

Billy Graham: Why Does the Cross Offend People?

This expression “the offense of the cross” sounds strange to our modern ears.

Because, you see, we have a beautiful cross on our churches. We have crosses in the lapels of our coats. We have crosses around our necks. We have crosses embossed on our Bibles. We never think of it as a scandal and as an offense. And yet the Bible says it's a stumbling block. It's an offense. It's a scandal among men. It's a base and despised thing.

The cross was a place to execute criminals. It was a place where the vilest died. And when I see Christ hanging on the cross, I say with Isaiah, there is no “appearance that [I] should desire him” (Is. 53:2). Paul says that in his day it was an offense.

I've found in my own ministry that I can preach anything else and it's called popular. It pleases the ear. But when I come to the heart of Christianity, when I come to the cross and the blood and the resurrection, that is the stumbling block. That's the thing people do not want to hear. That's the thing that is an offense, and yet it's that very thing that is the heart of the gospel. Without the cross, there is no salvation; there is no forgiveness.

God said, “I'll meet the human race only one place. That is the cross.” And if you haven't been to the cross, there is no salvation and there is no forgiveness.

Why is the cross an offense? I got to thinking about this not long ago. I see Christ hanging on the tree. I see Him dying for me. I see blood being shed. I see nails in His hands. I see a spike in His feet. And I see Christ dying for sin, an offense. Why is it an offense?

The cross is an offense because it says to the world, "You're a sinner." The cross said to the thief who was dying on the other cross, "You're a sinner. You'd better repent." And the thief did repent. He confessed his sins. And he said, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus turned to him and said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." Christ forgave him right there. But first the cross condemned his sins and made him confess and acknowledge that he was a sinner (Luke 23:39-43).

The cross speaks to you about your sins—your sins of immorality. There is no sin in the Bible that the Bible condemns more than the sin of immorality. It is America's great sin.

It is the same sin that caused the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the same sin that caused fire and brimstone to be rained down on the two cities of the plain. It is a sin that God hates. And some of you are cringing because you know that is your sin.

I tell you, I don't care if you are a Sunday school teacher, if you are a deacon or an elder or a church leader. Unless there has been a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, it means nothing. We have a lot of religiosity in this country. We have a great deal of worship in America that is not true worship.

The Pharisees fasted twice a week. They paid tithes. They were orthodox. They were fundamental. They believed the Scriptures from cover to cover. And yet Jesus, in the most scathing language, denounced them and indicated they were not saved; they would come to Him in the last day and He would say, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice evil" (Matt. 7:23).

There is no pride in the world as terrible as religious pride. Proud of our religion, proud of the things we do, when down

inside we are filled with pride, jealousy, envy, backbiting and gossiping.

The cross has come down through the centuries, passing its unfaltering judgment upon the vanities, prides, hates, greeds, self-indulgent pleasures and lusts of men. The cross says to us all, "You're a sinner." It becomes the conscience of the world. The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

And when I come to the foot of the cross, the first thing I have to say is, "I am a sinner." But the Scripture says men love darkness because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). You don't want the light of the cross, and so the cross becomes a stumbling block. It becomes foolish to you. You cringe, and you go back into your darkness.

And the light of the cross begins to penetrate into your extortion, into your pride, into your idolatry, into your bigotry, into your intolerance. Into all the sins of your life, the cross sends a beam of light. You cringe and say, "No, no, no. Don't expose me." But the cross goes down into the dark recesses of your heart where even your wife or husband cannot go, even your family cannot go, even your best friend cannot go, down deep inside of you, and sees the sins and exposes them to the light.

God says that someday every secret thing will be brought out (Rom. 2:16). And when I stand at the judgment in that day, I shall plead only one thing: the fact that one day by faith I went to the cross and gave my life to Jesus, and I had my sins cleansed by His blood. That is my only claim to Heaven. I don't claim to be going to Heaven today because I have preached or because I'm a good man. I claim to be going to Heaven only on the merit and the ground of Jesus and His death at the cross.

There are many things about the cross that I don't understand.

But this one thing I know—it is the way of salvation, and I'm to come by faith. Even though it may seem foolish and irrational, and it may not seem the right thing to do, and people may laugh at it, yet God says He has chosen the preaching of the cross to bring men to Himself.

And once you've been to the cross and had the experience of His forgiveness and had an encounter with the Christ of the cross, you're never the same. ©1958 BGEA. Used with permission.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New King James Version.

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