

# ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

*Don Fortner*

Because he was a man devoted to the gospel, zealous for the glory of Christ, and concerned about the souls of men, the apostle Paul clearly identified men in the early church who were "the enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippines 3:18). Sometimes, he even called them by name!

Those enemies of the cross were preachers and teachers who came in the name of Christ, professing to be followers of Christ, and pretending to preach the gospel of Christ. But they were offended by the cross of Christ. The fact that Christ died on the cross did not offend them; but the doctrine of the cross they could not and would not endure. Because of their great hatred for Paul's message, the doctrine of the cross, they sought to destroy his ministry by raising smoke screens and clouds of dust around it, falsely accusing him of many hideous things. Some said, "Paul is not a true apostle." Others said, "Paul is an antinomian." Another raised the cry, "Paul is a preacher of licentiousness." And some said, "Paul is lording over God's church." By these things, the false preachers and teachers in the early church tried to discredit Paul's ministry, and sought to excuse their rebellion and enmity toward the doctrine of the cross.

We have such men in the church today. Some are preachers, some are teachers, some are deacons, and some are in the pews. They falsely accuse God's faithful servants of many evil things. They raise many false issues in an attempt to hide the one real issue. They are "the enemies of the cross of Christ." What is the source and cause of their anger, wrath, and hostility toward those who faithfully preach the gospel? What are the real issues?

The real issue is this— Who is God? Is he totally, absolutely, and universally sovereign; or is he not? The Word of God says that he is; and the natural man hates that fact (Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:35-37; Rom. 9:11-23). God is sovereign in all things: creation, providence, and salvation. God does what he will, when he will, with whom he will, in the way he will, and gives account of his actions to no one. Either God is absolutely sovereign, or he is not God.

The real issue is this— What is man? Is man good, or is he vile? Is man weak; or is he depraved? Is man sick, or is he dead? What does the Bible say? You do not have to read much to find out (Rom. 3:9-19; 5:12; Eph. 2: 1-3). These things are true concerning all men by nature, no matter what their age, their race, or their condition in life: All men are spiritually dead, without life toward God. All men are morally depraved. Their hearts are evil, vile, wretched, and incapable of doing that which is good in the sight of God (Mt. 15:19). There is nothing you can or will do, of yourself, by your own power, of your own accord, to change your nature. And all men are justly condemned. Unless God Almighty intervenes and does for you what you cannot do for yourself, you are going to wind up in hell. And if you do, it will be right and just, you have well earned it.

The real issue is this— How is salvation accomplished? Man will accept any method of salvation which allows him some part in the work. And he naturally rebels against any method of salvation which denies him all pride and dignity. The scriptures are clear - "Salvation is of the Lord." "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Salvation is not an offer; it is a free gift. Salvation is not accomplished by the gentle persuasion of the Holy Spirit, never invading the territory of the sinner's free-will; but it is accomplished by the sovereign power of God the Holy Spirit, irresistibly drawing sinners to Christ and creating faith in their hearts. Salvation does not come by the decision of man, but by the revelation of God. Salvation is not walking down an aisle; it is bowing to Christ the King. The new birth is nothing less than an effectual awakening of dead sinners by God the Holy Spirit. It is God giving life to the dead. It is a spiritual resurrection.

The real issue is this—Who is Jesus Christ? Modern day preachers have made a conscience-soothing, fire-escape from hell and named it "Jesus." The modern preacher has made Jesus a pathetic, helpless beggar at the sinner's heart's door. The preacher of easybelievism and decisionism has made the will of Christ, the work of Christ, and the glory of Christ subject to the sinner's will. He has put the Son of God into the sinner's power, saying, "What will you do with Jesus? "Will you accept the Lord? Won't you let Jesus come into your heart? Let him have his way with you." It's all a lie, a blasphemous delusion, a snare of hell.

My friend, Jesus Christ is God, the sovereign Lord and King (John 17:2). He has you in his hands. You don't have him in your hands. The question is not, "Will you receive Jesus?"; but "will Jesus receive you?" The question is not, "Will you accept the Lord?"; but "Will the Lord accept you?" He has the authority, the right, and the power to save you or to damn you. The one thing you can and must do is bow down to him. Bow down before the great King and sue for mercy "Lord, if you will, you can make me whole."

The real issue is this—What did Jesus Christ do? Did the Son of God die to make salvation a possibility for all men, or did he make an infinite satisfaction to divine justice, accomplishing the eternal redemption of his people. The modern theory of the atonement is this—the Lord Jesus Christ died at Calvary to make it possible for all the people of the world to be saved, though he did not actually secure and make certain the salvation of any. And when any sinner believes on Christ, the blood of Christ becomes powerful and effectual to save him. This notion makes the blood of Christ a dormant and useless thing until the sinner's faith makes it meritorious and effectual. But what does the Word of God say? If there is anything plainly taught in the Bible, it is this - the Lord Jesus Christ did actually put away the sins of his people, and did actually obtain eternal redemption for us when he poured out his life's blood unto death at Calvary (Rom. 3:24-26; II Cor. 5:21 Heb. 9:12,26).

Though the doctrine of the cross offends unbelieving men and stirs up their wrath. I must go on preaching it with boldness. This is the only hope of my soul. And, though you may not know it, is your only hope too.

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