From educators like Horace Mann and John Dewey down to the present day leaders of “Women’s Liberation” there has been a strong hostility against the fact that God has prejudged the actions of His creatures. Man must be free to make his own rules and judge his own morals, as Eve was told that she would be as God, knowing good and evil, that is, deciding for herself what is good and evil without reference to God.

According to the “mush god” sect, man is to renounce all prejudgment. Anyone who has convictions based on what God has already prejudged is called “prejudiced” and soundly condemned for it. Of course, it somehow escapes the accusers that they themselves have prejudged anyone with such convictions. For example, Horace Mann who laid the foundation for such freedom from God’s judgment, insisted that all who fail to comply with his collective concepts should be eliminated!

The whole economy of God is based on judgment. God judged His creation to be “good,” then he laid down certain rules by which it was to function and prejudged anyone who refused to obey them. “Thou shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Later on He had laws written on tablets of stone with judgment clearly spelled out.

God has already judged sin. He has condemned murder, adultery, stealing, etc. One does not have to debate the issue; God has settled it. Modern man rejects such prejudgment and therefore cannot accept the gospel in its basic purpose and work. In its

place are the chilling substitutes of secular humanism, social progress and collective controls.

Christ did not relax the law and take a “mush god” stance, but fortified the rules and took a hard line with regard to prejudgment. The chaff, He said, is to be burned up in the final housecleaning (Matt. 3:12); the tares are already judged, and only await the day of final harvest when they will be thrown into the fire (Matt. 13:42); those who treat their suffering neighbors with indifference will be cast out of the kingdom into the final fire (Matt. 25:41). He did not come to judge, but to save, for the judgment is already determined. “He that believes on him is not judged: he that believes not has been judged already, because he has not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

It is only on this basis, that the sinner is judged to be worthy of death, that the cross has significance. “The soul that sins it shall die.”...“The wages of sin is death” (Ezek. 18:20, Rom. 6:23). Not perpetual torture. Not life under miserable conditions. But death, as demonstrated by the slaying of sacrificial animals and the death of Christ on the cross.

The revival song says, “There is power in the blood.” But the blood of Jesus was like all human blood (Heb. 2:14–15). The power was not in the blood, but in the fact that the blood poured out meant to the One Who bore our sins in His body (I Peter 2:24).

When Jesus assumed our sins, He also assumed our judgment. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6) and therefore “he was cut off out of the land of the living for my people to whom the stroke was due” (Isa. 53:8). Christ’s cry from the cross, “Why has thou forsaken me?”, demonstrated the condemned state of the unredeemed sinner at judgment: unworthy of life in the Creator’s presence, worthy of death and given up to die alone.

The cross is Judgment. Looking forward to it, Jesus said, “Now is the judgment of this world” (John 12:31). The cross does not represent God as giving in to man’s evil, but as God standing firm, holding man guilty of sin and under the judgment of death, judgment so firm and inexorable that nothing can satisfy it but its being carried out to the fullest degree. Isaiah said, “He shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). God is satisfied because His Son has suffered the full retribution of His perfect justice for every one of His children.

“The travail of his soul” does not mean that judgment is satisfied by the pain and suffering Jesus endured. It is explained in verse 12: “He poured out his soul unto death.” His whole life was given. “I lay down my life,” He said.

The satisfaction (justification) Christ gained by dying is evidenced by His resurrection. As the High Priest came forth from the Holy of Holies and folded his linen priestly garments to indicate that the offering has been successful, Jesus came forth from the tomb, leaving his linen grave clothes, indicating that the judgmental sacrifice has been completed.

FINALITY OF THE CROSS. Christian faith is not founded upon a philosophy but upon a fact which is part of history. There was only one Roman Empire, only one Pontius Pilate and only one occasion when a sinless man died on a cross. It is a one-time event that can never be repeated. “For by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).

Christ came into the world as a mortal man only once. His body was nailed to a tree with actual nails. The blood flowed, and with it the life. He would never live as a mortal man again. He took our sins so that the penalty of the judgment became His death. As far as Jesus and His mortality was concerned, it was the end. In this is a picture of all who stand before God in judgment: the finality of the second death.

But just as His death cannot be repeated, neither will the judgment be repeated for all who enter into the benefits of that death. All who enter into covenant with Christ and His death are also under the exclusion of the judgment, for it has already been exhausted on Christ on the cross. "All we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death...for he that has died is justified from sin" (Rom. 6:3, 7). By the cross, our freedom from the death sentence is final.

THERAPEUTIC POWER. While the essential power of the cross is in the fact that judgment is executed there for believers for all time, that power is such that it extends over and outside the primary purpose. For one thing it demonstrates the mighty love of God as no other providential act. He could as well have left us all to perish in the judgment. But He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son." Such love is especially great when we consider the fact that crucifixion was the most painful, shameful and disgraceful death known. Yet, God's love is so perfect and relentless that He would give His Son to die at the hands of those who hate Him and destroy His creation, in order that some might be saved.

There is also the power of Christ's example. "Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind" (I Peter. 4:1). In this sense, the Cross has great therapeutic power. When suffering comes because of our faith and obedience or because of intense temptation, then we but need recall the horrible suffering of Christ as He hung fastened to the wood with nails: debilitated, cruelly deformed by the painful position, swelling with ugly welts and drawing each breath with intense agony, and by comparison our present suffering is hardly worth mentioning.

At Adam's sin the whole world underwent great cataclysmic changes. But immediately following the sin God promised a Savior whose heel would be bruised by Satan; but who would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15). The cross is where it happened.

All who are finally salvaged from sin's wreckage will be saved through the cross. The new heavens and earth will exist for the dwelling place of those who are purchased by the blood of the Lamb, so that, in a sense, the entire economy of the eternal future is made possible by the cross.

"Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

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