

THE CROSS

By

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Early in His ministry Jesus became a controversial figure. “Whom do men say that I am?” He asked. All kinds of rumors were flying about who this man could be who challenged the Pharisees and the lawyers, insisted that eternal life could be gained only by a resurrection from the dead and that the old Covenant was to give way to a new one.

The apostles stood by in awe as the controversy raged about Him, not taking sides in the argument, but asking Him questions in private. Not until the very last did they realize that he was engaged in a conflict for which He would lay down His life. When that time finally came, much more suddenly than they had expected, they all fled as if upon prearranged agreement! It was all right for Jesus to be falsely accused, unjustly arrested, put to public shame and even tortured to death, but they had no stomach for such controversy.

Foreseeing this attitude on the part of the apostles and all subsequent believers, Jesus made the solemn statement: “If any man would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). He also promised, “IF they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). The apostles all experienced the truth of Christ’s statements, and soon after His resurrection they found themselves in the center of controversy and persecution.

Christian faith applies not only to the ultimate salvation in eternity, but also to every facet of present living: economic, political, recreational, health, and business. A believer must take up the cross daily, not just on Sunday; he must carry it to work, to the classroom, to the office and even to the social gathering of the evening.

Taking up the cross does not usually give the believer the excitement of a dramatic and heroic stand in which he may die in a blaze of glory, as is generally pictured. The enemy is more subtle, often making the believer appear to be anything but a Christian. To His own family, Jesus appeared to be out of his mind. Some said He was possessed by Beelzebub. Paul was accused by the king of being a mad man for the single reason that he affirmed the resurrection. Many a seminary professor of our day is held in very low esteem by some of his colleagues because he stands with Paul regarding resurrection. One professor in a (conservative) Bible College informed me that he dared not openly espouse the truth concerning the ultimate end of the unredeemed because of the pressure that would be placed upon the school by other believers. And what of the pressure in the community for those who will not give to united Way because of its support of Planned Parenthood? A teacher must not say aught against the NEA and its anti-Christian stance. Don’t say anything about the immorality of values clarification or homosexuality. One must not take the inflexible position of Christ, nor insist that God has a right to make demands.

There is a popular and obstinate misconception that the true faith is attractive to the world. Therefore, if the church is to grow it must adopt the world’s music, the world’s lifestyle, the world’s business practice (operate on credit) and the world’s goals — self-satisfaction, social pleasure. And plenty of preachers are ready to pursue these aims to the

fullest in the hope that it will mean popularity and a “successful” ministry. The end justifies the means. It is not just the notion that such means will get a hearing for the gospel and increase the church, but it is also the knowledge that one who refuses to compromise will be treated as an outcast. He will be shunned by other preachers and held in contempt by community leaders who see all religions as equal and want the church to be a tool for community solidarity.

Speaking on this subject, T. Robert Ingram said, “For years it was all but impossible to find a clergyman of any denomination in this whole land of our who would offer public prayer in the name of Jesus Christ for fear of offending the Jews. And the blasphemous hyphenated term, Judeo-Christian civilization is used now even by the most conservative Christian scholars — for the same reason. Yes, the true witnesses of Christ in this world will always have to face the threat of being thrown out of the respectable company of churchmen, and even those who harbor murderous intent against them will actually think they do God a service. They will think they are right.”

It is for these very reasons, the fear of being ostracized and smeared as a crazy fanatic unfit for decent company, that so many today take no initiative in holding forth the truth of God in the face of the present blitzkrieg of anti-Christ thought and immorality.

Christians in public office who keep silent on moral issues are denying Christ more than Peter ever did. Christians who compromise the truth for the sake of their own acceptance or for peace or popularity are walking in the steps of the Pharisees whom Jesus soundly condemned as children of the devil (John 8:44).

Christ went on from persecution, the cross and death to the triumph of resurrection and glorification, by which He could truthfully say; “All power is given to me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). The Jews thought they had won, but the victory was Christ’s. The cross is the way of death to the world, but it is the way to life for the believer.

Jesus does not call us to wring our hands and complain about the advance of Satan while retreating before him in fear. Rather He calls us to shine with the light of truth to destroy the advancing darkness. We may be sheep in the midst of wolves. Nevertheless we are sent into their midst, knowing that the Lamb of God is also the Lion of Judah, and the One before whom all will be brought to judgment.

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