

The Offence of the Cross.

“And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.”—*Gal. v. 11.*

THE Church in Galatia was—as is well known to all students of this epistle—infested with a set of false teachers. Men who, jealous of the influence of St. Paul, sought to undermine his authority by throwing doubt upon the validity of his apostleship. And who at the same time endeavoured—and with a considerable amount of success—to introduce a judaising element into the doctrine of the church. Teaching that circumcision was still necessary. And of course with circumcision the keeping of the Jewish law.

His personal authority, St. Paul defends in the first two chapters of this epistle, while chapters three and four contain his defence of the doctrine of free grace, as opposed to salvation by the works of the law. With this chapter—or according to Alford—with the thirteenth verse of it, begins the more hortatory portion of the epistle. And before proceeding with it the Apostle seems to pause for the purpose of meeting an argument used by his opponents to the effect that he himself had preached circumcision, and was in reality in favor of it. And no doubt they would try to make capital out of the fact that he had circumcised Timothy. But without going into an elaborate argument upon the subject and giving his reasons for so doing: Paul simply turns upon them and asks them why—this being the case—they continue to oppose him. If we are agreed upon this point, and all preach the same doctrine, why do ye not, instead of opposing me, give me the right hand of fellowship? “If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.” His object being to show that the very fact of their continuing to persecute him was proof that he did *not* preach circumcision.

And this brings us to the subject of this sermon: *the offence of the cross.*

“We preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling block”; says St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians. Where the word translated stumbling block is the same as here translated offence, and is the word from which comes our word *scandal*.