

The Cross and Relationships

by L.E. Maxwell

The sermon explores how the Cross transforms relationships, calling believers to prioritize their commitment to Christ above all else.

Scripture: Luke 12:51, 2 Corinthians 5:17

Topics: "Relationships", "The Cross"

Description

L.E. Maxwell emphasizes the transformative power of the Cross in shaping our relationships, asserting that true identity and connection come from being a Christian above all else. He illustrates how the Cross can create divisions even among the closest of family ties, as it calls believers to prioritize their commitment to Christ over earthly attachments. Maxwell uses biblical examples, including Paul's relationship with the Corinthians and the sacrifices made by devoted parents and children, to highlight the necessity of dying to self for the sake of the Gospel. He warns against the natural inclination to shield loved ones from the path of suffering, urging believers to embrace the Cross as a means of true love and connection. Ultimately, the Cross is portrayed as a source of both division and unity, leading to a deeper understanding of life in Christ.

Transcript

CHRYSOSTOM SAYS that when St. Lucian was asked C by his persecutors, "Of what country art thou?" he replied, "I am a Christian,.

"What is your occupation?"

"I am a Christian.'

"Of what family?"

"I am a Christian."

To St. Lucian, Christ was all, whether of country, of occupation, or of family.

How revolutionary is the Cross! It revolutionizes all our relationships, toward God, toward ourselves, toward others, toward all. Once the Cross lays hold upon the Christian, he realizes how completely unhinged he has become from the whole of this present world. The old life, the old world, the old ways and relationships--all are past. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away;

behold, all things are become new." Such is the conviction of the Cross that it "takes possession of us; it overcomes and absorbs us, and tears us ruthlessly from everything else; it becomes our sole object, and outside it nothing seems to touch us; those who do not understand it are strangers to us; those who attack it are our enemies; those who love and serve it with us are our true, our only family."

"Suppose ye," warned the Saviour, "that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law" (Luke 12:51-53). There is no divider like Christ. How He pierces and divides asunder! He "came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). His Cross sunders the dearest of earthly ties; violates our deepest attachments; gives us a heart of steel to ourselves and the tenderest of hearts toward others.

The Corinthians were Paul's children in the faith. In answer to their accusation that he did not love them, the great apostle and father said: "Receive us; we have wronged no man . . . for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you" (II Cor. 7:2, 3). Note that Paul speaks "contrary to nature." Affectionate parents naturally want their children near by to live and die with them. But Paul has already said to his Corinthian children: "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh." Then he adds this reason: "One died for all, therefore all died" (11 Cor. 5:14, R.V.). Paul therefore holds his children in his heart not to live and die with them, but "to die and live" with them. He knows them as Christ's. And if Christ's, they have been crucified and raised a new creation. Paul loves the Corinthians, but not "in the flesh." He loves them through the Cross. He knows „no man after the flesh."

Few Christian parents are governed by these simple implications of Calvary. We are thinking of our good Christian homes. Parents are often so wrapped up in their own children that they cannot bear to see them take the way of the Cross. They shield them from the path of suffering. Christian young people are often eager to go to all lengths for God and follow Christ to the ends of the earth, but the parents refuse to take the way of the Cross, either for themselves or for their children. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh." But it is the first law of discipleship, said Jesus, that "if any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Blood runs thick. Christian parents who have gone to great lengths in consecration and who seem otherwise to be sacrificial and devoted followers of Christ, break down at this point. Their fleshly sentiments make them, perhaps unconsciously, "the enemies of the cross of Christ." The Cross begins to lay hold of son or daughter and forthwith mother cries out: Be it far from thee, this shall never be unto thee--Pity thyself, spare thyself, come down from the cross and save thyself and us. Happy the young person who so senses the serpent's subtle and feigned love in that dreadful hour that he can say: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God but the things of men" (Matt. 16:23, R.V.).

We know a young woman called to China whose mother warned her: "If you ever go to China, you will go over my dead body." And she did. On her death-bed the mother confessed: "Daughter is right; I have been wrong." How sad to be forced to take the divine order in death! The mother died; her daughter went to China. The great Refiner and Purifier of silver sat over against the crucible of her deathbed and skimmed off "the grey scum of selfishness" until mother ceased to be a hindrance--albeit through the doorway of death. She managed to rise to the miserable low of not refusing her daughter's call to China. Concerning such parents Amy Carmichael has said: "Their high water mark is expressed in such words as these:

O Father, help, lest our poor love refuse

For our beloved the life that they would choose,

And in our fear of loss for them, or pain,

Forget eternal gain."

Another young lady was called of God to go to India. Mother was unsaved and seemed to need her help. But the call of God had to come first; that was unmistakable. Her Christian friends gave her good advice according to the natural. They cautioned her that, if she were a real Christian, she would stay at home with her mother. But the daughter died--died to her own friends and her own good name. Counted as cruel and unloving, she was with her Master "reckoned among the transgressors." She trod the way of death. In harmony with the Crucified she went to India. Her mother was still over on the other side of the Cross, "dead in trespasses and sins;" Calvary had come between daughter and mother. But this is the divine order. Calvary not only divides; it draws. Christ was "set forth crucified" before the mother's eyes. Referring to Calvary Jesus said: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." In a practical way Christ crucified was lifted up in that daughter--lifted up afresh to mother. As Paul puts it: "before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." Mother saw the Crucified for daughter had been "crucified with Christ." The daughter had her mother in her heart, not to live and die with her, but "to die and live." God honors those who so die to honor Him. In time this daughter came home on her first furlough and led her mother to Christ. She saw her fall asleep in Jesus and quietly laid away--and went back in the will of God to India.

Another case. A prodigal son was determined to "have a fling." His mother was a woman of prayer. He comforted himself beneath her prayers that he could not get far away. At length the mother detected a fatal flaw in her own praying. Her sentiment would save her son from the way of transgressors, which is hard. She was not in full identification with the spirit of the Cross. At length she came to have her son in her heart "to die and live" with him. She warned him: "Son, I'm no longer asking God to protect you or save you from trouble, I am asking Him to get you, dead or alive." Oswald Chambers says: "Whenever we step back from identification with God's interest in others into sympathy with them, the vital connection with God has gone; we have put our sympathy, our consideration for them in the way; and this is a deliberate rebuke to God." That son is a missionary in Africa today. He got afraid of mother's prayers. Shall I say that "mother died"--died to her own fleshly attachment? Her son then followed her through the Cross into resurrection-life and service.

In the days of the Scottish Covenanters, in those times before an enervating effeminacy had overtaken our faith, Jane Welsh, the noble daughter of John Knox, was approached by the prison officials with the assurance that her husband, John Welsh, would be freed if only he would renounce the Protestant faith. Gathering up her apron she replied, "Please your majesties, I would rather catch his head there." Our modern sentiment would call her intolerant, dogmatic, un-loving. But she truly loved God first, and her husband as herself. She had suffered much for the faith through her husband's imprisonment, but she still had him in her heart to die and live with him.

There is nothing so terrible, nothing so revolutionary as the Cross. But it is God's place of victory for ourselves and for our relatives--"dying, and, behold we live."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/le-maxwell/the-cross-and-relationships/>

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