

The Offense of the Cross

Matthew 16:16–23; 26:31–35;

Mark 8:27–33; 14:27–31

“But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24).

The great apostle Paul said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14a; KJV; emphasis mine). The glory of the cross comes out of the agony of the cross. The Son of God turned His death on the cross into a glorious victory.

God’s great heart for people was revealed at the cross. He said it all through His Son’s death. What more could He say? Satan has tried his hardest to blind us to the glory of the cross. He has sought to make it repulsive and ridiculous to our intelligence so that we will reject it. To recognize the “offense of the cross,” therefore, is crucial. God has chosen to save us through the cross, but the devil seeks to lead us to scoff at it. If we do not understand the “offense of the cross,” then we will probably miss what the god of this world, the devil, is doing! To misunderstand his designs is to allow ourselves to be deceived by them!

Sermons, songs, books, art, and daily conversations all vibrate with the cross. How, then, can there be any offense in it? Some talk of “sweet baby Jesus” or “a helpless man dying on a cross” and view Jesus as “a harmless man.” This has made the story of the cross seem like a sentimental fairy tale. Popular preaching has removed the violence, blood, and cruelty inherent in the cross; it has made the cross painless and consequently sterile.

Probably no one living today has seen a crucifixion. Such a death was humiliating beyond words. From our setting, it is almost impossible for us to grasp the agony of it. We put the cross in our church architecture; we think of it as beautiful and ornate. However, the cross is not just “appropriate architecture”; it is not just “a meaningful story.” Men glorify the cross while they miss the meaning of Jesus’ death. The cross is not sentimental storytelling; it is the historic death of the Son of God for man’s sins.

We love life; the cross is a presentation of death. We crave victory; the cross begins with defeat. We seek peace; the cross results from war. We love beauty; the cross is ugly. The cross is diametrically different from what mankind seeks to have. Critics protest, “How dare God be God!” Nevertheless, He is, was, and always will be! He, as the only righteous God, chose for His Son to bear our sins through an agonizing death on a cross.

Jesus sternly told His disciples that He would bring offense (Matthew 16:16–23; 26:31–35; Mark 8:27–33). Christ even used a Greek word that means “scandalized,”¹ saying that His followers would be offended in Him (Mark 14:27–31; John 6:60, 61).

¹The Greek word for “scandalized,” *skandalizo*, means “to fall away.”

People *were* offended by Jesus and His death on the cross! They could not see how a crucified common criminal could be their Savior. In polite Roman society, the word “cross” was almost an obscenity, a word that was shunned in public. The thought of Jesus’ being crucified was too much for Peter; he tried to protect Jesus from it. He was agitated. We do not want God to handle matters His way! Peter knew the Old Testament Scripture that pictured the tree (the cross) as a curse (Deuteronomy 21:23; Acts 5:30; see Galatians 3:13); he did not want Jesus to suffer such a death.

Jesus reacted quickly and firmly to Peter, identifying him with Satan (Matthew 16:23). People can rebuke their enemies, but they do not know how to rebuke their friends. Jesus reprimanded him and told him to get out of His way, for He was going to the cross.

The cross was the battleground for Jesus. He “sweated blood” in Gethsemane and prayed that God, if it were possible, would find another way (Luke 22:40–44). There was no other way but the cross.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16, 17). Are we? The temptation is always to change the cross, to minimize it. Paul not only talked about “the offense of the cross” in Galatians 5:11 (NKJV), but he also revealed Christ as “a rock of offense” (Romans 9:31–33). He taught the cross as a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:17–25).

We will not understand the salvation that Jesus brought until we understand the cross. At the cross God said that the only way to defeat sin is through the righteous judgment of sin. If the cross does not matter, then nothing matters!

Probably nothing on earth is as controversial, offen-

sive, or divisive as the cross. No one ever made people angrier than Jesus did and does!

The cross offends because God, not man, is right. (1) God is right because our problem is *sin*. (2) God is right because the only answer to *sin* is the *cross*! Sinners are lost, without hope, and hell-bound. This offends us. Most of us cannot admit that we are lost enough to need salvation. Sinners do not wish to know, or to be reminded, of their guilt. Saying that we are sinners contradicts our proud, selfish, stubborn, and sinful hearts. Christ died for the ungodly, that is, for sinners (Romans 5:6–8). We all qualify!

The cross offends because sinners do not deserve, cannot earn, and cannot buy salvation. We see here the offense of grace! Man cannot save himself. However, what justice demanded, grace provided. Jesus paid it all. Sinful man is eternally helpless without Jesus! Man cannot imagine or explain the cross—he can only humbly believe in it. This offends us.

The cross offends because we cannot respond to God “our way.” Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). His statement is rigid, narrow, exclusive, intolerant, and judgmental . . . but it is the truth. Such a declaration is offensive (see Acts 4:11, 12). Do we seek to please men or God? (John 12:42, 43; Acts 5:29). No sinner can be saved apart from Jesus. The time has come for us to put the cross where God put it. God Himself . . . gave Himself . . . to save us . . . from ourselves!

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*