

"THE WORD OF THE CROSS"

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not in wisdom of word, lest the cross of Christ be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." I Corinthians 1:17-18.

These are no chance words written at random, but they summarize a whole confession of faith. Those who are familiar with Paul's writings know that this word "cross" was a great word with him. He taught that the cross of Christ is the central theme of the gospel. "The Word of the Cross" is his striking phrase for the preachers of his day. They were heralds of the cross. Their business was to proclaim the word of the cross unflinchingly and persistently. He suggested that preaching must not be done in some ways lest the cross be made void. He spoke of the cross as something that could be used for the greatest good to the world, or as something that could be made ineffectual.

1. The cross can be made ineffectual by wisdom of words.

Words embody thought and thought represents the heart. The gospel of Christ has been written, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in words. But words are to be used to reveal the cross and not to hide it. The Corinthians thought themselves very literary. They had been inclined to discount the teachings of Paul because he had not used fine rhetoric like some of the Grecian orators. They were thinking about how he said things, rather than about the things he said. They wanted to hear words that sounded wise. Paul avoided any such display. A mirror is not to show itself, but to show other objects. Words are not to cover the cross, but to exhibit it. The Bible tells us that the time will come when people will have itching ears -- they will want the beautiful rather than the useful. The cross can be made ineffectual by efforts to display worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom does not show the cross to dying souls. The cross needs no defense or apology. It is God's criticism of sin, and His apology of love.

2. The cross can be made ineffectual by a low conception of it.

Christ, as He walked among men and worked for humanity, is an example for us; but Christ on the cross was not an example. An example is something to follow. Christ's death was not an example. It was not to be followed. It was an atonement. And none but Christ could make an atonement. None but Christ could give the blood that had cleansing power in it.

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heavenly lamb,
Takes all our sins away,
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.

I. What Is "The Word Of The Cross"?

It is exactly what the gospel is. No other expression embraces all that Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles have taught us as these words do. From the first word in Genesis to the last word in Revelation, the Bible in its entirety can in no better way be characterized, both as to its depth and its simplicity, than by this term, "The Word of the Cross." It is the cross that is the center of all that is in the Bible; all other things are subordinate and secondary. The cross and the Bible are closely connected, just as are the pearls and the shells, like morning gleam and morning dew, like the spring and the singing lark. The cross is the gist of the Bible;

the Bible is the book of the cross. The cross is the sign of salvation and the Bible is our banner carrier.

The cross is to be preached. Without the cross Christianity becomes meaningless and powerless. Salvation and the cross are indissolubly linked. The cross is to be preached plainly. Knowledge of the meaning of the cross is the deepest need of the world; all things should be subordinated to conveying that knowledge with utmost clearness and fullness. Men cannot be saved by eloquence or philosophy or learning, but they can by the Christ of the cross. Preaching the word of the cross means holding up Christ's death as the divine remedy for the sins and souls of men.

II. What Is The Message Of The Cross?

1. God's supreme word of condemnation.

(1) The Cross exposes our sins.

In the cross our Lord condemns our transgressions and reveals His horror of our iniquities. The cross accuses every man.

(2) The Cross tells us of the presence of sin.

We are so apt to excuse it, to deny it, to call it by some less terrible name. The cross stops all that. It strips off the veneer, cuts away the finery, reveals the sickness, the degradation, the foulness and the enmity of the thing we call sin.

(3) The cross tells us of the power of sin.

Not even God could combat it without the cross. Not even God could conquer it without the blood. What sin did to Christ on the cross is a bitter illustration of its power in the hearts and lives of its devotees. Let the cross warn you that you cannot fight sin in your own strength. Let the cross make you resist the devil, reject sin and refuse evil.

(4) The cross speaks of the penalty of sin.

The law is inescapable. The judgments of God are without repentance. There are no exceptions to either. Let the drops of blood that flowed from Immanuel's veins stop you in your disregard of the law, in your inexcusable unbelief, warning you of the inescapable curse, the unavoidable consequences, the certain condemnation of your sins.

2. God's supreme work of redemption.

We are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. Satan had enslaved us. Sin had sold us to the law. In the archives of glory there was a judgment bill against us which had to be met. It was beyond our ability, our powers and our means. The charge of it was so great, the pressure of it so enormous, the debt of it so heavy, that not all of us together could have had enough, offered enough, paid enough to redeem a single soul. The life blood of Christ was sufficient to cancel that guilt, to discharge that tremendous burden and to satisfy that crushing debt.

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me."

(1) It is the work of love.

The cross was to Paul the one irrefutable proof that God is love. "God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." John 3:16.

(2) It is the work of peace.

At the cross "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "He hath reconciled us unto himself having made peace by the blood of His cross." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." The cross reveals the greatness of God's love and His hatred for sin.

(3) It is the work of power.

Paul had so much to say about its power. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheth me." "Most gladly therefore will I glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." The word of the cross is the word of power.

3. God's supreme offer of salvation.

It seems to me that on the cross, Christ had His hands stretched out toward a stumbling, blundering, wandering, disobedient, dissipated, distressed, disheartened, discouraged, disturbed, disappointed, diseased, degraded world, and He says: "Sinner, I know your condition. I know all about you. I love you. I have provided a way of escape for you. Will you take it? Will you take it now? Will you accept me as your Saviour now?"

Truly, the way of the cross does lead home. There is no other way. The only way is the way of the cross. To reject the one way is the most foolish thing one can do and such rejection leads to destruction.