

**Galatians 5: 11 and 12; “The Offense of the Cross”, Message # 35 in the series –
“Christ has Set us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
April 23rd, 2023, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We see here from these verses that there is an offense of the cross which is on-going, throughout all generations of the Church age, to the end of the world. That offense was the reason that the Apostle Paul was persecuted. And it will also be the reason that you and I as disciples of Christ will be persecuted; to whatever degree that we are. Evidently the false teachers in the churches of Galatia had been saying to the members of those churches, that the Apostle Paul himself was sometimes preaching circumcision, and was therefore inconsistent with himself.

This charge Paul refutes here. But in this message I would like us to look more carefully at what the offense of the cross meant to Paul, here in the context. And also what it may mean for us in our generation. 1st of all – We want to see that the offense of the cross leads to various kinds of persecution. And then 2nd – We want to see that the offense of the cross leads to a very particular kind of desire in the mind of the true believer in regard to false teachers.

1st of all – The Offense of the cross leads to various kinds of persecution.

Paul says: “And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?” “Then the offense of the cross has ceased.” You and I need to understand that there is an offense of the cross, and that it does lead to various kinds of persecution. What is the offense of the cross? The offense of the cross is the offense that is given to unbelievers, or false religionists, when they are told by a true Christian that their own efforts, good works, or participation in ordinances will not save them. When you tell them that their church going, their participation in baptism or the Lord’s Supper will not save them, then they are offended.

Participation in church ordinances is no guarantee to anyone, of an entrance into heaven. The offense of the cross comes when unbelievers or false religionists are told that it is only by faith in Christ that a person is saved. It comes when they are told that only Christ’s righteousness and His sacrifice for sinners on the cross has satisfied God’s justice. That God must impute righteousness to their legal account offends them. These truths are very provoking to self-justifying people. And they will often, then, try to think of various ways that they can oppose the truth and cause trouble or hurt for the people who hold to the truth of the Scriptures and the gospel.

These truths are very upsetting to them because they realize that there is nothing that they personally can do, to prove to God and to true Christians, that they are pretty good people. That is, just as they are, striving to do God’s will in their own strength and wisdom, and going to church and participating in the ordinances of their church. This kind of mentality, of a person’s insisting that they know God through their own religious works, and then their to justify themselves in sight of God and men, it can lead to a hatred of those who tell them this. It is offensive to them to be told that they need more than their own wisdom and righteousness to be saved, and to find favor with God.

This hatred, or antagonism, is often related to their religious self-righteous pride. Turn with me over to John Chapter 15, and we will look at verses 18-25. “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.” “If you were of the world, the world would love its own.” “Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” “If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

“But all these things they will do to you for My names’ sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.” “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” “He who hates Me hates My Father also.” “If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and hated both

Me and My Father.” “But this happened that the word might fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’”

Now we must ask ourselves: Why did the scribes and Pharisees and rulers of Israel hate the Lord Jesus? They hated him without a cause. And Jesus says that it was because they were of the world; and that the Father had not chosen them unto salvation. When Jesus says that “they were of the world”, he is saying that there are many religious people in the world who hold many false perspectives in their hearts by nature. These are worldly, man-centered perspectives which are not God’s perspective. They only consult other religious men about what they think it means to know God and to have eternal life. And in this way they circumvent God’s word, or they impose upon it their own beliefs.

And so, you will find that this kind of unbelieving men are really making up and developing their own religion, and they are superimposing it upon the truth of God’s word. That is what these leaders of Israel had done; they had taken the Scriptures and they had twisted them to say and mean something that God never meant them to mean. They twisted them to say that if a person was circumcised and kept the law, that they were righteous. Keeping the law, then, meant keeping it in relation to how these leaders falsely thought it should be kept. They did this so that their own sinful purposes and practices would be established. Anyone who questioned them or contradicted them would be put out of the synagogue.

When a person like this is told that they need to believe in Jesus, and live their life according to the truth of the Bible, and not try to make up their own religion in regard to it, they rebel at the thought. When they are told that they should not join churches which teach a sacramental salvation, or that a works-righteousness will not save them, they do not like it. They think that by their own way of thinking and doing things, they can please God and follow Christ. This kind of hatred and persecution began when our Lord Jesus came to the Pharisees and Sadducees and rulers of Israel and told them that they needed to believe in Him.

Look with me at John 8, verse 12 – “Then Jesus spoke to them saying, ‘I am the light of the world.’” “He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” “The Pharisees therefore said to Him, ‘You bear witness of Yourself; your witness is not true.’” “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going.’” “You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one.” “And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me.”

“It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true.” “I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” “Then they said to Him, ‘Where is Your Father?’” “Jesus answered, ‘You know neither Me nor My Father.’” “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.” “These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him for His hour had not yet come.” This is where the hatred began; that Jesus was claiming to be someone completely different than they were; someone who knew the Father and was bearing witness to God.

He was saying that He was the Light of the World, and that the person who would follow Him would not walk in the darkness of ignorance and sin, but they would have the light of life. The Pharisees and scribes, and Sadducees could preach circumcision, but they could not lead a single person to know God through the false message of salvation which they taught, because they did not see the connection between Christ and salvation, nor did they want to see it. They were more interested in keeping the commandments of God outwardly than they were in keeping them inwardly.

They were more interested in outward conformity to their own man made worship and rituals than they were in really coming to know God. Jesus knew this and He was teaching them their need to believe in Himself. Look at verse 21 – “Then Jesus said to them again, ‘I am going away,

and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin.” “Where I go you cannot come.” “So the Jews said, ‘Will He kill Himself, because He says, ‘Where I go you cannot come?’” “And He said to them, ‘You are from beneath; I am from above.’” “You are of this world; I am not of this world.” “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” “Then they said to Him, ‘Who are You?’” “And Jesus said to them, ‘Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.’” “I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.” “They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.”

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught me, I speak these things.’” “And He who sent Me is with Me.” “The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” This was the offense of the cross; Christ having to be lifted up for their sins if they were to be saved. And this was because Christ was the only Man who has ever lived who always did those things that pleased the Father. Thankfully, it says in verse 30 – “As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.”

But for others listening, they wanted to persecute Him, and even to kill Him for His words. This same response is sometimes found in those who come to realize what we, as Jesus’ disciples, are saying. We are saying that they must believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins or perish everlastingly. This is the clear implication of Jesus’ statement that they would “die in their sins”. This idea of eternal judgment is something that all unbelievers do not like to believe is true. It is offensive to them. And the reason that it is offensive is, that they do not believe that their disbelief concerning the Lord Jesus is an awful thing, worthy of eternal judgment.

But turn over to John 3: 17 – “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God.” You can see here that it is a great sin not to believe that you need to come to Christ for salvation. It is a great sin not to believe that you will perish, if you do not believe that you are sinner who needs to receive God’s righteousness which is found only in Jesus Christ. This is the righteousness of faith, to receive a righteousness better than your own through faith in Jesus Christ. This is often very offensive to religious but unsaved people.

2nd – We want to see that the offense of the cross leads to a very particular kind of desire in the mind of the true believer in regard to false teachers.

“And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?” “Then the offense of the cross has ceased.” “I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!” Paul was not preaching that circumcision was necessary for any Jew’s salvation, and this is why he was being persecuted by his own unsaved countrymen. Paul preached that faith in Christ’s finished work on the cross was absolutely necessary. John Gill says: “Moreover, the Jews that believed would not have been so offended as they were at his preaching, had he preached the one as well the other; their offence was not that he preached Christ crucified, but that he preached, that, by the cross of Christ, circumcision and the other rituals of the ceremonial law were now abolished.”

And brethren, we can apply this to ourselves as well. Many religious people in our day believe that it is the rituals of the Christian religion that save. They believe that a person must participate in the sacraments and rituals of the Roman Catholic church, or the rituals of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in a theologically liberal church, in order to be saved. They may believe in Christ in some general sense, but they do not want to believe that they need to be converted to Christ in their heart. They do not believe that they must be born again by the Spirit of God to enter the kingdom of heaven. They do not want to believe that what Christ has done, alone, is the only means of their being saved from eternal judgment, and to be able to live their Christian life to God.

This is why false teachers who teach such things were so annoying to the apostle Paul. They were turning people away from the truth of how they could be saved. His particular desire is given here in the form of an imprecatory wish: “that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off.” (that they would “mutilate themselves” it says in the NAS. And in the ESV it reads, “That they would emasculate themselves”) The allusion here is to the act of circumcision itself; that even as in circumcision, the removal of the foreskin of the flesh, was desirable in order to become a Jew under the Old Covenant, that these false teachers needed to cut off. They needed to stop, or become “dumb” to, their own undesirable false teaching, in order that they could be saved.

Their cutting themselves off means, that if they persisted in teaching circumcision and ritual works as being necessary unto salvation, that they should be excommunicated, or formally removed from the congregations of the churches there in Galatia. I will close with verses which apply to this situation, which are found in Titus 1, verses 10-16. “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” “One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’”

“This testimony is true.” “Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.” “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.” “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” This is certainly a part of what it means to be pure. It means to be pure in doctrine. In regard to those who are not pure in doctrine, their mouths must be stopped if they are a part of the local church. Let us always hold fast the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone. And let us in this good way, pray to more and more obedient to the truth, and thus qualified for every good work.