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CHRIST CRUCIFIED

by

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(1816-1900)

There is no doctrine in Christianity so important as the doctrine of Christ crucified. There is none which the devil tries so hard to destroy. There is none which it is so needful for our own peace to understand.

By Â“Christ crucified,Â” I mean the doctrine that Christ suffered death on the cross to make atonement for our sins,-that by His death He made a full, perfect, and complete satisfaction to God for the ungodly,-and that through the merits of tha t death all who believe in Him are forgiven all their sins, however many and great, entirely, and for ever.

About this blessed doctrine let me say a few words.

The doctrine of Christ crucified is the grand peculiarity of the Christian religion. Other religions have laws and moral prec epts, forms and ceremonies, rewards and punishments; but other religions cannot tell us of a dying Saviour: they cannot show us the cross. This is the crown and glory of the Gospel; this is that special comfort which belongs to it alone. Miser able indeed is that religious teaching which calls itself Christian, and yet contains nothing of the cross. A man who teach es in this way might as well profess to explain the solar system, and yet tell his hearers nothing about the sun.

The doctrine of Christ crucified is the strength of a minister. I for one would not be without it for all the world. I should feel like a soldier without arms, like an artist without his pencil, like a pilot without his compass, like a labourer without his too ls. Let others, if they will, preach the law and morality; let others hold forth the terrors of hell, and the joys of heaven; let others dwell on the sacraments and the Church: give me the cross of Christ. This is the only lever which has ever turned the world upside down hitherto, and made men forsake their sins: and if this will not, nothing will. A man may begin prea ching with a perfect knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; but he will do little or no good among his hearers unless he knows something of the cross. Never was there a minister who did much for the conversion of souls who did not dwell m uch on Christ crucified. Luther, Rutherford, Whitfield, MÂ'Cheyne, were all most eminently preachers of the cross. This i s the preaching that the Holy Ghost delights to bless: He loves to honour those who honour the cross.

The doctrine of Christ crucified is the secret of all missionary success. Nothing but this has ever moved the hearts of the heathen. Just according as this has been lifted up missions have prospered. This is the weapon that has won victories o ver hearts of every kind, in every quarter of the globe: Greenlanders, Africans, South Sea Islanders, Hindoos, and Chine se, all have alike felt its power. Just as that huge iron tube which crosses the Menai Straits is more affected and bent by half an hourÂ's sunshine than by all the dead weight that can be placed in it, so in like manner the hearts of savages hav e melted before the cross, when every other argument seemed to move them no more than stones. Â“Brethren,Â” said a North American Indian after his conversion, Â“I have been a heathen. I know how heathens think. Once a preacher cam e and began to explain to us that there was a God; but we told him to return to the place from whence he came. Another preacher came and told us not to lie, nor steal, nor drink; but we did not heed him. At last another came into my hut one day, and said, Â'I am come to you in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth. He sends to let you know that He will m ake you happy, and deliver you from misery. For this end He became a man, gave His life a ransom, and shed His blood for sinners. I could not forget his words. I told them to the other Indians, and an awakening begun among us. I say, there fore, preach the sufferings and death of Christ, our Saviour, if you wish your words to gain entrance among the heathen. Â” Never indeed did the devil triumph so thoroughly as when he persuaded the Jesuit missionaries in China to keep bac k the story of the cross!

The doctrine of Christ crucified is the foundation of a ChurchÂ's prosperity. No Church will ever be honoured in which Christ crucified is not continually lifted up. Nothing whatever can make up for the want of the cross. Without it all things may be done decently and in order; without it there may be splendid ceremonies, beautiful music, gorgeous churches, learned ministers, crowded communion tables, huge collections for the poor; but without the cross no good will be done. Dark hearts will not be enlightened, proud hearts will not be humbled, mourning hearts will not be comforted, fainting hearts will not be cheered. Sermons about the catholic church and an apostolic ministry, sermons about baptism and the LordÂ's supper, sermons about unity and schism, sermons about fasts and communion, sermons about fathers and saints,-such sermons will never make up for the absence of sermons about the cross of Christ. They may amuse some, they will feed none.

A gorgeous banqueting room, and splendid gold plate on the table, will never make up to a hungry man for the want of food. Christ crucified is GodÂ's grand ordinance for doing good to men. Whenever a Church keeps back Christ crucified, or puts anything whatever in that foremost place which Christ crucified should always have, from that moment a Church ceases to be useful. Without Christ crucified in her pulpits, a Church is little better than a cumberer of the ground, a dead carcass, a well without water, a barren fig-tree, a sleeping watchÂ-man, a silent trumpet, a dumb witness, an ambassador without terms of peace, a messenger without tidings, a lighthouse without fire, a stumbling-block to weak believers, a comfort to infidels, a hot-bed for formalism, a joy to the devil, and an offence to God.

The doctrine of Christ crucified is the grand centre of union among true Christians. Our outward differences are many without doubt: one man is an Episcopalian, another is a Presbyterian; one is an Independent, another a Baptist; one is a Calvinist, another an Arminian; one is a Lutheran, another a Plymouth Brother; one is a friend to Establishments, another a friend to the Voluntary system; one is a friend to Liturgies, another a friend to extempore prayer: but after all, what shall we hear about most of these differences in heaven? Nothing, most probably: nothing at all. Does a man really and sincerely glory in the cross of Christ? That is the grand question. If he does, he is my brother: we are travelling in the same road; we are journeying towards a home where Christ is all, and everything outward in religion will be forgotten. But if he does not glory in the cross of Christ, I cannot feel comfort about him. Union on outward points only is union only for time: union about the cross is union for eternity. Error on outward points is only a skin-deep disease: error about the cross is disease at the heart. Union about outward points is a mere man-made union: union about the cross of Christ can only be produced by the Holy Ghost.

Reader, I know not what you think of all this. I feel as if the half of what I desire to tell you about Christ crucified were left untold. But I do hope that I have given you something to think about. Listen to me now for a few moments, while I say something to apply the whole subject to your conscience.

Are you living in any kind of sin? Are you following the course of this world, and neglecting your soul? Hear! I beseech you, what I say to you this day: Â“Behold the cross of Christ.Â” See there how Jesus loved you! See there what Jesus suffered to prepare for you a way of salvation! Yes: careless men and women, for you that blood was shed! for you those hands and feet were pierced with nails! for you that body hung in agony on the cross! You are they whom Jesus loved, and for whom He died! Surely that love ought to melt you: surely the thought of the cross should draw you to repentance. Oh, that it might be so this very day! Oh, that you would come at once to that Saviour who died for you and is willing to save! Come and cry to Him with the prayer of faith, and I know that He will listen. Come and lay hold upon the cross, and I know that He will not cast you out. Come and believe on Him who died on the cross, and this very day you shall have eternal life.

Are you inquiring the way toward heaven? Are you seeking salvation, but doubtful whether you can find it? Are you desiring to have an interest in Christ, but doubting whether Christ will receive you? To you also I say this day, Â“Behold the cross of Christ.Â” Here is encouragement if you really want it. Draw near to the Lord Jesus with boldness, for nothing need keep you back: His arms are open to receive you; His heart is full of love towards you. He has made a way by which you may approach Him with confidence. Think of the cross. Draw near, and fear not.

Are you an unlearned man? Are you desirous to get to heaven, and yet perplexed and brought to a stand-still by difficulties in the Bible that you cannot explain? To you also I say this day, Â“Behold the cross of Christ.Â” Read there the FatherÂ's love and the SonÂ's compassion. Surely they are written in great plain letters, which none can well mistake. What though you are now perplexed by the doctrine of election? What though at present you cannot reconcile your own utter corruption and your own responsibility? Look, I say, at the cross. Does not that cross tell you that Jesus is a mighty, loving, ready Saviour? Does it not make one thing plain,-and that is that if not saved it is all your own fault? Oh, get hold of that truth, and hold it fast!

Are you a distressed believer? Is your heart pressed down with sickness, tried with disappointments, overburdened with cares? To you also I say this day, Â“Behold the cross of Christ.Â” Think whose hand it is that chastens you: think whose hand is measuring to you the cup of bitterness which you are now drinking. It is the hand of Him that was crucified: it is t he same hand that in love to your soul was nailed to the accursed tree. Surely that thought should comfort and hearten y ou. Surely you should say to yourself, Â“A crucified Saviour will never lay upon me anything that is not good for me. The re is a needs be. It must be well.Â”

Are you a dying believer? Have you gone to that bed from which something within tells you you will never come down ali ve? Are you drawing near to that solemn hour when soul and body must part for a season, and you must launch into a w orld unknown? Oh, look steadily at the cross of Christ, and you shall be kept in peace! Fix the eyes of your mind firmly o n Jesus crucified, and He shall deliver you from all your fears. Though you walk through dark places, He will be with you: He will never leave you,-never forsake you. Sit under the shadow of the cross to the very last, and its fruits shall be swe et to your taste. There is but one thing needful on a death-bed, and that is to feel oneÂ's arms around the cross.

Reader, if you never heard of Christ crucified before this day, I can wish you nothing better than that you may know Him by faith, and rest on Him for salvation. If you do know Him may you know Him better every year you live, till you see Him face to face.