

The Offense of the Cross

by George H. Morrison

The cross is a stumbling block and a power for salvation, challenging people's pride and self-reliance and requiring them to come to God with empty hands.

Scripture: John 14:6, 1 Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:8, Colossians 3:11

Topics: "The Cross", "Evangelism"

Description

George H. Morrison emphasizes Paul's deep yearning for the salvation of his fellow Jews, despite the offense of the cross to them, highlighting the importance of not compromising essential truths for the sake of acceptance. He challenges Christian teachers to be willing to go to great lengths to reach others while standing firm on the foundational truths of the gospel, even if it means facing rejection or failure. Morrison explains why the cross was offensive to the Jews, as it shattered their hopes, pride in religious rituals, and national distinctions, emphasizing that the offense of Calvary still challenges modern society's values and ideals.

Transcript

ONE THING THAT MARKS the ministry of Paul is how he lovingly yearned over the Jews. With a quenchless and intense desire, he prayed that they might be brought into the fold. Never a did mother so long for the saving of her son as Paul longed for the saving of his countrymen. He was willing to suffer anything or everything, if only his people Israel might be won. It is when we remember that deep longing that we realize what the cross meant for Paul. For the great stumbling block for the Jews-the offense that made the gospel of Christ smell rank to them-was, as our text indicates, the cross. Take that away, and it would be a thousand times more easy to win the Jews to the acceptance of the Lord. Say nothing about that, just slur it over, and you would take half the difficulty out of the way of Israel. Yet, in spite of his yearning to see Israel saved, that was the one theme Paul would not ignore. God forbid, he says, that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ my Lord.

There is a great lesson there for Christian teachers, and for all who are trying to advance Christ's kingdom. The more earnest and eager they are to have men saved, the more willing they are to go all lengths to meet them. And that is right, for we must be all things to all men-to the Jews as a Jew, to the Romans as a Roman; but remember, there are a few great facts we cannot yield, though they run counter to the whole spirit of the age. It were better to empty a church and preach the cross, than to fill it by keeping silent like a coward. It were better to fail as Paul failed with the Jews, than to succeed by being a traitor to the cross.

And that is why I look with such uncertainty on much that the church is trying to do today. Religion can never be a pleasant entertainment. When the offense of the cross ceases, it is lost.

Why Is the Cross an Offense?

Now I want tonight to make a little plainer to you why the cross was an offense to the Jews, and to put things in such a way that you may see at once that the same causes are operative still.

The cross was offensive to the Jews just because it blighted all their hopes. It shattered every dream they ever dreamed, every ideal that ever glimmered on them. No telegram of news full of disaster, plunging a man into unlooked-for poverty-no sudden death of one whom the heart clings to, laying a man's life in ruins at his feet-nothing could more certainly shatter a man's hopes than did the cross shatter the vision of the Jews. They had prayed for and had dreamed of their Messiah, and he was to come in power as a conqueror. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" Matthew 3:3--you can almost hear the tramp of victorious feet. That was the light which burned in the Jewish darkness; that was the song which made music in their hearts. Then in the place of the triumph, there comes Calvary. In place of the Christ victorious, comes Christ crucified. And was this the Messiah who was to trample Rome, pierced in hands and feet by Roman nails? To the Jews a stumbling block: you cannot wonder at it, when every hope they had formed was contradicted. Yet, in spite of it all, Paul preached Christ crucified, and that was the offense of the cross.

Now I venture to say that that offense of Calvary is just as powerful now as it was then. If I know anything about the ideals men cherish now, and about the hopes that reign in ten thousand hearts, they are as antagonistic to the cross as was the Jewish ideal of Messiah. Written across Calvary is sacrifice; written across this age of ours is pleasure. On the lips of Christ are the stern words, I must die. On the lips of this age of ours, I must enjoy. When I think of the passion to be rich and the judgment of everything by money standards, of the feverish desire at all costs to be happy, of the frivolity, of the worship of success; and then contrast it with the "pale and solemn scene" upon the hill, I know that the offense of Calvary is not ceased.

Unto the Jews a stumbling block-unto far more than the Jews: unto a pleasure-loving world and a dead church. Therefore say nothing about it. Let it be. Make everything interesting, pleasant, easy. Then is the offense of the cross ceased-and with it the power of the gospel.

Once' more, the cross was an offense to the Jews because it swept away much that they took a pride in. If there was any meaning in Calvary at all, some of their most cherished things were valueless. The Jews were preeminently a religious people, and this is always one peril of religious people. It is to take the things that lead to God and let the heart grow centered upon them. There was the ceremonial law for instance, with its scrupulous abhorrence of defilements. No one who has not studied the whole matter can ever know what that meant to the Jew. And there were the sacrifices smoking upon their altars, and the feasts and festivals and journeys to Jerusalem. And there was the Temple, that magnificent buildings sign of their hope and symbol of their unity. At least let this be said of that old people, that if they were proud, they were proud of worthy things. It is better to be proud of law and temple than to be proud of battleship and millionaire. Yet all that pride, religious though it was-that pride, deep-rooted as the people's life-all that was swept away like autumn leaves if there was any meaning in the cross. No more would the eyes of men turn to Jerusalem, no more would sacrifices fill the altars, no more was there room for ceremonial law if the Son of God had died upon the tree. And it was this crushing into the very dust of all that was dearest

to the Jewish heart that was so bitter an offense of Calvary.

Today, has that offense of the cross ceased? Has that stumbling block been removed? I say that this is still the offense of Calvary, that it cuts at the root of so much that we are proud of. Here is a woman who strives to do her duty. God bless her, she does it very bravely. Here is a student proud of his high gifts. God prosper him that he may use them well. But over against reliance upon duty and all attempts of the reason to give peace, there hangs the crucified Redeemer saying, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). Here is the offense of the cross in cultured ages. It is that a man must come with empty hands. He must come as one who knows his utter need of the pardoning mercy of Almighty God. In an age like ours--one that leans upon its heritage and is proud of its magnificent achievement--that call to unconditional surrender is the offense of evangelical religion. We are all tempted to despise what we get freely. We like a little toil and sweat and travail. We measure the value of most things not by their own worth, but by all that it has cost us to procure them. And Calvary costs us nothing though it cost God everything. The love and the life of it are freely offered, and to a commercial age and a commercial city there is something suspicious and offensive there. Ah sirs, if I preached salvation by good works what an appreciative audience I could have! How it would appeal to many an eager heart in the young and teeming life of this great city! But I trample that temptation under foot not that I love you less but that I love Christ more. I pray that here, where the gospel is proclaimed, the offense of the cross of Christ may never cease. I do not believe that if you scratch a man you will find underneath his skin a Christian. I do not believe that if you do your best all is well for time and for eternity. But I do believe-

Not the labors of my hands

Can fulfil Thy law's demands;

Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears for ever flow,

All for sin could not atone:

Thou must save, and Thou alone.

The cross was an offense to the Jews because it obliterated national distinctions. It leveled at one blow those social barriers that were of such untold worth in Jewish eyes. It was supremely important that the Jews should stand apart; through their isolation God had educated them. They had had the bittersweet privilege of being lonely, and being lonely they had been ennobled. Unto them were committed the oracles of God; they were a chosen nation, a peculiar people. The covenants were theirs, theirs were the promises. The knowledge of the one true God was theirs until at last, almost inevitably, there rose in the Jewish mind a certain separateness, and a certain contempt, continually deepening, for all the other nations of mankind. They had no envy of the art of Greece. They were not awed by the majesty of Rome. Grecians and Romans, Persians and Assyrians--powerful, cultured, victorious--were but Gentiles. There is something almost sublime in the contempt with which that little nation viewed the world.

Then came the cross. It leveled all distinctions; it burst through all barriers of nationality. There was neither Jew nor Gentile, Greek nor barbarian, but Christ was all and in all. Let some wild savage from the farthest west come to the cross of Christ pleading for mercy, and he had nothing less to do, and nothing more, than the proudest Jew who was a child of Abraham. One feels in an instant the insult of it all; how it left the

Jew defenseless in the wild. All he had clung to was gone; his vineyard-wall was shattered; he must live or die now in the wind-swept world. And this tremendous leveling of distinctions-this striking out Jew and writing in humanity-this, to the proud, reserved, and lonely people, was no small part of the offense of Calvary.

Now, I would not have you imagine for a moment that Christ disregards all personal distinctions. If I sent you away harboring the thought that all who come to Christ get the same treatment, I should have done Him an unutterable wrong. In everything He did Christ was original, because He was fresh from God into the world. Yet in no sphere was He so strikingly original as in the way He handled those who came to Him. So was it when He was on the earth: so is it now when He is hid with God. There is always some touch, some word, some discipline that tells of an individual understanding. But in spite of all that, and recognizing that, I say that this is the 'scandal' of the cross, that there every distinction is obliterated, and men must be saved as lost or not at all.

You remember the lady from a gentle home who went to hear the preaching of George Whitefield? She listened in disgust to a great sermon and then, like Naaman, went away in a rage. "For it is perfectly intolerable," she said, "that ladies like me should be spoken to just like a creature from the streets." Quite so: it is perfectly intolerable-and that is the stumbling block of Calvary. Are you, who may be cultured to your fingertips, to be classed with the savage who cannot read or write? It would be very pleasant to say "No"-- but then the offense of the cross would be removed. A friend of mine who is a busy doctor in a thriving borough not 10 miles from Glasgow was called in the other day to see a patient who, as was plain at the first glance, was dying. The doctor, a good Christian, said, "Friend, the best service I can do you is to ask, Have you made your peace with God?" Whereon the man, raising his wasted arm, and piercing the questioner with awe-filled eyes, said, "Doctor, is it as bad as that?" I want to say it is always as bad as that. I want to say it to the brightest heart here. You do need pardon and peace with God in Christ as much as the wildest prodigal in Glasgow. Accept it. It is freely offered you. Say, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want." And then, just as the wilderness will blossom, so will the offense of the cross become its glory.

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