

# The Cross and the Wisdom

The cross of Christ is entirely God's wisdom. By men's words it can appear to be void of His wisdom. Such a position begins to occur when the cross is given the least aspect of being ornate, or is regarded as a burden to be borne. Moreover, any teaching is to be suspect which tends to indicate the slightest degree of deficiency as to the completeness of that which God achieved thereby in the salvation of His creation.

If our words suggest the need for any additional extra element, they are, in effect making void the wisdom of the cross. In the apostle's context of the cross of Christ, even a commission to baptise would be a matter likely to diminish the full effectiveness of the cross, for it would suggest a lack in God's wisdom. Such is the wisdom resident in the cross that God is able to achieve the elimination of every feature of the old creation. The cross ever speaks of condemnation and curse. Therein lies its wisdom.

Paul heralded Jesus Christ, that One Whose faith took Him to the death of the cross. Upon that faith rests God's just verdict concerning those who are believing. They are justified through Jesus Christ's faith. Their deeds, as sinners, have become God's righteousness. Here is the position of the first and opening statement concerning justification. Justified in His blood is an elaboration of His faith. It accepts the implications to which His faith led. It shows the faith of Jesus definitely applied to the believer. But the basic statement of justification is in regard to Jesus Christ's faith. It was because of our offences that He was given up. Thus did grace conciliate offenses. But, because of our justifying, He was roused.

It is most desirable that we learn to discriminate these and other distinctions as to how God deals with the varying aspects involved in our salvation. Around the cross lies God's wisdom, whereas justification is a matter related to purpose, to power and to the righteousness of God. Christ crucified starts the reference to God's wisdom.

In the cross is that wisdom of God which is able to deal with sin in regard to that aspect which puts the human in a condition of estrangement from God. What remains to us, due to our relationship to humanity, every problem which the eons have produced around the sinner, these the cross settles, and removes to God's glory. The law, and the disposition of sin's flesh, these are dealt with in the wisdom of the cross. In a word, anything and everything which could arbitrate against the just verdict of God, this is dealt with in the cross. The salvation which God is bestowing upon His creatures, it really makes us for His glory, and the wisdom to such an end is in the cross.

These matters the word of the cross emphasises and explains, and it indicates, in the fullest sense, that God centres His wisdom in the cross of Christ. It is a wisdom, which, though nullifying by means of condemnation, yet it achieves that condition which is salvation. Such a wisdom repudiates every scribe and discussor of this eon, and overrides all the requests and seekings of men for the credentials of its wisdom. The statement of its wisdom must be believed. It cannot be deduced. In the cross of Christ is a wisdom which disgraces the wise and the strong. They can achieve nothing which contributes the least item to salvation.

God's wisdom only becomes apparent to those who become aware that, in their flesh, they do not possess any ability for salvation. Also, that they cannot produce any efficiency in the flesh to that end. At once do we see that those who have thus realised God's wisdom, they do not pretend to achieve the least detail toward their salvation. They know that, in themselves, the effect of God's wisdom, in the cross, is operative. They were crucified together with Christ. In this fact God's wisdom is applied to them, for gone is their old humanity, left on the cross. God's spirit dips them into the death of Christ, and, with Him, to the tomb they go. As He was raised therefrom, so they are roused. They live and walk in newness of life. This has come to be achieved in them by God's wisdom which He placed around the cross.

It was on such a basis that the apostle went to Corinth. Knowing their boasts in men, both as to religion and philosophy, Paul's testimony concerning God was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This is not Jesus Christ the Ideal Man, an example to be followed, encouraged and cultivated. Nor is it Him as He walked and heralded the kingdom of God in Galilee and Judah. That One humanity crucified as an undesirable in the world. Humanity was through with Him, whether they were Jew or Greek.

In Him was God's wisdom, and humanity, by their treatment of Him, united God's wisdom to the cross. This they did in accord with God's wisdom, but not because they approved of the wisdom. On the cross the old humanity, with all its ability and disability, was crucified. That is how God effectually removed all the problems of sin, as well as the estrangement of His creation from Himself. His wisdom has united His love and His righteousness, delivering His creation. Thus will His creation come to have the holiness corresponding to and responding to His holiness.

The Corinthian epistle moves on to regard those who rule and control the nations, ostensibly to promote the good of the populace. In them we meet a very contradictory situation, for, amidst their ruling and policy, Paul went among them saying that God's wisdom lay around Jesus Christ crucified. In affirming this, he also said that God's wisdom did not arise out of this eon, and that, in His wisdom, God arranged this to be so. God's wisdom decided that the world by its wisdom could not know Him. In this way the apostle at once gives proof of his statement that God's wisdom was not out of this eon. In fact, the chief men of this eon would not crucify the Lord of Glory, if they had known God's secret.

Though the nations unwittingly executed what God planned, they formulated no such value as that which Paul, on God's behalf, heralded concerning Christ crucified. Moreover, had the chief men known, they would, in their wisdom, have avoided any part in the matter. They would have rejected it as an impossible procedure, incapable of good, for in the cross, not only did they not approve of Him, but they on their part, condemned Him.

The chief men, in their regulating of society, used their ruling status so as to rid it of an undesirable element among the people ! To them the cross was an aid in this regard. In crucifying the Lord of Glory, the position was afforded whereby God, by His concealed wisdom, transformed Israel's apostasy into an occasion for blessing directly to the nations. Israel does not channel this wisdom of the cross. It is a matter entirely apart from their administration.

The character of the office of rulers should prohibit that which is wrong or evil. The civil ruler, Pilate, for His part, did not agree that there was any case against the Lord of Glory. Yet the superscription which he placed over the cross gave the appearance that He was condemned because He, by His claims, opposed Caesar. It was really Pilate's indecision which allowed the charge of blasphemy, preferred by the chief priests. The crowd took its lead from the religious leaders, and added the intimidation which swayed the civil ruler, and so upheld the chief priests. The chief men, both of Israel and the nations, in their ignorance, effect the wisdom of Him Who was able to lead them to carry out His intentions ! How loudly this speaks when ears are attuned. Does it not also warn all who would embellish God's wisdom by making additions from those sections of the Scriptures which cannot give the cross that full value which God's evangel heralds for it ?

That there was concealed wisdom in regard to the cross of Christ receives emphasis when we recall that God, on many occasions, announced through the mouth of all the prophets the sufferings of His Christ. These sufferings He fulfils. This is the detail affirmed by Peter (see Acts 2:23 and 3:18). What of the glory that was to follow ? That was not at all concealed. Some obvious references to the sufferings of Christ are in Psalm 22, Isaiah 50:6, 53:3-5 and Daniel 9:26. Of course there are many others, but these above affirm death, whilst others speak of humiliation.

In his first epistle, Peter gives the outlook of the prophets concerning Israel's salvation, of which they prophesied (1:10 and 11). They searched into the sufferings and the glories of Christ to follow. Our Lord referred to the fact that many prophets and just men had yearned to perceive and observe and hear what He spake in the parables, (Matthew 13:17). Therein He was hiding from Israel, whilst at the same time revealing for those who had ears to hear. His ministry had come to that point when he hid the issue concerning Himself. It was not the simple issue of the rejection of a prophet whose message was false, nor of a prophet whose message they did not relish. Here was One Who knew what lay ahead, both for Himself and for the glory of His Father. Christ is described as the "given up" One (Acts 2:23). He was this in regard to the specific counsel and foreknowledge of God. Nevertheless, the people, and the rulers, and the circumstances, choose the method — gibbeting and assassinating. There was no wisdom in their action, and their hands were lawless.

The Scriptures do not express a supposition when they say that had they known God's wisdom around this

One, that is, what He was proposing to accomplish by Jesus Christ through the crucifixion, they would not crucify the Lord of Glory (1 Corinthians 2:6-8). But they did not know the mind of the Lord, and they certainly could not deduce it. Nor had they the wisdom to know how to save themselves. By this, the Scriptures show how thoroughly distinct is the wisdom of this eon from the wisdom which is of God. Ere the chief men could enter into such transaction, they would have to admit that their position before God was such as the evangel affirmed of them. It was they who needed to be crucified ! That was the crucial point, and this would be the basis of their refusal, for they did not accept such an estimate of themselves.

At a point when His ministry was much developed, the Lord explained to His disciples that He was to be crucified, and to be roused the third day. He did this privately, but they did not understand. To the throng (John 12:32-33), He spoke of being lifted up to signify by what death He should die. This, too, was late in His ministry. In the talk to Nicodemus, the Lord also spoke of being exalted as Moses exalts the serpent. The priests were reminded that this deceiver had said that He was to be roused the third day. Thus, when the facts of His death and resurrection were told, they still saw no wisdom or value in it, yet they requested Pilate to seal the stone of the tomb ! Nor subsequently, when He is roused, would they believe in order that the glories should follow His sufferings.

Significant it is that, in announcing the sufferings of Christ, God never stated the means of His death. This occurred during a time when death was by stoning. We see this when we think of the death of Stephen, for that was executed in true Jewish style. By their law the false prophet was to die (Deuteronomy 18:20), and stoning was the means. We note here that the words, "cross" and "crucify," are not words of the Hebrew Scriptures. To render these matters of the Greek Scriptures into Hebrew, the Aramaic word "tzlb" is borrowed ! Yet God designated this concealed wisdom before the eons for our glory, and the language of His people agreed with the concealing !

Such was God's wisdom that He was able to proceed with a ministry which is eminently concerned with His secrets. What God had concealed, His wisdom was able to achieve, in an eon where the chief men afforded no sympathy or understanding and were distinctly opposed to His wisdom. Thus God leads forward to that which the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard (1 Corinthians 2:9). Paul in his ministry, gave full evidence of God's wisdom in the cross, and, at the same time, when Paul spoke thus, his ministry presaged that completing glory related to the cross, which is recorded in Paul's later epistles. Even contemporary to the writing to the Corinthians, Paul spoke to the mature, that is, those who realised what Christ crucified signified to them: he spoke more deeply as to what was involved in God's concealed wisdom, and so matters from the depths of God were revealed.

The spirit of the world does not perceive what God is graciously giving, yet God's wisdom does justify itself. It brings out its treasures of knowledge, and those who are spiritual become aware of them, realising that in the cross, and before the eons, God's wisdom did designate glory for them. He Who was the Lord of Glory believed the cross was related to God's wisdom. His faith should be sufficient for us. His God and Father honoured the faith of His Son, for He roused Him from among the dead. That act on the part of God was the crowning demonstration of His wisdom, as it was also of His power to save others and glorify His creation and Himself.

The human association of the cross are shame and condemnation. God's Son despised these, and His obedience to His Father took Him far beyond them. HE WAS WISDOM FROM GOD FOR US. He is this besides righteous and holiness and deliverance. It is the wisdom of the cross which brings us to the new creation. This is the teaching of the cross. This is what God achieves by it.

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