

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (GAL 6:14).

In this sophisticated age, we find it hard to understand the idolatry of the Old Testament. It is incredible to read of intelligent people being so blinded as to offer worship to handcarved images of wood, stone or precious metals.

The scriptures tell us that people went into the forest and picked a hardwood tree, cut it down, sawed it in two, then burned half of it in their ovens for cooking and gave the other half to an engraver to carve into a little god. The whole family would kneel before that graven image and say, "This is my god, my deliverer, who saves me." Such idolatry is mind-boggling to us!

Yet it was the sin of idolatry that brought down God's awful wrath on his own people. It angered him more than any other sin in the Old Testament - so much that he declared: *"The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger."*

"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. I will cast you out of my sight..." (JER 7:17,16,15).

This is God's declaration against idolatry in the Old Testament. And yet he hates idolatry just as much today. It brings down his wrath on

They Have Done Away With the Cross!

any generation - including this modern one!

There Is an Idolatry in These Last Days Much More Wicked Than That of the Old Testament!

A new idolatry is sweeping across America right now. No, we don't see people kneeling down before carved images anymore, in unsophisticated fashion. This modern idolatry instead seduces multitudes by its subtlety and cleverness. Yet it angers God more than any Old Testament idolatry!

The New Testament warns us that ministers will come in the last days who appear as angels of light but who are actually ministers of Satan. These men will be intense, articulate, pleasant and very resourceful. But they will be manipulated by a spirit that is not of God!

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." (2.COR 11:13-15).

Paul warned that these demonic ministers would come

"...preach(ing) another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or...another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted..." (verse 4).

Think of what Paul is saying here. In the last days preachers will appear who seem to be men of honesty and righteousness - but who are actually ministers under the influence of Satan himself! They will be of another spirit entirely, introducing another Christ, another spirit, another gospel.

This sounds shocking - but it is something you and I must prepare ourselves for. If you are a Christian living in America, and you hear reports of the Holy Spirit moving in different parts of the country, you must be careful of where you go and what spirit you sit under. If you don't have discernment, you could get swept up into an idolatry that will turn you away from the cross of Christ.

I believe multitudes of Christians today are into idolatry without knowing it, having been seduced by angels of light. Paul saw this beginning to happen even in his day:

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but

there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (GAL 1:6-8).

This "Other Gospel" That Paul Mentions Is a Message of Salvation Without the Cross!

That is the great idolatry of our day. There is a great host of preachers who have literally cast aside the message of the cross of Jesus Christ!

Be warned: It doesn't matter what anyone tells you about a great "revival" or moving of the Spirit taking place; it doesn't matter how many multitudes are involved, or how loud their praises are; it doesn't matter how "successful" a particular ministry may appear to be. If the cross of Jesus Christ is not the door through which people come, you can rest assured - it is not a work of God!

The cross - including its demands and hope - are the very heart of the gospel. And any worship - any fellowship, anything calling itself church - is blatant idolatry if the cross is not at its center. Such worship is of another spirit entirely - and God will have nothing to do with it. Without the cross, all that is left is chaff - a perverted gospel, something from the pits of hell. It is an idolatry more insulting to the Lord than the idolatry of Israel!

Yet, in most churches where this "other gospel" is preached, the pews are packed. All the right words are sung and spoken. The theological terms, such as holiness, Holy Spirit and the cross, are mentioned. Everything looks good and sounds right. But the reality of the cross is not presented! The crisis of the cross, the confrontational aspects, are completely avoided. And if a sermon about the cross does not include confrontation of sin - if it does not bring you to the crisis of the cross - it is not the true preaching of the cross!

If I were to preach about the demands of the cross in many churches today - with its death to all lusts and worldly pleasures -

the crowds would flee, just as they did when Jesus told them of the cost of following him. If I were to say to the comfortable multitudes, "God demands that you face your sins, kneel at the cross, deal with your wickedness" - two-thirds of the congregation would leave offended and never come back. Such churches never even mention the cross. Instead, they pour their energies into clever meetings full of showmanship, dramatic illustrations, sermons on how to cope with life's problems. Right now we're seeing a whole new generation of smart, young ministers - bright, diligent, capable men - who build huge complexes offering people everything from day-care to spas to body-building classes. Parishioners can now center their church involvement around recreation, entertainment, family events, musicals. It is all high tech, contemporary and non-threatening.

I believe God must wink at many of these frail attempts to attract souls with modern enticements. He seems to have much patience with such well-intentioned, fleshly efforts to promote the gospel. But God help the ministers of these churches if they refuse to warn their people to forsake their sins!

Jeremiah lamented, *"...they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness..."* (JER 23:14). *"But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings."* (VERSE 22). I say to such ministers, "Bring back the cross - or the people's blood will be upon your hands!"

The One Thing God Will Never Endure Is the Casting Aside of the Preaching of the Cross!

Jesus said, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."* (JN 12:32). This "lifting up from the earth" Jesus mentions is his crucifixion. He was lifted up before the whole world on the cross - an image of his great sacrifice for our sins.

God had looked down upon a sin-sick world of people bound in prison-houses of fear and despair -

full of doubt, without peace, hope or rest, groping in darkness and confusion - and he sent his own son. So Jesus came to earth, taking on the frailty of human flesh, and told all who would listen: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* (MATT 11:28).

That is the invitation of the cross: It is a call to every soul that is sick of sin! Jesus was calling out to all who were weary with binding chains, powerful habits, besetting sins - all who were tired of the lying, the cheating, the adultery, the depression. He was saying, "I know you're weary from dragging your chains around, tired of the sleepless nights. Yes, sin is a hard taskmaster. Come to me now with all your heavy burdens. There is no other way but through my cross!" Jesus died on the cross not only to forgive sin, but to break its wearying power over us!

Sin wearies the flesh. It makes us weak and sick. It saps away all that is good and kind and precious. And it hardens the heart, destroying peace and causing guilt, sorrow and shame. It consumes the mind's thoughts, weakening and darkening the soul. It brings on fear. It leads to scandal, breaks up families, hardens children. And it leads to death. Worst of all, sin shuts off all communion with God.

About five blocks from Times Square Church there is a long avenue of pornography shops. As you look at the men going in and out of those shops, you see their shoulders slumping and sadness filling their eyes. They are slaves, driven by their lust. They no longer get any pleasure from their sin. They're weary, sin-sick, desperate, with no hope.

Beloved, the church of Jesus Christ is not a supper club, nor an entertainment complex. It is a hospital for sin-sick souls! But when sin-sick people come in and are comforted in their sins - when they are not made to confront the cross - that is blasphemy.

I realize I am making some very serious charges in saying that many ministers have done away with the cross; that multitudes of Christians are worshipping in

churches of wicked idolatry; that many pulpits are filled by men who are clever agents of the enemy. At this point you may be wondering, "What exactly do you mean by saying they have 'taken away the cross'?"

I don't mean that these ministers no longer refer to the historical Jesus and his actual crucifixion. But the fact is, it's possible to preach masterful sermons about Christ's cross in vivid detail - to speak of his suffering, of the blood flowing from his pierced side, and to do so in tears, tenderly and lovingly - and yet still not be preaching the cross. All of these great, wonderful things can be said by angels of light.

Years ago, I listened to a sermon by an agnostic man who pastored one of the largest churches here in New York City. He had written a number of books about Jesus. No one spoke more on the humanity, kindness and goodness of "this prophet Jesus," as he called him. But he didn't know Jesus! Jesus was not God to him.

If there is no confrontation with the cross - if its demands are not mentioned, its crisis never preached - then it is not the preaching of the cross!

You see, the cross is essentially a confrontation with man's sinful lifestyle. That's why it is an offense to every person who has made peace with his sin. That person wants to have Jesus and his sin. So he says, "Jesus paid it all. Now I have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my own heart. I can enjoy myself!" No! It's a false peace - a damning peace. He has been deceived into believing his sin is covered by the blood, even though he refuses to forsake it!

I almost wept as I heard the words of one well-known TV minister recently. He said, "Don't get too bothered by your sins. The Bible doesn't say much about sin anyway." And this Christian teacher is on television every week!

When Jesus says "*I am the way*" and "*I am the door*," He is speaking of the cross. He's saying, "You cannot be saved - you cannot enter heaven - unless you enter by the way of the cross!" "*Verily*,

verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." (JN 10:1).

The thief and the robber will tell you, "Repentance is not necessary. Simply believe! Godly sorrow is not important. Loving your neighbor will do! Don't fret about your sins. God loves you just the way you are!"

A recent radio report said that a church in Los Angeles has just appointed two homosexuals as pastors. The pastors said, "Everyone who comes here enters into a wonderful fellowship of love." No - it's a "love trap"! The love trap says, "As long as you love, you can indulge in anything you please - homosexuality, drugs, alcohol, adultery. Just love!"

Jesus says, "*...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" (LK 9:23). "*Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*" (LK 14:27).

It doesn't matter how much or how deeply your theology tells you to love. Jesus says that unless you deny yourself and enter by the way of the cross, you cannot be his follower!

Let Me Show You What I Mean by the Confrontation of the Cross!

Consider a man who is fed up with his sinful habit yet he continually falls deeper into its clutches. He has promised himself a hundred times he will never do it again - and, for a while, he submerges the temptation and enjoys a measure of freedom. But sometime later it comes back with greater force.

Now this man has covered up his sin, lied about it, cheated because of it - and it has brought him great sorrow. He no longer enjoys it, but he can't quit. He just keeps going back.

The man knows he will have to stand at the judgment seat one day, and he goes through life fearing exposure and scandal. His sin has drained him, shackled him, deceived him. It has brought him

down to a weariness in which he can hardly exist. He's at the end of his rope.

In this sad, weary, worn-out state, the Holy Spirit brings him this word: "There is a way out for you. There is a place of victory, peace, joy, newness of life. Accept Christ's call to run to him and find rest. Go to the cross of Jesus Christ!"

Beloved, when you kneel at the cross, you will not hear an easy, soft word - not at first. Even though the cross is the only door to life, you are going to hear about death - death to every sin!

At the cross, you face the crisis of your life. And that is what is missing in so many churches. The preaching of the cross brings about a crisis of sin, of self-will. It will speak to you with loving but firm words about the consequences of continuing in your sin: "Deny yourself. Embrace the death of the cross. Follow me!"

Let Me Talk to You About the Meaning of Self-Denial and True Repentance.

Repentance means more than saying, "Lord, I am wrong." It means also saying, "Lord, you are right!"

Repentance is facing the consequences of continuing in sin. It means facing, once and for all, the truth about your sin - that it has to end now. It is a crisis moment of truth - a place of recognition where you admit, "I cannot continue in my sin and have the Holy Ghost living in me. I'm going to lose everything. Lord, you're right about sin bringing death upon me. I see that if I continue in it, it's going to destroy me and my family. I know I'm wrong. Oh, God - I deny all my excuses for my sin!"

Simply put, repentance is a confrontation with your sin. The battle is fought before you get to the cross. It takes place as the Holy Spirit deals with you!

The same is true of self-denial. In short, self-denial is a confrontation that says, "Sin ends today - now, at this point!" Contrary to what many "comfort preachers" say, self-denial is not some heartache

you have to bear, or some infirmity of your flesh. When Paul said, "I die daily," he meant simply, "I've concluded I have to deny that I can continue in sin and still have Christ's favor. I don't have a special dispensation from God because I do good works and therefore am allowed to hold onto a pet sin. No! I agree with the word of God. And I deny all my rights to continue in sin!"

The glorious truth of the gospel is that if we die with Jesus, then we also come into the glory of his resurrection and into newness of life. His cross is our cross, his death is our death, and his resurrection is our resurrection, through our identification and union with him. That is the real cross we bear.

Yet this is the cross that many so-called ministers of the gospel have done away with. The real cross isn't about lovely words describing our Savior's suffering and bleeding on Calvary. No - the true meaning of the cross is that Jesus bled and died to bring our sin-sick souls into glorious liberty and freedom - to break every chain of sin that binds us!

I would not want to preach to a mass of people who were never confronted about their sins, and who tried to come into the kingdom some other way. Yet that is the condition of multitudes of so-called Christians today. Sin is never preached to them as being exceedingly sinful. It's merely a word with no power or conviction behind it.

Jesus himself is the word of God. And when a person repents, he agrees with Jesus' words about sin. So, when the Bible says, "***He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.***" (PROV 28:13), the truly repentant heart agrees with that word: "True, Lord. If I try to hide or hold onto my sin, it's going to cost me everything." Likewise, when God's Word says, "***The wages of sin is death,***" the repentant heart agrees: "Lord, if I continue in my sin, it will destroy me!"

Let me turn back here to the sin-sick man I described to you earlier. This man now falls broken and

wounded at the foot of the cross. He hates his sin, agreeing with the word that he cannot continue another day in it. But he feels powerless. And he fears he may fall back into his habit at any moment.

Yet Jesus, our sin-bearer, kneels beside him and bids him look up to the empty cross. Jesus says to him, "Friend, you agreed with my word about the need to confess and forsake your sins. Now you must agree with my word about my cross being your cross. Yes, that means my death is your death. But it also means my resurrection becomes your resurrection. My victory over sin's dominion becomes your victory over sin!"

Like this man, we too are at the cross - sin-sick, weary of our burden. We have been confronted with our sin, and we know we can't go on indulging it. And now we read in Romans 6 about being "***baptized into Jesus' death***" and "***planted together with him in the likeness of his death.***" We also read Paul's words in Galatians: "***I am crucified with Christ...***" (GAL 2:20). "***They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.***" (GAL 5:24).

We cry out, "That's what I want! I want to die to sin - to crucify all my fleshly lusts. But, Lord, how can I do it? How can I get Jesus' victory in my life? What will deliver me from this merry-go-round of sin and confess, sin and confess?"

If you're like me, your first impulse is probably to bite the bullet and try to deliver yourself. When I was a young minister in Pennsylvania, I read the lives of godly men who had led very simple lifestyles - and that sounded like the answer to me. At that time, I knew a minister who was a real hero to me, a man who spoke with great authority. He led a life of total simplicity, living in a little room and owning only one suit of clothes.

That's what I thought denying self meant - a simple lifestyle. I thought, "Lord, that's what I want. I could be a powerhouse for you, if I would only empty out my closets and give away all but a change or two of clothes. I could sell my car and get a cheap one. I could buy

an old, unattractive house. I could give up steak and eat hamburger instead. I could set a great example by having no desire for any material thing on earth!"

Actually, I was saying, "If I could just suffer enough - if I could just get hold of my flesh and be an ascetic - I could serve the Lord with true power."

But soon afterward my hero began teaching false doctrine - and he destroyed many lives because of it. That's when the Lord told me, "That's not what victory is all about, David. The victory isn't yours - it's mine!"

Beloved, it is at this very point that Jesus comes to us and says, "Now, take my hand and follow me - into my death, my burial, my resurrection. Look at the cross. Embrace it. And cling to my victory! That is where your crucifixion to the flesh has taken place. You already have been crucified on my cross, by faith!"

Yes, dying in Christ is an act of faith. We have to "consider" ourselves dead to sin and alive to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul says he wants to know Christ in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, he's talking about Christ's resurrection and sufferings - not his own or anyone else's!

At the Cross, Jesus Broke the Controlling Power of Sin!

Now, how do we get Jesus' victory and power in our own lives? How do we appropriate his resurrection and newness of life?

First, let me ask you: How do you know you are saved? It is by faith alone, of course. The word declares we are to consider ourselves alive unto God. The knowledge of our salvation comes by our faith alone in God's word.

Likewise, we are to take up the cross, embrace it and receive victory by faith in the overcoming power of Jesus' shed Blood. We must admit, "God, I have no power. I deny my ability to deliver myself. I deny that I can crucify myself or have any power over sin. I give up all my own efforts to die to sin!"

By faith, we are "in Christ" - and now we are to enjoy the benefits of all he has accomplished. You see, from the very moment we were born again, we have been in Christ - and that means we entered into everything that happened to Christ, including all of his victories, as well as his crucifixion. So, if we agree with God's word that our sins are exceedingly wicked, we must also agree with the good things the cross offers as well. They are ours - because Jesus accomplished them all for us!

For instance, God's word says that once we embrace the cross, we are crucified with Christ - and we are resurrected with him into newness of life. Sin no longer has any dominion over us. We can do all things through Christ's strength. We are set free. We can yield our bodies to the service of the Lord and offer our members as instruments of righteousness.

At times you may stumble through all this, because of unbelief. But you can hold onto the truth that ultimately victory is yours - because you cry, "Lord, I'm going to trust you until victory comes!"

I thank God for the cross of Christ - and I thank God for its crisis. I know by experience that the greatest "grace preaching" in the world is the preaching of the cross!

And so, I ask you: Have you had your crisis of the cross? What about your present sinful condition? What about that one stronghold you long to be delivered from?

There is deliverance for you today. But it won't come until you kneel before Jesus and have your crisis at his cross. Only at the cross is there finality of sin. It is there you must agree with his word: "I can no longer continue in my sin, not

for another hour. Oh, God, I'm weary of it. I bring it to you now!"

Dear saint, one day, because you have heard and received this message on the cross, we will see each other on resurrection day and rejoice. We'll hug each other and say, "Thank God for the cross! Thank God we were confronted with our sins, and told we couldn't get away with them. Jesus loved us enough to take us into his death, burial and resurrection, and bring us into newness of life - for all eternity. Hallelujah!"

Finally, I thank God for all the true ministers of Christ who still boldly proclaim the gospel of the cross. They are the Lord's bulwark against the idolatry of sin in these last days!

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