

The Philosophy Of The Cross

Introduction. The first of the three great facts of the gospel is that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3). The spirit of the gospel is the spirit of the cross, and the very genius of the gospel message is the philosophy of the cross (1 Corinthians 2:2).

In order to impress these fundamental truths on the minds of His people with such recurring frequency they should never lose sight of them, our Lord erected in the very heart and center of His church an institution which witnesses to this philosophy. This institution is known as the communion of the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). In determining the philosophy of the cross, we will compare human philosophy with the philosophy of the cross and see its greatness.

I. *The Inadequacy Of Human Philosophy*

- A. Paul wrote eloquently on this subject in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5. Human philosophy represents the oft-repeated attempt to comprehend infinity, and to explain the mysteries of God. However, Paul said that this cannot be done through the human mind alone.
- B. The official definition of philosophy is "the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence."
 1. Someone once jokingly described philosophy as "the search of a blind man in a dark cellar for a black cat that isn't there."
 2. Human philosophy is speculation and nothing more; it has never been found adequate to satisfy the aspirations of the soul.
- C. The thesis of modernism is that all religion is the consequence of a long evolutionary process, rather than of divine revelation; that man's enlarging ideas of deity arose out of a consciousness of his own needs and were, therefore, the concepts of his own mind. In other words, God did not create man in His own image, but man created God in his own imagination.
 1. Lewis Browne, formerly a rabbi, in his book entitled *This Believing World*, has attempted to describe the forward steps in this alleged development of religious concepts and modes of worship.
 - a) His five steps are as follows:
 - (1) Animism -- "the law of the idea of spirit," or the tendency to see souls in things.
 - (2) Shamanism -- primitive man's belief that he could exploit the power of a spirit.
 - (3) Fetishism -- the worship of an inanimate object because it was thought to be the residence of a spirit.

- (4) Tabooism -- the prohibition of certain objects and actions on the ground that they were the abode of, or inspired by, evil spirits.
- (5) Sacerdotalism -- the setting aside of a priestly order to mediate between the spirits and man.
- b) Browne concluded, "Religion was the bootstrap by which man raised himself out of savagery."
- 2. However, the five preceding steps are all evidences of man's degeneracy, rather than of his alleged ascent from a barbarian state to a civilized state.
 - a) Experience teaches that man, if left to his own devices and resources, will go backward spiritually rather than forward (Romans 1:21-25).
 - b) The only true incentive to moral and spiritual progress is not a pushing power from within man, but a pulling power from without.
- D. God's nature, attributes and works are not matters to be apprehended by any intuitive process, but matters that can be made known to us only by revelation from deity Himself (Deuteronomy 29:29; Job 11:7). Without this revelation, our race would be no more advanced morally and spiritually than it was several thousand years ago.

II. ***The Surpassing Greatness Of The Philosophy Of The Cross***

- A. It is complete and perfect because it meets every test of human experience and every need of which the soul is aware.
- B. There are two major points which define the philosophy of the cross.
 - 1. The philosophy of the cross is moral.
 - a) It presents love as the noblest motivating principle for all of human conduct. Love for God is the first and greatest commandment and it will produce those fruits essential to true righteousness (Matthew 22:37-38). Love for God will destroy such sins as worldliness, idolatry, blasphemy, profanity, covetousness, etc.
 - b) Love for one another is the second greatest commandment of the law (Matthew 22:39). If this were practiced, it would destroy such sins as murder, theft, fornication, adultery, enmity, jealousy, division, factions and war; in fact, all sins classified in the category of "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21).
 - c) These forms of love were both perfectly exemplified in the death of Jesus on the cross. His death was at once and the same time a demonstration of perfect obedience to the will of the Father and a manifestation of perfect love for mankind.

2. The philosophy of the cross is spiritual.
 - a) It transcends the realm of ordinary morality and becomes the very heart and soul of true religion.
 - b) From the judicial point of view, the atonement provided by our Lord's death makes it possible for man to be redeemed from the curse of the law and to receive the pardon of his sins (Galatians 3:13; Revelation 22:3).
 - (1) Man, in the beginning, trampled under foot a divine law, making it necessary that the majesty of that law be sustained by a divine offering.
 - (2) Man had nothing he could offer that would atone for the violation of a divine law, and was therefore helpless. Hence, what man was unable to do for himself, God did for him.
 - (3) The benefits of the Lord's death may be appropriated by man through faith (Romans 3:24; 8:3).
 - c) From the legal point of view, this process is known as justification in the sense that the claims of justice are fully satisfied (Romans 5:1).
 - d) From the personal point of view, the atonement provided by our Lord on the cross makes reconciliation possible (Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Romans 5:10-11).
 - (1) It serves to reconcile God to man, and man to God. It achieves a double purpose: sustaining the majesty of God's violated law, and overcoming the rebellion in man's heart.
 - (2) No human being can seriously contemplate Calvary without realizing that all men are the object of God's redeeming love.
 - e) The philosophy of the cross is the essence of of true religion. True religion manifests itself in worship. True worship, says Jesus, is composed of two parts:
 - (1) Communion of the human spirit with the divine spirit (John 4:24). God cannot be confined to one place nor conceived of as a material being.
 - (2) Communion according to the truth; i.e., on the terms and conditions laid down by God in His revealed word of truth (Acts 2:38, 42).
 - f) In the light of these truths, the gospel becomes the one and only religion known to mankind.
 - (1) Expressions such as "comparative religions," "ethnic religions," "the religions of mankind," "natural religion," and the like, are, technically speaking, misnomers.
 - (2) Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc., are in reality systems of philosophy.
 - (3) The gospel reveals the only religion, because it is the only

system which makes possible reconciliation between creature and Creator (John 14:6).

Conclusion. The philosophy of the cross transcends all human philosophy as the heavens transcend the earth. Self-denial, sacrifice and cross-bearing, motivated by love, is the very soul of the Master's teaching (Matthew 16:24-26). To bear the cross is to surrender our wills to the divine will. We must bring every thought, word and deed in submission to the will of Christ. Cross-bearing, which is equivalent to self-denial, is not measured in terms of monastic asceticism, but in terms of loving obedience and sacrifice.