

The Offense of the Cross

"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." 2 Timothy 3:12

Are you suffering rejection, persecution and loss for the sake of Christ? If you are not, you may need to reexamine your faith and ask yourself if you are really living godly in Christ Jesus. Jesus said if they persecuted Him, they would also persecute everyone who follows Him (John 15:20). This does not mean we can rightfully claim to be persecuted when others reject us for wrong behavior. However, it does mean we will experience hostility when Jesus Christ shines His light brightly through us in this dark world. Sharing the true gospel can be a sure prescription for "how to lose friends and alienate people." The Bible calls Jesus Christ the "rock of offense (1 Peter 2:8)" and calls the gospel of Christ the "offense of the cross (Galatians 5:11)." If we share the Kingship of Jesus Christ and the power of His cross in this fallen world, we can expect to offend others and suffer persecution.

What is the gospel of the cross? It is the message that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified for us and our old man of sin was crucified with Him (Roman 5:8; 6:6-8). Therefore, our old sinful nature is dead and gone and the life we now live in this body, we live by faith in the Son of God who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). The gospel of the cross has the power of God to convict us and deliver us from sin (1 Corinthians 1:18). It is a hammer that can shatter the hardest heart. It is a sword that can pierce the depths of our soul. It is a fire that can consume our entire being. The message of the cross is good news to all who are humble in spirit and know they need Jesus Christ to be the Lord of their life. "Blessed is he who does not take offense with Me (Matthew 11:6)." But the gospel of the cross is an offense to those who are proud in spirit and reject the need for Jesus Christ to live and rule in them.

The devil tries to counterfeit everything in Christianity. There are false conversions and false

disciples. And, of course, there is a false gospel. Instead of being a sword, a hammer or a fire, the false gospel is a feather that tickles the ears of its hearers (2 Timothy 4:3). The false gospel doesn't always directly deny Christ; instead, it subverts Christ's sovereignty and crucifixion by appealing to man's carnal desire for self-reliance. Whereas the true gospel convicts us, the false gospel entertains us. The false gospel is a feel-good message of "Christian" self-help. When we hear the true gospel, we express remorse and repent from our sin and ask Jesus Christ to sovereignly live His life in us. In contrast, the false gospel makes us feel confident about ourselves and boosts our self-esteem. The false gospel boasts that we can change ourselves and fulfill ourselves by following "Christian" principles. The true gospel proclaims we could not change ourselves and there was nothing of virtue in us worth reforming. That's why God had to righteously include us in His Son's death so our sinful nature would be executed and buried (removed) in order that His Son might now sovereignly live in us.

If we could successfully live the Christian life by just following Christian principles, we would not need Jesus Christ and the power of His crucifixion. If we could change our behavior to conform to Christian virtues and use our natural talent and energy to do Christian work, then Christ would have died needlessly. The false gospel is not much different than other world religions that inspire people to better themselves and find fulfillment through their dedicated efforts and so-called "keys" to successful living. Many people have embraced this false gospel of self-empowerment that is sprinkled with a little Scripture to disguise it as a form of Christianity. If you promote the false gospel in today's world, you won't suffer persecution. In fact, you may become a popular author and conference speaker. And you may even be asked to pray at the President's Inaugural Ceremony or the President's Annual Prayer Breakfast. "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way (Luke 6:26)."

In countries where Christianity is outlawed, sharing the gospel will cost you your freedom if not your life. Even in nations where civil rights and religious freedom is protected, we will experience hostility when we share the true gospel. The hardest rejection we experience may not come from "sinners" but from other professing "Christians." This should not surprise us since Jesus said our enemies would be members of our own household (Matthew 10:36). Sadly, many churchgoers have been blinded by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and have become enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18), lovers of self rather than lovers of God, practicing a form of religion that denies Christ's power (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Those who are "religious" and live by the power of the soul have historically persecuted those who live by the power of the Spirit (Galatians 4:29). Yet when we suffer for the gospel's sake, we are blessed because the Spirit of glory rests on us (1 Peter 4:14). We should consider our suffering as mild compared to our fellow believers around the world who suffer far worse for our Lord's sake.

If we abide in Christ and He abides in us, our destiny and honor will be to suffer for His Name. Since no persecution can separate us from His love (Romans 8:35), Jesus has commanded us to boldly share the gospel and love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). This is surely Christ's witness and only possible if we know that our sinful nature has already died with Him and entrust ourselves completely to our Lord Jesus who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). Therefore, let us fix our eyes on Jesus and arm ourselves with this purpose of suffering for His sake (1 Peter 2:21-23; 4:1-13) so we may be considered worthy of our Lord and King for whom we endure all things (Acts 5:40-42).

"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:11-12