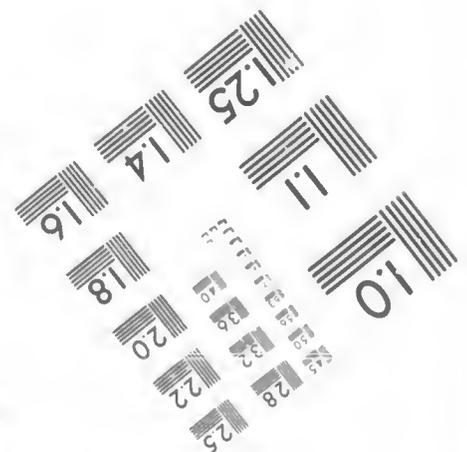
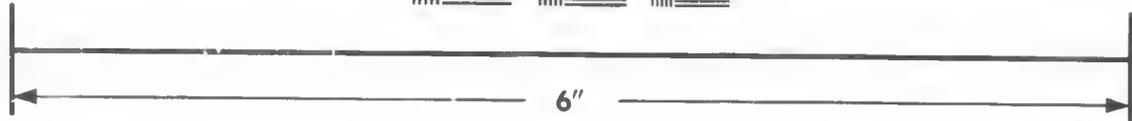
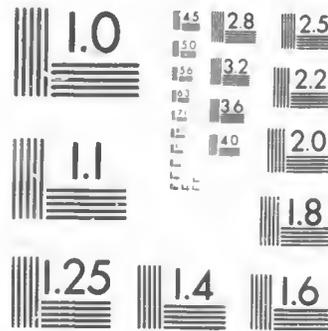


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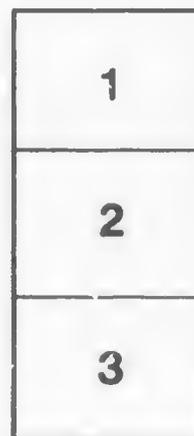
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To the Rev. Mr. Lamb
with much esteem
from
A. Stone

IT IS believed that in the following discourse certain Christian truths of essential importance—much overlooked and misunderstood in these parts—are stated with clearness and great plainness. This consideration, together with others which do not here require to be specified, led to its publication.

LANGLEY, B. C., August 2nd, 1878.



I. COR., 1st CHAP., 18th VERSE.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

The positions taken up by the opponents of the Christian faith have often been widely apart. Some have represented it as a pernicious and intolerable system of priestcraft, supported at enormous expense, and calculated to fetter the intellect and to retard the progress of scientific research and sound philosophy. Often ignorant of its true character, sometimes ignorant even of its leading features, and carried away in the pride of reason by plausible but one-sided theories, they have called upon their fellow men to meet its lofty demands with steady, uncompromising resistance. Others imbued with a wilder and more intolerant spirit, deeming the subject unworthy of debate, or even of serious consideration, have zealously advocated the utter suppression of the whole system by force of arms. Perhaps a more numerous and more dangerous class of opponents are they who assume the attitude of indifference. I refer to those who profess to look upon the religion of Jesus merely as a harmless superstition. The various religious systems devised by men, as well as that which we believe to be divine in its origin, they class together in the same category. They regard all as the varied creations of credulous and superstitious minds, differing from one another only in degrees of absurdity, but all alike destined to disappear at the approach of enlightened reason. Even those who are Christians by profession, who in a general sort of way give their assent to the religion of Jesus, are often found sceptical in

matters of detail. And this scepticism very frequently has reference to the doctrines of the cross. When it is affirmed that men are either saved or not saved ; that men destitute of faith in Christ, however lovable and amiable they may be by nature, are doomed to destruction ; that unless men repent and be converted they will perish : when these doctrines of the cross are proclaimed and applied, such persons tell us, if not directly at least indirectly, that upon those matters they have their doubts. It seems to be taken for granted by them that the Scriptures do not speak very clearly or very explicitly on these points ; and that there is, therefore, room for difference of opinion.

I appeal to those amongst you who are accustomed to think on such matters if there is not a belief, common enough amongst those who are not prepared to deny the doctrines of the cross, and who do not feel inclined to do so, that this endless preaching about faith, conversion, salvation without works, is just a species of foolishness. Yes, the preaching of the cross is still, in the estimation of thousands, foolishness, sheer folly.

Why should the doctrines of the cross appear to be foolishness ? I do not intend to enlarge on this division of my text, and, therefore, I shall endeavor to answer the question very briefly. To an idolator, who had no idea of receiving gratuitous favors from the gods he worshipped, who, when he asked benefits, felt himself placed under obligation to render service in some form or other in return, the proclamation of free pardon, the unchanging love of God, endless life in bliss, solely for the sake of the Divine Saviour, would, we can easily see, appear to be incredible, absurd, foolishness. This idea of rendering service, or as it is now more frequently called, performing good works, in return for the blessings of salvation, or as the price of them, still

haunts the minds of people. When the offers of a free and full salvation are pressed upon their acceptance, they often incredulously exclaim, "Heaven on such terms? Impossible, incredible—to say so is foolishness."

Another reason why the doctrines of the cross come to be discredited is, some who profess to believe them, to have been converted, to be saved, lead openly immoral or grossly inconsistent lives. The conclusion often drawn from witnessing such cases—a conclusion as illogical as unscriptural—is that conversion is nothing more than a name, and that those who declare themselves to have been the subjects of it labor under a delusion. Of course the legitimate inference would be that those habitually inconsistent in their lives have not been converted at all; and that, if they say so, they, if not attempting to deceive others, are assuredly deceiving themselves.

The preaching of the cross—that Jesus died on the cross for sinners, and that any sinner that will may have Him for a Saviour—although foolishness in the estimation of the unsaved, is nevertheless the power of God. While the vast multitudes, who embraced the Christian religion during the first centuries of the Christian era, furnish a strong evidence of its divine origin, they also afford a striking illustration of the doctrine contained in the text—"the preaching of the cross the power of God."

Of the success which has attended the preaching of the gospel during the apostolic age we are assured by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. The sermon Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, resulted in the conversion of three thousand souls. In the fourth chapter of Acts we find that opposition began to be offered to the preaching of the Apostles by the priests, by the captain of the temple, and by the Sadducees. We subsequently read that in every city to which the Apostles went they were insulted and abused. Yet notwithstanding

these adverse external influences, God gave testimony to the word of His grace, and multitudes of both men and women were added to the Church.

Towards the close of the First Century, the pro-consul of Bythinia (Pliny), in his famous letter to the Roman Emperor (Trajan), complains that "many of every age and rank were becoming Christians; that in cities and villages as well as in the open country the temples were deserted and the customary sacrifices neglected." Two Christian fathers of the Second Century, in papers addressed to the Roman Emperor, mention with triumph the multitude of Christians. Both Christian and heathen writers attest the diffusion of Christianity in the Third Century. And in the Fourth Century, the number of Christians had so increased that the Emperor, probably from policy, publicly professed to be a believer in the principles of Christianity.

The mere fact, however, that multitudes renounced one religious system and embraced another, does not prove much. In every age and in every country there are always multitudes ready to abjure old opinions and embrace new ones irrespective of their character. Gamaliel, in his memorable counsel to the Sanhedrim, mentions one Theudas, who rose up "boasting himself to be somebody," to whom about four hundred joined themselves. Also, one Judas, a Galilean, who also "drew away much people after him." Just as if he had said, "You know the character of Theudas and Judas, and you know also the nature of their teaching, and yet, strange to say, these men enjoyed for a while considerable popularity."

Only let the promoters of new opinions be possessed of a large measure of conceit; let them also possess courage and self-possession, and ability to advocate their views with fluency; and let the adoption of their principles involve no pecuniary or temporal disadvan-

tage, then, however ridiculous or even unintelligible their opinions may be in the judgment of thinking men, from amongst the unthinking multitude they will always command a following. "Some to the fascination of a name surrender judgment hoodwinked."

Mere success is no test of truth. It is when the success of any religion cannot be accounted for by human causes that we are entitled to have recourse to divine interposition.

Now the rapid propagation of the religion of Jesus cannot be accounted for by human causes. Its first apostles, moving for the most part in the humbler spheres of life, possessed neither learning nor eloquence. This their hearers declared. Yet it is said that the people could not resist the power with which they spoke. The greatest of all the apostles, in certain respects, was the apostle Paul. And he informs us that the people of Corinth, in passing their opinions respecting his personal appearance and preaching ability, said that "his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible." He tells us in the same letter that he came "not with excellency of speech;" that he preached "not with enticing words of man's wisdom;" that he was with them "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." Yet notwithstanding these drawbacks, his language in the second epistle to the Corinthians is, "Thanks be unto God who always causeth us to triumph in every place and maketh known the savour of His grace by us in every place."

And here it is worthy of mention that there were no temporal advantages in the days of which we speak to induce men to become Christians. Converts from heathenism to Christianity gained nothing, humanly speaking, by the change. Those who cast in their lot with the struggling, despised followers of Jesus, were aware that in doing so they exposed themselves to great inconvenience and hardship. They

knew beforehand that they might be called upon to sever the ties of blood and relationship, forsake father and mother, sister and brother, for the sake of the truth ; that they might be called on even to yield up life itself for Jesus sake. And in thousands of cases the life was demanded and willingly and cheerfully given. Yet, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, insurmountable barriers to the progress of Christianity by all human rules of judgment, the religion of Jesus flourished and extended itself till, in the Fourth Century, it became the religion of the empire. Truly the preaching of the cross—foolishness as it may appear to be in the case of those who do not understand it—is the power of God.

The preaching of the cross, the power of God, is further illustrated by the holy lives of its early converts. Holiness was characteristic of them. (Holiness is still characteristic of Christians, but in these days it is difficult, often impossible, to distinguish between Christians and mere professors.) Their beliefs seemed to their enemies an absurd superstition ; but their pure lives, their unselfishness, their readiness to forgive injuries, their patient endurance of insults, struck them with amazement. Their conduct seemed as strange as it was unaccountable. Of course we know the love of Christ constrained them to act thus. The preaching of the cross was to them the power of God.

Yes, my friends, the old story of the cross has wondrous power in it. Wherever it is proclaimed in its purity and beautiful simplicity, it produces an effect. In the course of centuries it has lost nothing of its ancient energy. It still goes forth conquering and to conquer. It proceeds in its onward march with undiminished force, ever achieving fresh triumphs, bringing savage and civilized, learned and unlearned, under its benign sway. Men

of the most powerful and gifted intellect have cordially testified to its all-conquering might, and even the most sceptical of sceptics dare not ignore its existence as a mighty, if mysterious, agency in the moral reformation of mankind. The story of the vicarious sufferings and death of Jesus meets the wants, the cravings and aspirations of humanity. Its suitability as a remedy for the terrible disease of sin is recognized and felt. It inspires with hope the man who had abandoned hope. It brings joy to the heart of him who despaired of ever obtaining joy in this vale of tears. It brings relief to the most desperate cases. It has effected that which all other means and appliances have attempted in vain. It alone truly reforms, effectually regenerates men.

Human laws, however stringent, and however rigorously enforced, will not change human nature. They are essential to the existence of human society. They are essential to the existence of human society. They awe the man inclined to rebel. They serve to restrain the more violent passions of men. But they leave men the more unchanged. The lion is still the lion though at heart unchanged. Only let the minds of rebellious spirits be in chains. Only let the minds of rebellious spirits be divested of the fear of consequences, and irregularities and disorders surpassing description will certainly follow. Only let the barriers which confine the flood be removed, and forth the torrent rushes with resistless impetuosity bearing ruin and devastation all around.

Intellectual culture will not regenerate men. Educate the masses, says one school, and virtuous and provident habits will be the necessary consequence. "University towns," says a modern authority, "are the hot-beds of vice." The Augustan Age, the most enlightened period of Roman history, according to all the pictures which have been drawn of it, exceeded the usual measure of corruption. Mental training, it is admitted, tends to elevate the character. It tends

to withdraw the mind from things base, ignoble and vicious. But while this is true, and while it may and generally does produce an external refinement of manners, it does not change the heart. Along side of lofty genius, brilliant accomplishments, and manners of courtly polish, vices rank and gross often grow in luxuriant profusion—licentiousness, drunkenness, lying, deceit, indifference to the good of others. Men of commanding intellect and superior mental endowments have not unfrequently been a disgrace to humanity. But what mere learning has failed to effect, the preaching of the cross has triumphantly accomplished.

How it is or why it is that it does so, I cannot fully explain. Why the loadstone attracts iron, why the needle points to the pole, I cannot explain. But that the loadstone does attract iron, and that the needle does point to the pole, cannot be questioned. And that the preaching of the cross does attract, does regenerate men, cannot be doubted. From the Saviour on the cross a healing virtue flows which cures the most malignant evils, the most inveterate distempers. Natures hardened, selfish and grasping, have, under the genial life-giving rays which stream from the cross, been softened—have become generous and sympathetic. Natures degraded and sunken have, under its all-potent influence, been raised to newness of life—have become new CREATURES (or new CREATIONS, as the word in the original signifies) in Christ Jesus. “Old things have passed away and all things have become new.”

In the gospel, Simon says, “We have toiled all night and have taken nothing. Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when he had done so he enclosed a great multitude of fishes.” So multitudes in their ignorance of the power of the cross, or who in their perverseness refuse to believe in its efficacy to ease a guilty conscience, to heal a broken heart, to subdue a

rebellious will, toil on, struggle on from year to year, but make no headway. The same failures, the same shortcomings, characterise their lives. But when they look in faith to the suffering Saviour on the cross, in obedience to His command, all is changed. The burden of sin falls off. New life is imparted to them. A new spirit possesses them. Sin loses its power. Joy fills the heart, and the peace of God which passes all understanding keeps their hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.

And here who desire to be reinstated in the favour of God ' To you let me say, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Waste no more time in attempting to attain your object by any other method. "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Jesus Christ the Son." I have read somewhere of a Christian who, when in an anxious state about his salvation, dreamed that he was in a very deep pit. He could find no way of getting out, although he struggled hard and long. But, just when he had abandoned hope, his eye caught a star in the heavens, which, when he gazed upon, drew him out of the pit. Whenever, however, he looked aside, he descended again. Perceiving this, he kept his eye fixed upon it till he was securely placed on solid ground at the mouth of the pit. Jesus Christ is called in Revelation "the bright and morning star." Benighted sinner, behold Him! and the darkness and terror of unbelief will disappear, and a new morn of joy and peace will dawn upon your soul.

Christians, continue to look to the cross for sanctification. The power which emanates from the cross is exercised only while we gaze upon it, while we remain in its light. How many forget this. Hence many make little progress in the divine life. Many appear to remain stationary. They look aside to other objects—to men, to books. They trust in prayers and religious services for holiness. When they do this, their peace de-

parts ; their terrors return. Any of you in this state ? Look again to Christ who spoke peace to you at first. Trust in His atoning death. Confide in His boundless love and mercy. Contemplate His matchless beauty and excellence. And gradually, imperceptibly, almost unconsciously you will rise above the world with its sins and sorrows.

In conclusion—does the love of Christ, as discovered in His awful and mysterious death on the cross, exert any power over you ? Many are quite uninfluenced by it. Many substantially say, “The preaching of the cross tames the savage nature, subdues the most turbulent passions, transforms and beautifies the blackest characters. We admit all that, and we glory in being the professors of a religion which has done more than any other, than all others put together, for the true happiness and civilization of the human race.” (For it is a matter of fact that the three hundred and sixty-five millions of Christians are not the savage and uncivilized nations of the earth, but the nations which possess the power, the commerce, and the literature of the world). So far well—but what has the cross done for you personally ? Has it discovered to you your guilt and led you to cry for mercy ? Inclined by nature to run into all kinds of excess, do you find it restraining you ? In your leisure moments do you turn to the old story of redeeming love as to an ever new, ever congenial theme ? Can you sit with pleasure at the feet of Jesus, as did Mary, contemplating the glory of the God-man, seeking to obtain clearer views of his unspeakable love ?

Be true to yourselves. Leave not the investigation till you know how matters stand between God and your souls.

