

The Conflict at the Cross

As we prepare for Resurrection Sunday next week, we are going to focus on the cross of our Savior. For some, a cross is a piece of jewelry. For others, a cross in the church has sacred power. For the believer, the cross has a powerful message. For everyone, the cross represents a challenge that brings us into conflict with our human nature.

1. The cross *itself* is *filled* with conflict -

It is the place of love and also of judgment. Rom 5:8 But God commendeth His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

It is the place of grace and also fulfills the demands of the law.

It is the place of salvation, and also reminds us of our sins.

It is the place where mankind was at his worst and also where God's best for man was fulfilled for us.

2. The cross causes conflict *between* people -

Years ago, a large statue of Christ was erected high in the Andes on the border between Argentina and Chile. Called "Christ of the Andes," the statue symbolizes a pledge between the two countries that as long as the statue stands, there will be peace between Chile and Argentina. "Sooner shall these mountains crumble into dust than Argentines and Chileans break the peace sworn at the feet of Christ the Redeemer."

Shortly after the statue was erected, the Chileans began to protest that they had been slighted—the statue had its back turned to Chile. Just when tempers were at their highest in Chile, a Chilean newspaperman saved the day. In an editorial that not only satisfied the people but made them laugh, he simply said,

"The people of Argentina need more watching over than the Chileans.

— Bits & Pieces, June 25, 1992

Because of the cross, there is a conflict between:

- Zionists, who sometimes think that evangelism is an attempt at genocide, and born-again Christians.
- The ACLU and born-again Christians – in cases that put Christian rights in conflict with other rights brought a conflict between the ACLU and Jack Philips of the Masterpiece Cake shop because of his Christian beliefs.
- Liberals and Evangelicals and Fundamentalists – liberals who treat the Bible loosely and not necessarily as God's Word are opposed to Evangelicals and Fundamentalists.

1Cor 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1Cor 1:23-24 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

24But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Gal 5:11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

1Pet 2:6-8 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

3. The cross causes conflict *within* people -

"We, who preach the gospel, must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, or the world of sports, or modern entertainment. We are not diplomats, but prophets; and our message is not a compromise, but an ultimatum."
— The Biblical Evangelist, November 1, 1991, p. 11

There were a number of people at the cross representing people from a vast array from the walk of life. Each one experienced the presence of Christ at the cross and were confronted to respond in their heart to Him. There were probably many conflicts that people faced on whether to choose Christ or not. We are going to look several examples.

- The conflict over duty.

The representatives of earthly government were there. They were presented with the conflict of choosing to do their duty or to follow Christ. Over time, those before military tribunals for war crimes have found that "just obeying orders" was no defense. There are specifically two who were faced with the conflict of duty vs. submission to Christ.

Pilate was there, a conflicted and tormented soul over the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God.

Matt 27:19 When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just

man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

Matt 27:22-26 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? *They* all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

23And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

24When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but *that* rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye *to it*.

25Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children.

26Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *him* to be crucified.

Pilate tried to wash his hands of the affair, but ultimately consented to let the Jews crucify Him.

The soldiers were there, conflicted in their sense of duty and the realization of the injustice against the innocent and righteous Son of God.

Matt 27:27-31 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band *of soldiers*.

28And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

29And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

30And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

31And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on

him, and led him away to crucify *him*.

Even though they were probably calloused by fighting and other crucifixions, nevertheless we see that by the end of the crucifixion they had second thoughts.

Matt 27:54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Government leaders are still conflicted today over the cross. San Diego, for example, tried to find a way for 25 years to settle a dispute over the Mount Soledad Cross before they came to a resolution that only rendered the issue moot without *truly* settling it. They found a way to sell the property where the cross was set up to a monument group which kept the court from having to deal with the people who wanted to keep it and those who wanted it torn down.

- The conflict over social pressure.

The representatives of organized religion were there. Moving from the secular sphere to the sacred, there were religious leaders who were conflicted about their social standing. While it is true that the religious leaders joined in chorus against Christ at the cross, there were others who had wanted to follow Him but were afraid of what others might think.

John 12:42-43 Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:
43For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

At the cross, we see which side of

the conflict they fell.

Matt 27:41-43 Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said,

42He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

43He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

Matt 27:20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

John 19:12-15 And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.

13When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

14And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!

15But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

They were conflicted whether to go with the established social order or stay true to God, but the cross got in the way. First, before cross they could have followed. By the time of the crucifixion they turned on Him completely and committed *Him* to the *cross* rather than submit *themselves* to *Him*.

- The conflict over hope.

The representatives of social failure were there. Moving from the opposite end to the lowest end of society we find two thieves being crucified. They experienced a conflict in their soul as they faced Jesus. At first, they were both joined against Jesus. They first saw Him as probably just as judged as they were.

Matt 27:38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

Matt 27:44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

You might think that being in such dire straights, each thief would be willing to consider any possible hope. The conflict in their souls was demonstrated in that *one* turned *to* Christ while the *other* remained convicted *against* Christ. There is no automatic reaction to the worst of our circumstances. Each one of us will have to reckon with God and whether to place our hope in Him.

Luke 23:39-43 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

40But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

41And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

42And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

43And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

They had once been children, representing the high hopes of their parents. Whatever family or society presented to them they must have

resisted somewhere along the way. Society itself, today, is conflicted over the cross when it comes to such social failure. While as churches we do not seek government funding, but Christian based groups have always struggled with the government when it came to funding for outreach programs for the indigent, the addicted, and the down and out. They have been told "Christians need not apply." Day schools housed in churches could get funds, if they put a covering on the cross. Distributing Bibles in a school is taboo, but distributing them in jails is appreciated. Something is backward. We have been surprised at some of the politicians who are actually pointing out that there were less people in jail when we had prayer in the public schools. We are challenged to cover our cross rather than carry it in public. There is no question that they had to face an inner conflict when they had to decide what to do with Christ before them on the cross.

- The conflict over persecution.

Peter, the great representative of believers was there and conflicted. The government, the religious community, the hopeless, were there. Now also the ones Jesus should have been able to count on were there and conflicted. Peter demonstrated the great conflict in his soul and failed to even show up at the cross.

Matt 26:69-75 Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

70But he denied before *them* all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

71And when he was gone out into the porch, another *maid* saw him, and said unto them that were there, This *fellow* was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

72And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

73And after a while came unto *him* they that stood by, and said

to Peter, Surely thou also art *one* of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

74 Then began he to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

There are still many who fight an internal conflict over the cross.

Mark 8:38 Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

- The conflict of a broken heart.

The representatives of all the broken hearted were there. The only ones who had pity were John and Mary and the other women. They, of all people were able to deal with the conflict properly. There is nothing recorded of them reacting in a negative way. Jesus only had words of encouragement for them. While Mary suffered watching her son on the cross, there is no mention of anything that showed a rebellious spirit. The conflict of her suffering spirit with the will of God was resolved in acceptance.

John 19:25-27 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing

by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

27Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*.

They had watched Him as He had raised Lazarus from the dead. Their hopes and dreams were now hanging on three nails. All those who turn to Christ for salvation have to face the cross the same way. We may not understand why God would choose to love us and die for us. We know that He is compelled to act according to His character and being the God of love it is logical that He should have allowed His Son to go to the cross. But as we sing in *At the Cross*

Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?

Thy body slain, sweet Jesus, Thine,
And bathed in its own blood,
While all exposed to wrath divine,
The glorious Sufferer stood!

Was it for crimes that I had done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker died,
For man the creature's sin.

Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt my eyes to tears.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give my self away
'Tis all that I can do.

As the women stood there,
surrendered to the cross, we need to
surrender ourselves to the cross and

simply turn to and receive Christ.

4. Which side do *you* fall on in the conflict?

There are those who by their indifference show which side they are on.

Rev 3:15-16 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

There are those who by their rebellion show which side they are on.

1 Cor 10:2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

Rom 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Matt 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [**or wealth**].

Luke 9:23-26 And he said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

25 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?

26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be

ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and *in his* Father's, and of the holy angels.

There are those who humble themselves, turn to Christ, and submit themselves to Him.

There are no crown-wearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers here below. - Charles Haddon Spurgeon

We need men of the cross, with the message of the cross, bearing the marks of the cross. - Vance Havner

God drew a line at the cross. Which side do you fall on in the conflict of the cross?

1. The cross itself is filled with conflict -
2. The cross causes conflict between people - 1Cor 1:18, 1Cor 1:23-24, Gal 5:11, 1Pet 2:6-8,
3. The cross causes conflict within people - Matt 27:19,22-26,27-31,54, John 12:42-43, Matt 27:41-43,20, John 19:12-15, Matt 27:38,44, Luke 23:39-43, Matt 26:69-75, Mark 8:38, Rom 1:16, John 19:25-27,
4. Which side do you fall on in the conflict?