

Articles and Sermons :: The Cross and the World - L.E Maxwell

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The Cross and the World

THE ROMAN ORATOR, Cicero, summarized the attitude of the ancient world to the cross when he said: "Not only let the cross be absent from the person of Roman citizens, but its very name from their thoughts, eyes and ears." Two thousand years ago we find no halo of glory, no beautiful associations of history, no nobility, and no thought of heroic sacrifice attached to the cross. How cluttered up is the cross at the present time! Even the unbelieving world now says: "The Cross stands for all that is noblest in manhood". But it was not so in the beginning. It is not so today. As soon as the Cross ceases to be to us, first of all, the place of utmost shame and contempt, we make the Cross of Christ of none effect. In Christ's day the disciples must often have beheld the procession of criminals, murderers, and rebels carrying their crosses on their way to an ignominious departure--a death of such infamy and shame and execration that we have no word that is significant of the deep and universal detestation that belonged to the cross in early times. Add to all this the scriptural anathema and capstone: "He that is hanged is accursed of God," and we begin to understand the offense (literally, the scandal) of the Cross.

Yet it was only in the Cross that the princes of this world could find an adequate expression of their unrelenting and envenomed hatred of the Christ of God. There, once for all, the proud world spoke its mind out loud. The Cross, then, perfectly photographs the world's thought of Christ. Take counsel, speak your mind, O world--what think ye of Christ? "They cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man. . . . Crucify him, crucify him." Be not deceived, my friend, that dagger is still there, albeit hidden in the world's skirts. It is still true that the "one pulse by which we can measure the real spirituality of an epoch, or of a soul, or of a group of souls, is the measure of horror they find in the word "world." (D. M. Pantony.)

It is not easy to define the word "world." The Scriptures speak of "the prince of this world" (John 12:31), of "the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2) which is according to "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), of "the spirit of the world" which is contrary to the Spirit of God (I Cor. 2:12), of "the fashion of this world" which is passing away (I Cor. 7:31), and of the wisdom of this world which "crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 2:8).

Little wonder, then, that God says: "Love not the world"--the whole orbit and life of the natural man--"neither the things that are in the world" (I John 2:15). This last clause is important. It is likely that many of my readers are, as a whole, unworshipful. But let me ask, Are you the victim of a single worldliness? To what thing are you passionately attached? You may rightly condemn the young person's love of the dance, the show, the theater. But are you under the spell of politics, or art, or science, or money, or ambition, or social popularity, or business power? The world is a different world to a young person than it is to the middle-aged or older person. But "the narcotic is no less deadly." Since the world slew Christ, and hates God, its whole ambition and passion and swagger, its popularity and pleasure--yea, its ten thousand enchantments all contradict the Cross and exclude "the love of the Father." The apostle does not "Love it not too much, or love it not so much"; he simply says, Love it not at all.

The apostle next defines the three chief roots of all worldliness, all so like the three golden apples that lured the legendary Atlanta to a lost race. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:16). Selfish man seeks satisfaction through these three forms of lust. But to all of them the Christian has been crucified. Let him not come down from the cross. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." But, oh, the uncrucified lusts that are lording it over God's children and putting the Crucified to an open shame!

However, the infinite cunning and craft of the world-spirit are beyond the natural mind to detect. It is an enchantment, a witchery, a pageantry vastly seductive. Worldly-mindedness in multiple form has thrust its cancerous roots into the very fiber of our religious life. It is a deadly leprosy, unaccompanied by pain, but eating to the bone. It is the white ant which has eaten away the frame of our spiritual house. It is the seed-bed of intellectualism, the handmaid of modernism. It is the fifth column boring from within, which has unseated and ousted the spirit of the Cross "Some of us read, years ago," says J. Gregory Mande, "of a mountain of loadstone which drew by its tremendous power of attraction every piece of iron that was brought within the range of its influence. Ships at sea passing near the shore of that land where the mountain was, felt its force on their anchors and chains and bars.

At first their approach to the mountain was scarcely perceptible. There was a declining from their course which excited very little apprehension. But the attraction gradually became stronger, until, with ever increasing velocity, the vessel was drawn closer. Then the very bolts and nails started from the vessel's beams and planks, and fastened themselves on the sides of the mountain, the vessel of course, falling to pieces and becoming a total wreck".

Let us then set forth a few subtle forms of worldliness which lure us to the rocks, and wreck our Christian testimony.

Note: Our dread of that faces and frowns of worldly men. On the other hand, what a pleasant morsel is the world's favor

and flattery!

The unwarranted time we can spend over some trifling hobby instead of "redeeming the time." We call it relaxation, but there may be much worldliness in it.

The ease with which we can sit in slippered feet noting the world's news when we might be giving the "good news" to lost men. We refuse to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Our soft little "world" has us.

The prevalent lust for late night lunching and vain-glorious witticisms--cheating ourselves of the time needed for God's fellowship in the Word and prayer next morning. Then we go out ungirt and stripped of our armor to meet the world at large--all because of our own secret inner worldliness.

The great place we give to likes, dislikes, and personal choices.

How much we are regulated by public opinion, perhaps religious opinion, rather than scriptural principle.

How easily we are content to allow this or that thing, be it ever so innocent or lovely, to becloud the world to come.

How little we count it a privilege to suffer shame for His name.

What expectations we have of great contentment and satisfaction from certain earthly comforts. How fond we are of nice things and luxuries, and how unwilling to forego them for the sake of sending the gospel to the heathen.

How we abhor being counted eccentric! How unquestioningly obedient we are to fashion's decrees, not because the styles are reasonable or right or decent, for they are often most unreasonable and indecent. We are so worldly-minded we would rather be indecent than different. Old King Lust calls thus: "Do this," and many do it as obediently as any centurion's servant ever obeyed under the lash of his Roman master.

Until we personally take ourselves in hand we need not wonder at the false doctrine, the modernistic ministry, the poor church discipline (or none), and the corrupt practices in the church. The whole root of our ruin is found in worldliness. As William Law so well puts it: "The heresy of all heresies is a worldly spirit. Whence is all the degeneracy of the present Christian church? I should place it all in a worldly spirit."

Re: The Cross and the World - L.E Maxwell - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/8/2 15:30

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What a powerful article, may God keep us from the root of worldliness in our walks and churches.