

The Cross of Christ

By E.J. Waggoner, published in a pamphlet, 1900

The failure with many people is that they make a distinction between the cross of Christ and their own crosses. There is no cross that comes to any person on earth, except the cross of Christ. If we will always remember this, it will be life and joy to us.

The Lord does not give us some crosses of our own,—little crosses adapted to different ones,—one having one cross and another another. We cannot separate Christ from His cross. Christ is crucified; He is the only crucified one; therefore whatever cross comes to us must be the cross of Christ; and that cross is with us continually. But in the cross of Christ we find Christ Himself.

Union with God by the Cross

What do we get through the cross? Forgiveness of sins, reconciliation.

1 Peter 3

¹⁸ Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

Ephesians 2

¹⁶ That He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross.

It is the cross, then, that unites us to God, and makes us one with Him. Everything then that is a real cross is life to us, because it brings us to God. Take the things that come to us; new duties, perhaps, are revealed to us; sins, it may be, are shown to us, that must be denied. Different things come up that cut directly across our habits and our own way and convenience.

We can take them in a hard and cheerless way, groaning over our religion, and giving everybody that comes near the

idea that it does not agree with us, but that we must endure the service of Christ, hoping that by and by we shall get something better, when we get out of this grinding service.

Or we can find joy in the cross, and salvation and peace and rest, by recognizing that cross as the cross of Christ.

The Cross Without Christ

Suppose we are stingy. Well, we have to make sacrifices for the cause of God, and so we know we must give something. We groan over it, and shrink from it, but finally by dint of hard work, will manage to give something. Then we think afterwards of what a hard cross we have borne.

Or take the Sabbath as a typical case. To keep the Lord's Sabbath is very inconvenient for our business, and we perhaps stumble over that cross a long time. But there it is plainly before us:

Exodus 20

¹⁰ The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.

If we do not keep the Sabbath, we are afraid we shall be lost. So in order to save ourselves from destruction, we agree to keep the Sabbath. It is a weekly cross, and we are always thinking of the inconvenience and hardship. Surely it must be we shall get credit for that because it is so hard to do.

Not so; when we take it that way it is our own cross, with Christ left out; and there is no salvation except in the cross of Christ.

With a thousand other things it is the same. We mourn over them, and it is only by will power that we force ourselves up to the rack,



and take the bitter medicine, consoling ourselves with the thought that by and by all this will be ended. We shall not have such hard times when we get into the kingdom.

Possibly we put this rather strongly and yet this is the idea of the Christian life with a great many people who profess to be Christians.

We sing of the “resting by and by,” and of joys to come, giving the world the idea that there is no joy in the present. The idea held so commonly is that the harder the cross is, the more joy there will be when it is done with.

Pagan and Papal Penance

That is not Christianity at all. It is heathenism. How much more Christianity is there in that than in the case of the man who puts pebbles into his boots and goes on a pilgrimage, so that the worse he can make himself feel now, the better he will feel when his journey is ended? The only difference is in the sort of penance we endure. We take this duty and that as scourges with which to afflict ourselves, thinking we are working out everlasting joy for ourselves by and by.

We have all done more or less of this. It is human nature. That is the devil’s way of deceiving people. He does not care how many crosses we endure. In fact, he must thoroughly enjoy seeing people groaning over their religion, and having a hard time of it generally.

Now all these things we have been laboring over may be things that God requires us to do. He doesn’t require us to scourge ourselves with whips, or to go on pilgrimages on our knees; but the only difference between ourselves, when we have made burdens of our duties, and the man who has scourged himself or worn a hair shirt, is that we make our penances out of those things which God requires, and he makes his out of those things which the Lord has not required. Yet we have thought we were better than he!

Opposition to Christ

Both classes are trying to put up a cross that would take the place of the cross of Christ. People ask the Lord to accept their offering for sin. Every cross men bear in that way is hard. If that were all that is in the cross, those crosses ought to have served the purpose; for they were bitter and cruel enough.

Then there must be something else in the cross besides hardness. Popularly the idea is that anything that is a discomfort, that a person doesn't like to do, is a cross, and some men perform their duties as the Catholic wears his hair shirts, to make themselves uncomfortable all the time.

It makes no difference how much people talk about the Lord; how much they say they believe in Christ; how much they call themselves Christians; the setting up of a cross aside from the cross of Christ, is opposition to Christ. Although there is much about Christ and much about crosses, in Roman Catholicism, we know that in the system itself there is none of Christ.

Of course many individual Catholics have Christ, and many more would gladly know of Him; but, as a system, with its penances put upon the people, we know that Catholicism tends to eclipse and shut out the cross of Christ; so that each individual is virtually to have his own cross, and atone for his own sins. In many cases the individual is deluded with the idea that what he is enduring is the cross of Christ, and that is worse yet.

Now thousands of professed Protestants are doing what amounts to the same thing, and yet all the time they are preaching and talking against the papacy. These crosses, men have thought, were going to bring them nearer the Lord. The idea has been, "No cross no crown;" the more we suffer, the more we shall enjoy by and by. This is the time of suffering; by and by we shall have the time of enjoyment. So we will en-

dure it. Certainly, we thought, these crosses will bring us nearer to God.

But as a matter of fact, try as hard as we could, even at things that were right in themselves, we couldn't get nearer to the Lord than before. We were always wanting to get nearer, and yet finding ourselves afar off.

Then we did not have Christ in the cross, although we persuaded ourselves that we were believing in Christ and bearing His cross. For if we had Christ in the crosses that we bore, we should have been brought near to God. The trouble was that we had a cross in the place of the cross of Christ,—a substitute for it.

Self in Place of Christ

Who was on that cross?—Self. The power of the cross of Christ is the power of His life, the power of an endless life. The power in our crosses was only the power of our own life, which is nothing, and could not bring us nearer to God.

We were crucifying ourselves on our own crosses; and as we thought that those crosses were the cross of Christ, we were putting ourselves in the place of Christ. We were very Antichrist ourselves! And all the time we were doing that, we were throwing stones at the Pope. Christ said those who were without sin might throw stones; and whoever indulges in stone-throwing, thereby tacitly proclaims himself to be sinless.

And those who do as described above are claiming that very thing; because the cross is a sacrifice for sin, and atonement for it, and they are “bearing the cross.”

“Didn't we do this duty? Didn't we perform that uncomfortable service? Didn't we deny ourselves?”

And thus by all these crosses, had we not, in our own minds, freed ourselves from sin, so that we could throw

stones at other people?

Again we put the case rather strongly, perhaps, and yet we are assured that we are giving the experience of the natural heart. Many who have found Christ indeed testify to these old experiences, and there are many who are living through these experiences now, and are finding the way hard and wearisome and deceitful.

Only One Cross

There is only one actual cross in the world, and that is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16

²⁴ If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

We have often thought we were denying self, when we were only building self up; we were putting ourselves in the place of Christ. Our talk of self-denial was but Pharisaism.

People are apt to get a wrong idea of what a Pharisee was. The word "Pharisee" denoted one who was "separated". They were the separated ones, zealous for the law, and for God, as they supposed. They were not bad as people saw them. The observer might find nothing crooked in the outward life of Saul, the Pharisees; before men he was blameless.

But when he came to himself he saw that he was all sin. There is no writer who states the depravity of human nature so vividly as the Apostle Paul. While it was all written by inspiration, he wrote what he had experienced. When he told of the wonderful grace of God, he told exactly of that grace that had been revealed to him, as chief of sinners; for the man who sins and calls it righteousness, is of all sinners the chief.

Knowing Christ

The question for everyone is,

"Do you know that Christ lives in you? Are you joined to

Him?”

There are many who are workers for Him professedly, who dare not say that Christ lives in them; they do not know that Christ is one with them. When we were bearing crosses after the manner we have described, we could not say, “Christ lives in me.”

So we were separated from Him, and thus separated from His cross. It was self in the place of Christ, “a form of godliness but denying the power thereof,” for the power of godliness is the cross of Christ. We denied the cross of Christ, and so denied the power of the gospel.

We are not crucified with Christ except we are one with Him in the crucifixion. He must be identified with us in the cross; for it is His. There is no crucifixion of the man that amounts to anything unless he is crucified with Christ. Crucified together with Him, there is virtue to us, because we get the virtue that is in Christ.

That virtue is freedom, separation from sin, and redemption, life, joy, peace. So it is not so difficult a thing to bear the cross when we are crucified with Christ. He is with us and in us. Now it is Christ enduring the cross, and to us there is joy in the Lord in it. Christ has made peace for us through the blood of His cross.

Christ was crucified for sin. There was no cross except for sin. He bore our sins. There is wonderful joy that comes to us in this, that while we are yet in sin we are permitted to claim Christ as ours, and to say,

Galatians 2

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

If we could not assert this with all assurance while yet sin-

ners, we never could assert it. But while in sin we may claim Christ as ours, and that He is in us. We know it because the Holy Ghost says that it is so. To the man who believes the Lord and dares assert it, it is everlasting strength.

Ephesians 2

⁴ God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith He loved us,

⁵ Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ.

We could not be quickened or made alive together, unless dead together. So Christ identifies Himself with us in death, even the death in trespasses and sins, and it is He who bears the burden in His own body on the cross; and while we are crucified with Him we also live with Him, delivered from sin.

Saved by the Life

Christ is the present Saviour of all men. He is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” John says,

1 John 2

¹ If any man sin, we have an Advocate [or Comforter] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

² And He is the propitiation [sacrifice] for our sins.

Romans 3

²⁵Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation [sacrifice] through faith in His blood.

His blood is now shed for us; He is now lifted up for us. The knowledge that the cross is set up in every heart, that He is crucified for us, makes a delight of the crosses which come to us, all the burdens to be born, all the habits to be given up, which are as taking our life, because they are our life.

The knowledge that now Christ is crucified for us, that now are we crucified with Him, not in fancy but in fact, makes the presence of the cross a joy to us, for there we find Christ, and are brought into fellowship with His death, and

live with Him. Being reconciled by His blood, we know we shall be saved by His life.

To take up the cross is to take Him. To deny self is to own Him. To crucify self indeed is to take His life, and the life we live with Him is not one of hardness and discomfort, and the performance of disagreeable duties for the sake of joy by and by, but it is the constant springing up of life and joy; so that with joy, and not groaning, we draw water from the wells of salvation.

It makes all the difference when we have His cross.

Isaiah 51

¹¹ Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head.