

The Offense of the Cross

Sunday, April 27th, 1986

Galatians 5:11

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

The message that I will be bringing to you this morning is entitled: “THE OFFENSE OF THE CROSS.”

Paul wrote in Galatians 5:11, *“Brethren, if I preach circumcision, (that is the works of men for salvation) why am I persecuted?”* For if we preach salvation by works then is *“the offence of the cross ceased.”*

In other words, Paul is saying that there is no offense in works; it is the cross that is offensive. It is the Gospel of grace and it is the Gospel of substitution that is offensive to natural men. In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote *“The preaching of the cross, is foolishness, (sheer nonsense) to them that are perishing. To us who believe, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

You see, my friends; religion is not offensive to natural men. I have traveled to many countries in this world; everywhere I go I find religion. Natural men are religious by nature. It does not matter what country you visit, what village or what tribe, you will find religion in some form. You will find people going through some form of worship, worshipping some god, doing some things religiously.

So, religion is not offensive, religion is a worldwide thing. All natural men are religious by nature and there is no offense there. Let everybody have their own religion, you know; leave well enough alone. Don't bother or don't fool with a man's religion.

Actually, good works are not offensive to natural men. Morality is not offensive, no it isn't. There are different ways in which men will go about to enforce morality and legalism which is offensive, but morality itself and good works are not offensive to natural men.

All men will applause a hero who sacrifices to help a person in distress. Everybody loves a hero. Everybody loves a person who will sacrifice himself to help someone else. People will applaud kindness and generosity.

Most men abhor and hate dishonesty and greed. They hate dishonesty in public officials. They hate dishonesty in the business world and they hate dishonesty wherever they find

it. So, religion is not offensive, good works are not offensive and morality is not offensive.

Now listen to this, natural men do not even object to Jesus Christ being a partial Saviour. He can be a prophet, a healer, or an example. He can even be a sacrifice for the sins of the world and no one will be upset or offended. It is Christ, the full, complete and only Redeemer of sinners that is offensive; that is where the offence is.

You see; the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel of free grace, the Gospel of His glory, is a message of mercy. This Gospel is mercy for the miserable and it is a message of love, love for the unlovely.

The Gospel is a message of grace for the guilty, grace from God to sinners; it is good news and glad tidings. That is what the Gospel is, it is the free gift of God, "*the unspeakable gift of God,*" the gift of life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You see, the Gospel of Christ announces life to those who are dead in Adam. The Gospel announces peace to troubled hearts and troubled souls. The Gospel speaks of "*the forgiveness of sins in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.*"

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a Gospel of peace, mercy, love and grace. Yet, the history of the Gospel of substitution, the Gospel of God's grace, is a history of being hated, despised and rejected by men in this world.

I am telling you the truth; it is no different today. The world is the same and the Gospel is the same. The Gospel of grace, the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of substitution, has always been despised and hated by men; it is a Gospel of peace.

Christ is called "*The Prince of Peace; He went about doing good.*" Yet, Christ Himself, the Saviour, was despised. Isaiah 53 says, "*He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. We hid as it were our faces from Him. There was no beauty about Him that we should desire Him. He had no comeliness.*"

Everybody who was anybody turned thumbs-down on Jesus Christ. The disciples were men of good will. They were men of mercy and were men who went about helping, healing, aiding the sick, aiding the depressed and deprived. They were men who brought the good news of mercy from God through Christ.

Every blessed one of them was killed except the apostle John who was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. The world hated them and slew them, they were martyred. They weren't satisfied just to let them die, they had to murder them.

You can call the role of men who have preached the Gospel of grace. These men have not interfered in politics, and they haven't interfered in government. They have not been war-minded men. They have not interfered in the lives of people. All that they have done is stood in the pulpit and preached the Gospel of grace, the Gospel of God's mercy in Jesus Christ, the Gospel of substitution.

There were men like Luther, Calvin and Knox. John Huss was burned at the stake. Latimer and Rutherford were killed. Whitfield was hated, despised, and was cast out of the churches in England. He couldn't even preach in organized religion; he had to stand on his father's tombstone to preach.

There was John Bunyan, when I was in Bedford, England, not long ago; men were erecting monuments to John Bunyan. They officially made him a saint. I went into the church at Bedford where he attended when he was a boy. He wasn't allowed to preach in that church; he had to preach on the streets.

They put him in prison there on the bridge in Bedford for 12 years. Why did they do this? He was no troublemaker or rebel-rouser. He was not a rebel, all he did was preach that Jesus Christ is the only full, complete, Saviour of sinners.

He preached that salvation is not in good works, not in the church, and not in religion, but it is in Christ. So, they put him in prison for 12 years. They have made a hero out of him because he became a famous author, but now he is dead.

There was Charles Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards was one of the leading preachers in this nation who was president of Princeton University. He was kicked out of his church at North Hampton, Massachusetts where he pastored for many, many, years. He demanded a regenerated church membership. He demanded that if people belong to the church they ought to know God.

I will tell you this, our Lord said, *"Marvel not My brethren, that the world hate you. They hated me before they hated you."* They don't hate religion, the world is full of religion. They don't hate morality and good works but they hate substitution. They hate the Gospel of the grace of God. They hate free grace.

The popular religionists, along with the preachers that are popular today don't preach the Gospel of Christ. They preach the gospel of denomination, sacraments, good works, and they preach the Gospel of man's own free-will.

Of course they are not unpopular. The offense is in the cross. That is what Paul says in my text, *"The offense of the cross."* Paul summed it up by saying, *"If I please men, I am not the servant of Christ."* Salvation by grace has never pleased men.

Our Lord said, *"Woe unto you when all men speak well of you."* Paul said this, *"If I preach circumcision (works), then the offense is gone."* There is no offense and there is no hatred. There is no animosity and there is no malice in works. The offense is in grace.

Now, wherein lays the offense of the cross? What is there about the Gospel of God's free grace that is so offensive? If you will listen to me, I have been preaching a very long time. The same message that I preach to you on this television program is the same message that I have preached for 35 years, (almost 36 years), the message of God's free grace. I know from experience wherein lieth the offense. I know what it is that makes men angry.

This is the first point: The Gospel of God's grace, God's free grace, and salvation through Christ alone, addresses all men. This Gospel addresses me, you, the pulpit, the pew, and the world. This Gospel addresses old and young, white and black, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, Jew and Gentile.

This Gospel addresses all men everywhere, all men and women as sinners. That is what we are, sinners in God's sight. We are guilty before God. We are guilty by imputation; *"In Adam all die."* We are guilty by birth; *"In sin my mother conceived me. I was shapen in iniquity; I was brought forth speaking lies."*

We are guilty by nature; Paul said, *"When I would do good, evil is present with me. I find a law within me that when I would do good, evil is present with me"* (I have evil thoughts, evil desires, evil passions, and evil intentions).

We are sinners by choice; we choose evil. Knowing to do good, we do evil.

We are sinners by practice. There is no difference; Romans 3 says, *"There is no difference between Jew and Gentile; they are all under sin. They are altogether become unprofitable. There is none righteous, no not one."* That means you, me, and everyone under the sound of my voice.

There is not a righteous man in this world in himself, by his own attitude, actions and manner of life. There are no righteous men, not God-Righteous. He may be a pretty good fellow compared to everybody else, but compared to God, he is a guilty sinner.

He does not love like God, show mercy like God, or forgive like God. Most of us are motivated by selfishness or self-righteousness. *“There are none that understandeth.”*

We don't understand the perfect ways of holiness. All religion has their so-called holiness today but it is conformed to the way you dress, the way you say “Hallelujah or praise the Lord.” People think it is in where you go to church, how long you wear your hair, how long you wear your sleeves or wear pants, jewelry or makeup.

This is an outward veneer of holiness; inside is malice, hatred, and jealousy, bigotry and prejudice along with envying. That is where sin is; it dwells in the heart. Sin flows through the veins; it is a principle and nature of the heart.

There are none that really understand what holiness really is. The man who claims to be the holiest is the farthest one away from God because he knows the least about Him. *“There are none that seek God. There are none good, no not one.”* Isaiah said, *“The whole head is sick.”* I'm talking about the mental capacities.

The Scripture says, *“The whole heart is faint;”* I'm talking about the affections. We love ourselves that is who we love. You know that is so as well as I do. *“The whole heart is faint from the soul of the feet to the top of the head. There is no soundness. In the flesh dwelleth no good thing.”* There is no good. *“In the flesh no man can please God.”*

“By one man sin entered this world and death by sin and so death passed upon all men: For by one man's disobedience many were made sinners.”

I will tell you this and it is offensive to call men what they are and to tell them what they are; to expose men what they are is to expose their dignity. Man has high thoughts of himself. Yet, God says; *“If we say that we are without sin, we are liars and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar.”*

I wish I could paint a picture as black as it is. I wish I could expose these rotten, evil, corrupt, natures of ours for what they are in God's sight. *“God looked down from heaven and said; there is none good, no not one. Every imagination and thought of man's heart are evil.”* Am I talking about once in awhile? No sir; I am talking about *“continually.”*

Take People Magazine; there was an article in there recently about sin. People estimated how many times they sinned a month. Someone said that they sinned on an average of four times a month. If you would make that four times a second, I will buy it.

You are sin; *“The natural man is enmity against God,”* the natural mind and heart. Blessed is the man who knows what sin is and regards himself to be a sinner. Christ said; *“He came to seek and to save the lost. Christ came into the world to save sinners.”*

Secondly: This is the second place of offense where the Gospel is offensive; the Gospel of Christ declares a full, complete, righteousness which we don't have. It declares a full, complete, righteousness purposed by God, provided by God and purchased by His Son.

There has to be a full, complete, atonement that is accomplished by Christ Himself or God Himself in the person of His Son. That is offensive but it is true. Romans 8: 1 through 3 says this; *“There is therefore now, no condemnation (no judgment, no damnation, or no curse), to them who are in Christ Jesus.”*

You might say, “Those people who you just talked about and told them they were sinners by thought, attitude, motive and nature, are you saying that in Christ they have no judgment?” That is what He says, *“There is condemnation (no judgment) to them who are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.”*

“For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,” (the Law wasn't weak, it was the sinful flesh that was weak). *“What the Law could not do,”* it could not give us righteousness, could not establish righteousness, nor could it make us acceptable to God. *“What the Law could not do,”* (because of the weakness of the flesh), *God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”*

Do you know what I am saying? I am saying that Jesus Christ the Lord, the God-man, our Representative as a man on this earth in the flesh, He perfected by His obedience and fulfilled by His perfect life all the requirements of God's Law on behalf of those who believe. The Scripture says, *“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”* He imputed to us a holy righteousness. By His obedience we have a perfect standing before God.

If you choose to stand in yourself, you will be condemned because you do not have any righteousness. If you choose by grace and by faith that you will stand in Christ, then you have a perfect righteousness because you are robed in His righteousness.

Through His death on the cross, Jesus Christ satisfied God's justice. You see; the wrath of God is against sin and Christ satisfied that justice of God and died. *"The soul that sinneth shall die."* I already died; I died in Christ and I am crucified with Christ.

He imputed unto us that perfect standing before God and enabled a holy, just, and righteous God to love, forgive, accept and justify you and me and still be God. *"When He had by Himself purged our sins."* It is not Jesus Christ and me or Jesus Christ and you; it is Christ alone who purged our sins.

He is our holiness, all of it. He is our justifier, completely. He is our acceptance. Nothing needs to be added to what He did. We are redeemed with *"the precious blood of Christ."* We are redeemed fully, the ransom is paid; nothing needs to be added.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He hath saved us." Paul said, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; it and it alone is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greeks. For therein, in the Gospel, is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith for it is written; the just shall live by faith."*

This is the doctrine of substitution, total, complete, substitution and it is offensive. This Gospel offends a natural man's pride. I'm telling you, "The banquet of mercy is served up by one host, the Lord of glory. The royal bath in which black souls are washed white and cleansed from all their transgressions and sins was drawn from the veins of the Son of God. Nothing you do or anyone else has done will enter that stream; it is without mixture; it is Christ's blood."

Thirdly: The Gospel of God's glory and God's grace declares that God is absolutely Sovereign and Almighty in the matter of salvation. You see; *"Eternal life is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."* He said to Moses in Exodus 33, *"I will be merciful unto whom I will be merciful. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious."*

So then, *"It is not of him that willeth; it is not of him that runneth; it is of God that showeth mercy."* Our Lord said, *"All that My Father giveth Me shall come to Me."* In John 17 He said, *"I pray not for the world; I pray for them which Thou hast given Me."* He said, *"No man can come to me except My Father which sent Me draw Him."*

In Romans 8 it says, *"We know that all things work together for good to them who love God who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. And whom He predestinated, He called and whom He called He justified and whom He justified He glorified."*

“What shall we say to these things?” Well, we say; *“If God can be for us, who can be against us?”* Salvation is of the Lord! Salvation is of the Lord in its planning and in its execution; *“It pleased God to bruise Him.”*

Salvation is of the Lord in its application; *“It pleased God to reveal His Son to me.”*

Salvation is of the Lord in its sustaining power; *“We are kept by the power of God.”*

Salvation is of the Lord in its ultimate perfection; It is of the Lord. *“Herein is love, not that we loved God; He loved us. We love Him because He first loved us.”*

The hymn writer wrote this:

Tis not that I did choose Thee
For Lord that could not be,

If Thou hast not chosen me
I would have never chosen Thee.

What about Noah? *“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”* Abraham said, *“Lord; I have found grace in Thy sight.”*

You see, my friend; the new birth is totally misunderstood by most preachers and religionists. You have no more to do with your new birth than you did with your fleshly birth; that’s right! You see; the new birth is not you making a religious decision; the new birth does not occur at an altar or occur down at the front of the church.

God in His Sovereign grace gives divine life to whom He will. That’s right; the new birth is from above, totally and completely from above. That is what the Scripture says, *“We were born from above.”*

I was born the first time 60 years ago. I had absolutely nothing to do with my birth. There was a seed planted in my mother’s womb that became me; my father put it there and I was born. Then I could see and hear and speak.

One day, by God’s grace from above, I was born anew; I was born a second time; I was regenerated by the Holy Spirit. That is a miracle of God, a super-natural, miracle of God. Now listen to the Scripture; *“We are born of God. To many as have received Him, to them gave He the privilege to become sons of God which were born not of blood, (that is,*

not of fleshly inheritance), *not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but we are born of God.*”

The agent in the new birth is the Holy Spirit. The seed in the new birth is the Word of God; *“Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth.”* I know that this is offensive to natural men. My friend; let me ask you something; are we going to go by the Bible or are we going to go by what we think?” If we go by what we think, we will have thousands and millions of theologies. The Word of God is our only rule of faith and practice.

We do what we do because the Word of God commands it. We believe what we believe because the Word of God teaches it. *“If they speak not according to the Word of God it is because there is no life in them.”*

This is offensive but I am telling you; salvation is of the Lord. It is of the Lord from beginning to end, from Alpha to Omega; salvation is of the Lord.

The new birth is by the power of God. Yes, men call on God but He calls them first. Men do seek the Lord because He seeks them. Men do love Christ because He loves them. The Scripture says, *“He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”*

Listen to this; what is offensive about the Gospel of grace? The Gospel of Christ declares the wrath of God against sin. I know that today’s preaching emphasizes the love of God exclusively and leaves out the wrath of God. Listen to this Scripture; *“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and all unrighteousness of men.”*

Listen to Psalm 5:5; *“God hates all the workers of iniquity.”* In Psalm 7:11, the Scripture says; *“God is angry with the wicked every day.”* John 3:36 says, *“He that believeth not the Son the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

The judgment of God fell upon the angels that sinned, this was God’s wrath. The flood in Noah’s day reveals what? The flood reveals God’s wrath. The destruction of Sodom reveals what? The destruction reveals God’s wrath. At Calvary, God spared not His Son. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD reveals God’s wrath.

Explain this about eternal hell to me; is it a product of God’s love or God’s wrath? His holy wrath! My friends; *“God is love”* but it is in Christ. What does the Bible say? *“Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

This Gospel declares that Christ is the way to God, the truth of God and the life of God. This Gospel denies that no one can come to God any other way. This is offensive and I know it is offensive.

Paul said it was offensive but he was going to preach it; he said, *“I didn’t come to please men but I came to preach what God has written in His Word and the glory of God in Christ.”*