

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE OFFENSE OF THE CROSS

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1Corinthians 1:18

The religious nature of man is no friend to the preaching of the cross of JESUS CHRIST. It is no wonder that the apostle Paul said, "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offense of the cross ceased". (Gal 5:11) when we understand what it is that is offensive to men about the cross of CHRIST. Paul said, in essence, "religious men have no objection to religion and its requirements and if I was content to preach a message that the natural man wanted to hear then I would not suffer any persecution and I would be received with open arms." So what is it about the "preaching of the cross" that is so offensive to the natural man?

To say that we live in a day when there is a proliferation of what many call "preaching the gospel" is quite an understatement. Thousands flock to churches of all types each week and there is no lack of avid and even rabid devotees of this or that doctrinal position. By and large all so called "Christian" churches preach in some measure about the crucifixion of JESUS CHRIST. Yet I would assert that the "preaching of the cross" which Paul has reference to would be offensive in just about every one of them. What is it that is so offensive?

I believe the scripture indicates that the primary offense of the cross is that the natural man despises the ONE who hung there. The LORD told the Pharisees "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honor from men." (John 5:39-41) HE told them in no uncertain terms that the problem that religious men have is that they will not bow down and worship the ONE who rules the heavens and the earth. The natural man does not totally reject the idea that there is a GOD. After all, from time to time he may need HIM to get him out of jam. But every man by nature rises up against the true and living GOD who shows mercy to whom HE will show mercy and hardens whom HE will. (see Rom.9:18) The fool has said in his heart that there is no GOD over me. Man in his natural state is an idolator, that is one who forms and fashions god according to his own ideas and desires. Men will worship a god of their own making and choosing but they will balk and resist the ONE who does according to HIS will in army of heaven and in the earth. They love a god with limitations but will continue in rebellion against the ONE who does whatsoever HE hath pleased. Men will worship a god who needs them but hate the thought that there is a GOD who has need of nothing and no one and is in no way dependent on anything a man can do or offer unto HIM. The LORD told the Pharisees, "I receive not honor from men" which is exactly what we have described here. I have heard some say that GOD needs for men to worship HIM. Such balderdash ought never to be spoken by any puny mortal. GOD stands in need of nothing. Had HE never created men, HE would still be as full of glory as HE is by HIS very person and

nature. The natural man hates the thought of an absolute sovereign, predestinating GOD and will without exception rise up against HIM unless HE is pleased to subdue his will and open his eyes to behold HIS glory. So men despise the cross because they hate the ONE who hung there. Any man who loves the LORD JESUS CHRIST will bow down and worship HIM as an absolute KING. “Keep silence, all created things, And wait your Maker's nod; My soul stands trembling while she sings The honors of her God. Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown, Hang on His firm decree; He sits on no precarious throne, Nor borrows leave to be.” (Isaac Watts, 1709)

The cross is also offensive to the natural man because of its exclusivity. Men are not saved nor “perfected” by anything else. All of man’s salvation is totally dependent on the transaction made at the cross of JESUS CHRIST. Some pay lip service to believing that JESUS “paid it all” but then they add on further requirements and acts of obedience in order for men to be perfected or to take advantage of what HE attempted to do for them. Some say a man must believe it in order to complete the transaction which HE started. Others say that HE settled their sin debt at the cross but that now it is also necessary for men to “keep the law” in order to be pleasing in the LORD’s sight. Such was the mindset of the Galatian Judaizers who required that those who were circumcised in the heart also be circumcised in the flesh. There is no end to the duties and requirements which man’s religiosity seeks to lay upon the backs of the freeborn sons of GOD. Such Judaizers cannot stand the thought that sinners are set free from the law of sin and death by the imputed righteousness of JESUS CHRIST which has been forever laid to their account by the satisfaction of the law which HE settled on the cross of Calvary. There is nothing left for men to do, HE has done it all at the cross. The test of whether or not the gospel of the cross of CHRIST is preached is whether or not that message asks or requires men to do something in order for it to be effectual.

The true preaching of the cross is offensive to the natural religious man because of the specific nature of what the LORD JESUS intended to do and actually accomplished in HIS death on Calvary’s tree. When the angel appeared to Joseph he told him not just what HIS name was to be but what the purpose of HIS coming was. *“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”* (Mat 1:21) The LORD came into the world for a specific purpose and a specific people and HE accomplished exactly what HE set out to do exactly for the people HE intended to do it for. I have never known of anyone to get angry and combative when men preach that JESUS died for every one of the human race in order to give each one an equal opportunity and chance to be saved according to their own free choice in the matter. But I have witnessed with my own eyes the angry reactions of religious men whenever the particular redemption of GOD’s elect is set forth. As long as men feel that GOD is giving everybody a fair chance and a square deal they seem to be happy. The preaching of the cross, however, does not present salvation as something that has anything to do with “chance” or “deals”. Neither is it a transaction that can be settled by the free will and choice of men. The preaching of the cross is a clear presentation of the finished work of JESUS CHRIST for HIS elect children which were given to HIM before the foundation of the world. It is a clear proclamation that HE has purchased the eternal redemption of all of HIS elect and that HE shall present them everyone faultless before HIS FATHER’s throne. They are justified by HIS blood and they shall never perish because HE gives unto them eternal life. *“In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o’er the wrecks of time; All the light of sacred story Gathers round its HEAD sublime. When the woes of life o’ertake me, Hopes deceive, and fears annoy, Never shall the cross forsake me, Lo! it glows with peace and joy.* (John Bowring, 1825).

“For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” (Heb 10:14)