

Cross—Offense or Power

Sermon #0938

Study given by W. D. Frazee—February 15, 1963

"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" Galatians 6:14.

Many songs have been written about the cross. Many sermons have been preached about it. Many poems have been penned.

"In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story,
Gathers round its head sublime."

In thinking of the glory of the cross we want to clearly understand that glory is seen only by those who open their hearts to what is revealed there. To most people the true cross is not glorious at all. Paul speaks of the offense of the cross:

"And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased" Galatians 5:11.

The word translated offence in this verse is also translated stumbling block, or snare. Yes, the cross to many is a snare, a stumbling block. Paul says:

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" 1 Corinthians: 1:23-24.

Is the cross a stumbling block to you? A snare? An offence? Or is it the power of God and the glory of God?

"The opinions and wisdom of men must not guide or govern us. They always lead away from the cross"
Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 1, page 286.

What leads away from the cross? The opinions and wisdom of men. How often? Always. If you listen to the opinions in contrast to the Word of God and the call of God, they will lead you away from the cross. But remember, the cross is the power of God and the glory of God.

Our brother just sang for us about taking up our cross and following Jesus. That song came from the Bible. It came from the words that fell from the lips of Jesus:

"And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" Luke 9:23.

We are to take up the cross every day. Did you take up the cross this morning? Are you planning to take up the cross tomorrow? Next week? I read an inspired definition of taking up the cross:

"It is never difficult to do what we love to do, but to take a course directly against our inclinations is lifting a cross"
Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, page 94.

Jesus said to do this daily. Paul did also. In 1 Corinthians 15:31 he said, "I die daily."

Many people do not understand the Christian life. They suppose that if they could only get converted they would never have to do what they don't like to do, and what they like to do would always be alright. That is the goal, the objective. And some day it will be true. Thank God that everything we do in obedience to God will be something we enjoy and like to do. But that is not the day we are converted, nor the day after, nor the week after. Paul said he died daily. Commenting on that Sister White said:

"His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he did God's will, however crucifying to his nature" *Ministry of Healing*, page 453.

You see what makes a cross? It is very simple. It is a line going in a certain direction, and another line going across it. That is what makes the cross. And on that cross your selfish will and nature must be crucified by repudiating its choice, by denying its desires, by declining to accept its rulership.

"And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" Galatians 5:24.

To be born again does not mean that from that time on every desire of your body, every craving of your mind, will be spiritual and heavenly and worthy to be carried out. No. The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and every one of us is in that conflict. Oh, I hope each one is lifting the cross every day.

What did we find that lifting the cross means? It means to take a course directly against our inclinations. I would like to study with you three areas in which this great principle is to be applied.

First, the denial of self so we do not indulge ourselves, but control ourselves. We speak of that principle as temperance.

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. . . . but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" 1 Corinthians 9:25-27.

Paul had a battle with himself. Do you suppose Paul ever had a battle with his appetite? Apparently he did. That is part of the body he had to keep under. I wonder if Paul was ever tempted to eat something that wasn't good for him? I wonder if he was ever tempted to eat more than was good for him of something that was good for him. He had something in mind when he said he had to keep under his body and bring it into subjection.

Do you have a battle with appetite? Do you have a battle with any other fleshly desire? The victory is not in idle wishing that there be no battle. That is not the way to victory. Victory is gained in looking at the cross where Jesus gave everything for us, and from that receiving inspiration to give everything for Him, and deny those desires which are not to the glory of God. Will we accept the cross, or will we seek to evade the cross?

This little book, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, has some wonderful instructions on the question of the control of appetite. If any of you have a problem with that subject, I suggest you read the chapter beginning on page 145.

Here we see that sin entered the world on the point of appetite. Adam and Eve ate something God told them not to eat.

We find the great sin in the days of Noah came from the indulgence of appetite and passion. God had to destroy the world by a flood.

Again, in the time of Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of this very thing of failure to control appetite and passion. We are told that Sodom and Gomorrah and Babylon all fell because of gluttony and drunkenness. Indulgence of appetite was the foundation of all their sins.

Jesus takes the days before the flood and the days of Sodom and Gomorrah and compares this last generation to those days. He mentions specifically their failure to control appetite and passions. I read:

"Man's great need was conversion,—in heart and mind and soul, from the life of self-indulgence to one of self-denial and self-sacrifice" *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, page 162.

The great problem God had with Israel in the desert was over the question of appetite. They remembered some things they had back in Egypt, and they got lonesome and homesick about it over and over again. If we follow through with the remnant, we are going to be on a bread and water program before we see Jesus coming on the cloud.

We are not told to restrict ourselves to that simple a program right now, but we need to get ourselves under control so that the body cannot dictate to us. Unless we do that, when it means you cannot buy or sell unless you receive the mark of the beast, you will receive the mark of the beast in order to get what you call a square meal. It is better to go hungry with Jesus in the wilderness than to feast with Belshazzar without Him. Wouldn't you say so?

Think of Jesus in the wilderness fasting for forty days. What for? To break the hold of appetite upon the human family. But many people have so little concept of this that they suppose Jesus took the cross so they would not have to. Instead He overcame to show us how to overcome.

"Satan's temptation to indulge appetite will be more powerful and more difficult to overcome as we near the close of time" *Ibid*, page 164.

Do you find it so? Well, if it is any comfort to you, it is easier now than it will be next week or next month. Oh, let's take up the cross and follow Jesus. What do you say? Let's get every appetite, every craving under control.

That doesn't mean being extreme or fanatical. It doesn't mean starving ourselves. We will be well nourished. In fact, we will be better nourished on that program. It is a wonderful thing to sit at a table and know you are the master, not the slave. God give every one of us that control.

I want to ask you something. Who is it that offers a health program without the denial of appetite? Satan. That's the truth. Whenever you find a health program that has things fixed so you do not have to deny your appetite, you had better be afraid of it. The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us who are being saved it is the power of God. Let's accept and lift the cross.

There is something else I would like to have you think of. Turn to Isaiah 58. This is the great medical missionary chapter. In this chapter, medical missionary work is linked with the keeping of God's commandments and the Sabbath reform message. But I want you to notice the heart of the appeal. Speaking of the fast that God has chosen, the prophet says,

"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" Isaiah 58:7.

Who is to cover the naked? We are. Whose bread are we to feed to the hungry? Our own. And where are we to bring the poor? To our house.

That might cost money. It would cost money. But it would cost something far more expensive than money. What is it? Time, effort, continence. Did you know that God deliberately planned it so it would cost you inconvenience and sacrifice? That's right. And the only way you can get out of it is to try to skip the cross.

There are plenty of people to help you. There are plenty of people to show you how to do what is called medical missionary work without it costing you a sacrifice. You can have your name written high and large as a medical missionary worker without inconveniencing yourself or sacrificing anything more than millions of people do every day just to earn some money. But that is not the way of the cross. Here is something interesting:

"By our churches there is a work to be done of which many have little idea, a work as yet almost untouched"
Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 6, page 275.

Then Sister White quotes Matthew 25:35-36 where Jesus says:

"For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in. Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me."
Matthew 25:35-36

How is it that the people of God actually visit Jesus and feed and cloth Him? By helping the poor and needy, the sick and suffering. This is a work that little have any idea of. Now watch:

"Some think that if they give money to this work it is all they are required to do, but this is an error. Donations of money cannot take the place of personal ministry"
Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 6, page 275

So it isn't enough to give to the Salvation Army and the Red Cross, or our own offerings to the church. It is all right to give offerings. But I am to deal my bread to the hungry, and I am to bring the poor that are cast out to my house.

That is so inconvenient. Yes, it is. And that is what it is meant to be. It is meant to get down to business about crucifying our selfish desires for ease and have everything the way we like it. It is pitiful how selfish our human hearts are. You don't have to want liquor and tobacco and gambling to be selfish. You can want perfectly good things. You just want to get somewhere and enjoy them and not be bothered. But that is not the way of the cross.

"Good works cost us a sacrifice, but it is in this very sacrifice that they provide discipline. These obligations bring us into conflict with natural feelings and propensities, and in fulfilling them, we gain victory after victory over the objectionable traits of our character; thus we reflect the likeness of Christ" *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, page 662.

Oh friends, I want to get discipline. Don't you? God brings me in contact with the poor and needy. They are not all clean, and they are not all appreciated. They are not all bright, intelligent, responsive people. I wonder what it is for? To help

them? Yes. But perhaps more than that, to help you and me to get rid of our selfishness; our disinclination to inconvenience ourselves. This is the way of the cross.

Who would try to teach us how to do medical missionary work without sacrifice? Satan. We are told he is coming as the great medical missionary. He is seeking to teach people how to do medical missionary work without sacrifice. If we had an hour on this point only it would be worth it to study the great deception of the Devil and make people think they are doing medical missionary work when instead of sacrificing they are rolling up great amounts of money and things money can buy through the very process of so called ministry to the sick. There will be an account to render to God on this matter.

I warn your soul. Jesus is calling us to the cross. I ask, is it to you an offence, a snare, a stumbling block, or do you see the glory of the cross? Do you see the power of the cross? And are you glad to take it up and bear it after Jesus?

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, page 70, says that many are ruined by their desire for a life of ease. They want things the way they want them. They don't want anything bad. They want good things, and plenty of them, and nobody to interfere with their enjoying them.

You must never forget that the place Jesus left to come and save us wasn't a bad place, it was a good place. The place He came to save us was not a good place, it was a bad place. Jesus didn't give up bad things so He could be saved. He gave up good things so we could be saved. That is the cross. And He invites us to share with Him in that experience.

Look at Mark 10. See that young man running after Jesus. What does he want? His heart is hungry for something. He has riches. He has honor. He has fame. He has a good reputation. But there is a longing in his soul.

When he finally asked Jesus, "What lack I yet?" Jesus told him he lacked just one thing. How that young man must have hung onto those words. Just one thing I lack. Tell me, and then I will be perfect.

"Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" Mark 10:21.

Did he see the glory in that? No. To him it was a stumbling block; the offence of the cross.

Judas thought that the Savior had made a terrible mistake. What poor public relations. What a foolish way to deal with an influential and rich man. Why didn't He handle that man more careful?

Why indeed? Ah friends, the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us who are being saved, it is the power of God. It is a

wonderful thing to see such glory in the cross that we gladly leave everything and count everything lost that we may take the cross and bear it after Jesus.

The rich young man went away sorrowful. Anyone who misses the message of the cross and fails to enter into cross-bearing will never know the joy of Jesus and the fellowship of heaven.

Do you know why Jesus took the cross for us? Love. The cross is the supreme revelation of the love of God. And if love for us led Jesus to take the cross, what will lead us to take the cross? Love for Him. Do you see? That is all it takes to get the victory over appetite and every other selfish lust. Love for Jesus. More love for Him than love for our stomachs and our selfish ways.

It is love for Jesus that will send us out into the homes of the poor and sick and suffering, and help us to find those who need our help and bring them to our homes to minister to them. All it takes is love for Jesus. More love to Thee, Oh Christ, more love to Thee. He took the cross to show His love for us, and we take the cross to show our love for Him. Let's do it.

In doing it, shall we try to make the gift as inexpensive as possible? Some people were looking around for a gift to give some friends who had just been married. They found a set of cheap glassware which they had received free with some premiums at a gas station. They put those together as a wedding gift. It was a cheap way to get rid of an obligation. But if you had been the people receiving the gift, you might not have been too much impressed. I wonder what Jesus thinks of the cheap little offerings of love we give Him? The leftovers, the remnants, the stray coin we happen to have in our pocket? The occasional good deed on the spur of the moment?

When Paul is asked in the kingdom of God to recount his experiences, he will tell of all the sacrifices Jesus helped him to make, and how happy he is to have had the privilege. Wouldn't it be too bad if we should tell our experience and say, Well, I used to go up in the attic and hunt up all the old shoes and old clothes and give them to the Dorcus? It is a good thing to be sure our old things are being used rather than let the moths have them, but we need to go beyond that in order to learn the lesson of the cross. Ourselves, our time, our effort is to be dedicated through love to the service of Christ by serving others.

In 2 Samuel 24:24 is a little verse that bears study. David had sinned against the Lord, and he was required to burn burnt offerings at a certain place. The man who owned the place freely offered the oxen for the service. But David said:

"Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing." 2 Samuel 24:24

Children and young people, study how to give offerings to Jesus that cost you something. There may be a time when the only way you can give an offering is for daddy to put some pennies or nickels in your hand to give to Sabbath School. But as you gain intelligence, study how you can do something through sacrifice that cost

you something to give to Jesus to show Him how much you love Him. Bearing the cross is to ever be an act of love.

The only chance we will ever have to do it is here and now. There will be no cross in heaven. Did you know that? Think of what that means. You will never have to deny your appetite or some other physical craving in heaven. Some people are so lazy and selfish they wish they could get there right now so they would not have any more conflict. They never will. The battle must be fought, the victory won, the nature changed, the selfishness crucified in this present world.

I repeat, the only opportunity to show our love by denying ourselves is now. Suppose you were in heaven and love would thrill your heart, and you would want to go visit some sick person. Which street in the New Jerusalem would you go to find a sick person to minister to? Which mansion would you visit to find someone to feed? Which place would you go to find some poor person to invite home with you? Where in all those millions of square miles would you find a single needy, suffering soul? Do you see that your only chance is here and now to enter into this experience?

Oh, how we should be seizing every opportunity to do that instead of evading and avoiding. This is our hour. Eternity is a long time, and it is to share the joy and results of it. For the joy that was set before Him, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame. It will be a wonderful thing to have as many there with us as possible. He that winneth souls is wise.

I repeat, there will be no cross in heaven. Never an inclination to deny. Never a sacrifice to make. Never through all eternity. We show our love to God there by obedience, and in loving service. But never like we can here and now. Now is the glorious hour to lay our lives down upon His altar and do what the rich young man failed to do to come and take up the cross and follow Jesus. Let's do it.

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