

A Rock of Offense

By R.T. Nusbaum

"For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; as it is written, Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." (Romans 9:32-33)

The message of Christ and Him crucified can be a very appealing message – as long as it remains only a message. What I mean is that, people can really enjoy the message of the Cross for its deeper message and more Christ-centered emphasis. But if these things are so, how can this same message be a rock of offense? It becomes a rock of offense when it begins to be applied (usually by others) to the things in our lives that we want to be untouched by the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ then causes offense.

The preaching of the Cross is a point of stumbling for many. All of us have obvious problems in our lives, which we are only too happy to relinquish to the Lord. The problem arises when God wishes to slay something that we do not wish to be exposed. His dealings begin to go beyond the religious veneer that is on the surface into the very heart of our personal selfishness. What we are by nature begins to be exposed by the light of the Cross. We may be very happy to give up some things but most people don't like to see that they are not as pretty as they have held up before men.

Many people are willing to only walk so far with Jesus. There is a line that they do not want crossed. But Jesus expects that if one is to follow Him, he must be willing to give up more than things. His words are unmistakable: "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24).

The Need For Death

The reason why many find the preaching of the Cross to be a Rock of Offense is because they have never seen the need for death. They are confused by statements such as it doesn't matter whether you are good or bad -- it makes no difference – all must die. They are more apt to see the need for the removal of certain bad habits but still view their basic self as useful to God. When the message of the Cross begins to work its way past a surface presentation, the hearer becomes uncomfortable. If God chooses to continue to press that message home, the person may become defensive, belligerent, and find fault with the messenger, the place that is presenting it, or claim that the message is not being presented in a balanced way. These reactions will be pawned off as spiritually based when they are actually nothing more than an encounter with the Rock of Offense. They have stumbled at that great stumbling stone!

As long as a person has not had a Romans 7 experience, he will continue to seek to save his own life. He will seek to offer up his talents, money or anything else in place of the loss of his self-life. God does not just want our life "given" but replaced. All these truths

can be acknowledged as fact while resisting their personal application. That hypocrisy can continue for a long time until God decides that you must make a choice. The choice is: "Will you continue to embrace the message of the Cross while resisting its application or will you surrender to it in a personal way?" This decision will never be the right one unless a person becomes convinced of the need for death.

What Does The Cross Bring About?

"Where there is neither Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, for Christ is all and in all."

Part of the problem is that we simply view the Cross as the means of taking away something instead of the means of bring about something. The Cross took place, not just because of sinful flesh but to bring about one New Man in which Christ is all and in all. To bring this about requires the death of all others. So removal of Greek and Jew, bond and free, male and female is necessary, not simply for disposing of all that is evil but for an increase of Christ. It is Jesus taking His rightful place in His body as all in all.

How heinous then is it to allow the wonderful message of the Cross become a Rock of offense! To do so not only allows the core of our sinful self to remain in tact; it compromises the Word, the Cross and the eternal purpose of God. To us, we may simply be protecting ourselves but the result is that we are robbing Christ of His right to be all in all. In so doing, we are declaring there is a legitimate Body of believers that is allowed by God to live, minister and function without the full claims of the Cross and of Christ as the "fullness that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23).

We will either fall on that Rock and be broken or that Rock will fall on us and grind us to power. It all depends on our relation to Jesus, the Rock. He either brings about a brokenness within us or we become so hard that the Rock ends up being the means of our destruction. Christians should seriously ponder these things. They should not be taken lightly. Throughout history there have been many a person who, though they started out well, ended up being offended by the Cross of Christ.

Why is it that we will only accept partial claims of the Cross? Why do we choose the part that saves us from hell but not that which saves us from selfishness? The answer is: We want the benefits with none of the consequences. But God will never change. He wants us free! He provided the Cross to make us free from hell. He wants us free from the devil. He wants us free from sickness. And He also wants us free from a self-centered life. ***