

The Message of the Cross 1 Corinthians 1:14-2:5 by Rev. Tom Aicken

Paul makes it very clear in this passage that his principal duty as a pastor and teacher is to preach the gospel. What is this gospel, or good news, that he was sent to preach? He calls it (v.18) "the message of the cross."

Now he is not saying that there is nothing else about Christ worth preaching except His death. The apostle knows that the death of Christ cannot be separated from any of His other works, such as His active obedience, miracles and teaching. His purpose rather is to focus on the chief thing that Jesus came into the world to do, His atoning death, which gives His people victory over sin and death and hell.

While this message of the cross is so important, however, it is precisely this that sinners find so offensive. The preaching of Christ and Him crucified is a SKANDALON (literally, stumbling stone) to the Jews. This was because, as they said, they wanted a sign from God to prove that Jesus really was the Messiah. Jesus had given them many signs, had done countless miracles before their eyes, but, as long as He was not the kind of king that they wanted Him to be, they would never accept or even acknowledge any of those signs.

The Jews were not the only ones who were offended by the message of the cross. The Greeks were as well, and considered such preaching to be foolishness. One prevailing view of Greek philosophy at that time was Gnosticism. This was the belief that man's spirit is good, but that his body is evil, and so salvation must somehow be by the powers of wisdom and knowledge to escape the shackles of the flesh. The very idea, then, of Jesus being sacrificed for others and rising from the dead in His body (instead of escaping His body) was utterly absurd to their way of thinking.

How is it, believer, that you and I are not offended by the cross of Christ but find Him precious? It is because this message of the cross has been made unto us the power of God unto salvation. At the time of creation God spoke and life was thus formed, and man became a living soul. God continues to speak through Holy Scripture today, and by the power of His Word which He sends out in preaching, sinners are re-created in Christ Jesus and are made entirely new in Him.

Paul said that he did not come to baptize (a mere symbol of God's power), but to preach (which is a demonstration of His power). It is by this means that we are born again. The Holy Spirit produces faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel, and the sacraments, baptism and the holy supper, are meant to confirm that Word to our believing hearts.

Perhaps you were baptized as an infant, but the cross is still an offense to you. Listen, unbeliever, to what your baptism is telling you: you need to repent of your sins, you need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Place yourself under the counsel of God's Word as often as you can. Oh, that the message of the cross may yet become the power of God unto salvation for you!