

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 OFFENCE OF THE CROSS

And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

Galatians 5:11

The LORD gave the Jews the rite of circumcision in order to manifest to them, the fact that HIS choice of them as a people set them apart from the rest of the world. What should have been a very humbling matter became in their own minds a source of pride and they viewed it as symbolic of their righteousness rather than HIS grace. Paul says that the Jews (in the main) have stumbled over the ROCK of OFFENCE (which is CHRIST) because they have sought to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to HIS.

He is dealing with the exact same problem when he is writing to the Galatians, except that these Jews to whom he is primarily writing are some who had professed faith in CHRIST and had at least outwardly embraced the gospel. They are like that that seed which fell on the stony ground or among the thorns, which sprang up but having no depth withered or was choked by the thorns and brambles.

Self righteousness is most easily spotted in others but is difficult to see in oneself until it has well nigh consumed a man. So it is with these Jews who seemed to rejoice in their deliverance from the condemnation of Moses' law at first but in time resorted back to it. Either they had forgotten, or perhaps were never really convinced in the first place of, their own wickedness and inability to keep the law in any meaningful fashion. So now they had reverted back to a reliance on the outward religious activities of the flesh, most especially circumcision.

Paul made it very plain that the only circumcision which was acceptable in the sight of GOD was a circumcision of the heart and not the flesh. *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."* (Rom 2:28-29)

Any sort of reliance which a man has in his own self or ability is an affront to the grace of GOD and a path of sure destruction for those who traverse it. The basis upon which the sons of GOD expect to stand before the face of Almighty GOD is completely devoid of any human endeavor and that faith which they confess and stand in rests wholly upon the finished work of CHRIST as their SUBSTITUTE, ATONEMENT, and present RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The preaching of the cross is offensive to all men who view themselves as able to perform some deed or act of obedience which will cause them to gain some sort of favor with GOD. To these self-righteous Jews, circumcision was that act. Being circumcised was to them the ultimate test of whether or not one was "obedient" to GOD and therefore was a sign of their acceptance with HIM. In doing so they disregarded the all sufficiency of the blood of CHRIST.

They were not opposed to the preaching of the fact that CHRIST died on the cross or was raised from the dead. Rather, their despising of the preaching of the cross lay in their denial that

CHRIST actually "obtained" eternal redemption for HIS elect, by HIS death, leaving nothing which they could do to gain acceptance with GOD. They viewed CHRIST's act as one of selfless sacrifice which put them in a salvable state but their ultimate reliance for their salvation was in their own obedience to that which the gospel clearly states they were delivered from.

While these Jews held onto "circumcision" as a necessity, the same scenario is played out among the Gentiles in the present day as there are numerous points of "obedience" which various sects and orders of those who call themselves "Christians" hold onto as being necessary "acts" on the part of man which make a man "acceptable" in the sight of GOD. It may be water baptism to some, a profession of faith to others, speaking in tongues, or a general outward keeping of the ten commandments (most especially the Sabbath day,) the adoption of a particular doctrinal order, etc. Whatever a man considers as a "necessity" to his salvation is that upon which he will trust and find a reliance in even if he labels such as mere "evidences" or "results."

Here, in the south, it would be unusual to find very many who would vocally oppose the preaching of the facts concerning the life and death of JESUS CHRIST. The majority of those in our communities would embrace the notion that JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth hung upon a cruel instrument of torture and execution commonly referred to as a "cross". There is in reality quite a bit of mention made concerning those facts on the radio and TV as well as in newspapers and other publications.

The publishing and proclaiming of these facts is an "offense" to relatively few. Yet the preaching of the "cross" to which Paul refers is very offensive to most, especially the religious societies which teach that the action of faith on the part of man is just as important (yea even more so, it seems) to their salvation as the work which CHRIST performed on Calvary's tree. In fact it is quite common for salvation to be described by them, as having two parts. One being GOD's part (where Jesus died on the cross for everyone, hoping that some would receive him) and the other being man's part. (where he must acknowledge and believe what Christ did, by water baptism or simple confession of faith, etc and thereby make salvation effectual)

That preaching of the cross (which is indeed an offence to the righteous) only has ONE PART, it is the declaration that JESUS CHRIST did offer up HIMSELF as an ATONEMENT for the sins of HIS people. It is the declaration that HE shed HIS precious blood to purchase their eternal redemption. It is the statement that in no uncertain terms HE has obtained eternal redemption for everyone for whom HE shed HIS blood. Nothing needs to be added, nor can it be. HE is the SALVATION of HIS people whom HE has loved with an everlasting love.

The preaching of the cross is a declaration that JESUS CHRIST is the SAVIOR of HIS people even as the angel revealed to Joseph when he said, *"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) There were no conditions mentioned nor was any doubt about the outcome spoken of. HE came to seek and to save that which was lost, and HE has accomplished their salvation. CHRIST alone is the salvation of HIS people. HE purchased their redemption and shall bring every one for whom HE died to HIMSELF. *"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me."* (John 6:37)

There are really only three scenarios which can be presented to the reason of men concerning the work of CHRIST on the cross. 1. By HIS death HE paid for the sins of all men and therefore all men are saved. (This is called universalism) 2. By HIS death HE made salvation a possibility for all men but HE actually procured the salvation of none, leaving their salvation up to their own free will. (This is called modern evangelicalism) 3. By HIS death HE actually paid the sin debt of the people which HE chose, before the foundation of the world by becoming their SUBSTITUTE and dying in their room and stead, being made sin for them. (This is called the offence of the cross.) While it is offensive to those who go about to establish their own righteousness it is the sweet sound of deliverance to those who know themselves to be lost and undone sinners. *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."* (1Cor 1:18) *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Gal 6:14)