

The Cross-Contrary to Nature

by L.E. Maxwell

The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of the Cross, which contradicts human nature and calls for a radical self-denial in the life of a believer.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, John 15:5, Romans 6:6, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:5

Topics: "The Power of the Cross", "Transformation"

Description

L.E. Maxwell emphasizes the transformative power of the Cross, illustrating how it contradicts human nature and calls for a complete renewal of the self. He uses the analogy of a countryman seeking to repair a broken gun to highlight that God desires to make us new creations rather than simply fixing our old selves. The Cross challenges our will, wisdom, affections, and pride, demanding a radical self-denial and a life that is no longer centered on self but on Christ. Maxwell asserts that true discipleship requires us to lay aside our old nature and embrace the life of Christ within us, leading to spiritual fruitfulness that glorifies God. Ultimately, he encourages believers to recognize the necessity of the Cross in their lives as they seek to live in the fullness of Christ's resurrection power.

Transcript

MR. SPURGEON tells of a simple countryman who took his gun to the gunsmith for repairs. After examining it, the latter said: "Your gun is in a very worn-out, ruinous, good-for-nothing condition. What sort of repairing do you want for it?" "Well," said the countryman, "I don't see as I can do with anything short of a new stock, lock and barrel. That ought to set it up again." "Why," said the smith, "you had better have a new gun altogether." "Ah," was the reply, "I never thought of that. It strikes me that's just what I do want, a new stock, lock, and barrel. Why that's about equal to a new gun altogether, and that's what I'll have." That is just what God says concerning poor human nature: "A new man altogether, and that's what I'll have."

But that poor stupid countryman was sensible when compared with our reasoning in the things of the Spirit. It scarcely dawns upon us, even as God's children, that God's plan is to "cross" out the old race entirely. He says: "Behold, I make all things new." And in the infinite power of God and wisdom of God, He chose the Cross as the most complete contradiction of Adam's race--"that no flesh should glory in his presence." The Cross contradicts our wills: Christ said, "Not my will, but thine, be done." The Cross contradicts our wisdom: The wise of this world crucified the Lord of glory. The Cross contradicts our affections: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." The Cross contradicts our pride: We are to let the mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus who humbled Himself and

became "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The Cross contradicts self: "One died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves" (II Cor. 5:14,15, A.S.V.). The Cross contradicts human nature at every point. For the inexorable and unalterable terms of discipleship are these: Except a man denies himself, forsakes all that he has, yea, all his own life also, Christ says he "cannot be my disciple." When Christ went to the Cross, therefore, the "axe was laid to the root of the tree." The old Adamic stock--yea, lock, stock and barrel--was done away. The Cross reveals our utter bankruptcy, and pronounces a death sentence on Adam's race. It is God's master-stroke to undo and drain away our natural life, that the life supernatural may take its place. Christ came not to straighten us out, but to "cross" us out; not to trim us back, but to cut us off; not to get us doing, but to bring us to an undoing. The Cross contradicts all fleshly doing and reveals a divine dying. Christ came not to put new wine into old skins. He came not to put new cloth to an old garment, but to put off in toto the old man with his "duds." Hence the real meaning of Christ's command, "let him deny himself and take up his cross," can be nothing short of an ignominious termination and undoing of the whole of our moral and spiritual heritage from Adam. Such is the all-essential of our salvation, inasmuch as "self is the root, the tree, and the branches of all the evils of our fallen state" (Law).

It should be observed that self-denial is no mere cutting off of an indulgence here and there, but, as Dr. A. T. Pierson said, "laying the axe at the root of the tree of self, of which all indulgences are only greater or smaller branches. Self-righteousness and self-trust, self-seeking and self-pleasing, self-will, self-defense, self-glory--these are a few of the myriad branches of that deeply rooted tree. And what if one or more of these be cut off, if such lopping off of some few branches only throws back into others the self-life to develop more vigorously in them?" Until the axe, then, is laid to the root of the tree of self, and our natural life gives place to the life of the Spirit, all our "virtues are only taught practices grafted upon a corrupt bottom."

Is there not a tendency, however, even after we have been rooted in Christ, to be prompted more often than not from the old springs and roots of the tree of self? It is in this connection the Christian must learn the dynamic of the Cross as it applies to the believer. But let us illustrate. Jesus said: "I am the vine, ye are the branches." As a branch of the old Adamic stock, I "brought forth wild grapes." As a partaker of Christ, I have been grafted into Him. When I believe into Christ crucified, I was cut off, cut away from my former natural connections, and grafted into Christ, the living Vine. E. J. Pace says, "Some time ago near my home in Florida I had occasion to visit a citrus nursery, and I asked the man in charge to show me how he grafted fruit. He led me to the grove of young trees. He then carefully cut from a little sapling a very small twig with a swelling bud at the end of it, and proceeding to another tree nearby he deliberately cut in the back of it a cross, and where the tree was expressly cut to receive it he deftly inserted the scion." Even so, we have been severed from our former family tree, and, at the Cross, grafted into the trunk of the eternal Deity. Let faith fasten stoutly to this fact: I am "joint heir" with Christ. We have become partakers of the divine nature.

However, ours is a grafting "contrary to nature." According to the ordinary laws of grafting, the good branch of a desirable fruit is grafted into an inferior trunk. Contrary to nature, we have been grafted into a good tree. The True Vine was crucified, and into the riven side of the Redeemer we have been grafted, a bad into a good. But there is another "contrary to nature" that is all-important. When the life-union of the vine and branch is effected in nature, the branch still bears fruit "after its kind," i.e., according to its own original life. But I died in Adam. By the life I received from Adam, I brought forth "fruit unto death." "The mind of the flesh is death." In order, therefore, to bring forth "fruit unto God," this natural life must give way,

must "yield up the ghost." Having been condemned to the Cross, I must come to feel by a deep work of the Spirit that by nature I am unfit to live. The Cross says so; and I must consent. I must come to a cordial consent that I have been crucified together with Christ, so that it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me. His crucified life must come coursing through me, the ingrafted branch, so contradicting and setting cc " 'de, that the spiritual fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus--"after His kind"--shall be manifest to the glory and praise of God.

Amy Carmichael tells about the nurse Kohila, who, at a certain time, "came upon something in herself which we call briefly Nan than. Nan means I; than underlines the pronoun. Someone has said that there is nothing God will not do through one who does not care to whom the credit goes. Nan than greatly cares. Kohila set herself to renounce her Nan than, so that she might be free to serve others." When Christ comes into the life He must "take over" entirely; and He is on a sit-down strike until He starves the "me" out. The Cross must bring me to a glad "yet not I." Contrary, then, to all the laws of grafting and fruit-bearing, the "ye-in-Me" of our life-union with Christ is to be followed all our days by the "I-in-you" of fruit-bearing.

Across the will of nature

Leads on the path of God;

Not where the flesh delighteth

The feet of Jesus trod.

O bliss to leave behind us

The fetters of the slave,

To leave ourselves behind us,

The grave-clothes and the grave!

--Ter Steegen.

Let us listen to the little scion as he repeats Galatians 2:20: "I have been cut off from my family tree; I am crucified to my former connection and family; I have been ruthlessly torn away; I am dead to them; nevertheless I live--I still know that I am the same little wild branch and no other--I am still myself. I live. And yet it is no longer I that is living; it is the life of another that liveth in me so that none of the beautiful grapes are of me. They are the product of the life of another, continually contradicting my old life and pushing on out through me to bear precious fruit to glorify the great husbandman." In speaking of the violation of these principles of our fallen selfish natures, F. J. Huegel says: "We are so addicted to self, so wrapped up in self, so entwined with self, so infatuated with self, that our spiritual natures cannot be centered in God by means of a deep union of love without a violent contradiction of our old natures. This is the secret of the Cross. It does violence to corrupt human nature. It slays the old life."

Those who teach us that the blood of Jesus cleanses or eradicates the old nature often fail to enter into and learn the meaning of the Christ-indwelt life as the only lifelong remedy for self. It was the saintly Francis de Sales who said, "It is a delusion to seek a sort of ready-made perfection which can be assumed like a garment; it is a delusion, too, to aim at a holiness which costs no trouble, although such holiness

would be no doubt exceedingly agreeable to nature. We think that if we could discover the secret of sanctity we should become saints quickly and easily." We shall the rest of our lives be making new and fresh discoveries of plague spots in our nature upon which the Cross must be laid. Has the reader not discovered, in spite of many victories over

self and sin, how many natural choices and likes and preferences need to have the death-mark of Calvary put upon them? The birth-mark of nature must be contradicted throughout by the death-mark of the Cross. Let us, then, ask the Lord to mark His Cross upon all our natural choices.

Lord Crucified, O mark Thy holy Cross

On motive, preference, all fond desires,

On that which self in any form inspires

Set Thou that sign of loss.

And when the touch of death is here and there

Laid on a thing most precious in our eyes,

Let us not wonder, let us recognize

The answer to this prayer.

--Amy Carmichael.

But, thanks be to God, this yet-not-I kind of a Christian life is no lifelong funeral procession. Nay, verily, for Jesus said, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." What could be more wonderful than that the Son of God, glorious and eternal, Creator of all things, "who loved me and gave himself for me," should stoop to make me His own, His very temple, allowing me to say, in the language of a living faith and reality, "Christ liveth in me." Has He not promised, "Because I live, ye shall live also"? Oh, the marvel and mystery of "ye in me" and "I in you"! The branch is in the Vine and the Vine is in the branch. Glorious life-union of life and love and liberty! I am quickened together with Him, raised together with Him, seated together with Him. I am rooted in the Eternal, with my life already "hid with Christ in God." J. Gregory Mantle says:

In one of the Perthshire valleys there is a tree which sprang up on the rocky side of a little brook, where there was no kindly soil in which it could spread its root, or by which it could be nourished. For a long time it was stunted and unhealthy, but at length, by what may be called a wonderful vegetable instinct, it sent a fibre out across a narrow sheep-bridge which was close beside it.. Then, fixing itself in the rich loam on the opposite bank of the streamlet, it began to draw sap and sustenance, and speedily became vigorous. What that tiny bridge was to the tree, the resurrection of Jesus is to the believer.

If the roots of our life are in our risen Lord, we shall 'neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Have we had the bitter experience of trying to produce fruit? We have toiled and tried and prayed and bled, but all to no avail? In spite of all our efforts the stream of our life is mixed and muddy through our own unholy duplicity of motives. We know that in Christ there is abundant fullness. The question is how to

get it out. With Hudson Taylor we say, "I knew full well that there was in the root abundant fullness; but how to get it into my puny little branch was the question." In a veritable paroxysm of despair we finally cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Thank God there is a life all-divine and powerful that can contradict and liberate and set us free: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord . . . for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

Look not for a true living strength, in the life of the Me and the I,
With nothing to love but its selfhood, and fearing to suffer and die,
As thou seekest the fruit from the seed-planted grain,
Seek life that is living, from life that is slain.
Then hasten to give it its death-blow, by nailing the I to the Cross;
And thou shalt find infinite treasure in what seemed nothing but loss;
For where, if the seed is not laid in the ground,
Shall the germ of the new resurrection be found.
--T. C. Upham.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/le-maxwell/the-cross-contrary-to-nature/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net