

"THE CROSS IS OFFENSIVE"

Galatians 6:11-14

Many of you have been watching since Thanksgiving the tragic story of Tiger Woods played out in every media venue possible. And while some of us waited to see if Tiger would come out from behind closed doors and admit his wrongdoing, it never happened until.... As a matter of fact, at the time I began to write this sermon on Thursday, February 18th, I got on my computer and, lo and behold, I found out that the very next day, February 19th he was going to break his silence and address the nightmare that has cast a huge shadow over him and his family. The major networks covered the event and I was told the stock market seemed to come to a screeching halt at 11:00 a.m. when Tiger stood before a selected audience. But let me take you back to Sunday, January 3, 2010 to the show, "Fox News Sunday," and to something that Fox news analyst Brit Hume said. Speaking about the scandal-plagued and Buddhist golfer, Tiger Woods, Hume's gave some personal advice saying that Tiger should, "turn to Christianity" to make a full

recovery. Brit Hume said that Woods recover, "depends on his faith." "The extent to which he can recover seems to me depends on his faith," Hume said. "He is said to be a Buddhist [which Tiger confirmed in his address on February 19th]. [Brit Hume continued] I don't think that faith offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith. My message to Tiger would be, 'Tiger, turn to the Christian faith and you can make a total recovery and be a great example to the world.'" And WOW, did the backlash begin and what appeared in newspapers were words like, "ignorant," "corrupt," "inept," and "morally bankrupt," referring to Hume. And what appeared on YouTube is too vulgar for me to say from this pulpit or any pulpit, for that matter. I knew it was going to happen but it is a puzzle to me and yet it shouldn't be.

Let me set a different scene. Person A and Person B are carrying on a conversation. They are only acquaintances, they are at a party and Person A says to Person B that she is a Buddhist. Person B is not taken back, he is

not angry or appalled by what has just been said. Person B might even ask some questions about her faith.

Now a similar scenario but in this case Person A says she is a "born-again Christian." Person B might excuse himself and move on to the refreshments or he might accuse Person A that she is trying to force her beliefs upon him and maybe even get down-right angry. And all H, E, double toothpicks breaks loose. I wonder what would have happened if instead of Brit Hume using the "C" word, Christianity, if he had suggested that Tiger should join a "Sexual Addiction Recovery Group" if there would have been such a backlash... I don't think so. Or if Brit had encouraged Tiger to seek redemption in his Buddhist faith, nothing would have been said, end of story. Interesting, Mr. Hume even noted that the Bible speaks of the violent and visceral reaction to Christianity and to Jesus Christ, Himself.

Listen to what Jesus says in John 3:17, 21-22, ""Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." Folks, there are those who HATE the light. It doesn't say they will "walk away from the light" or "avoid" or "ignore" the light but HATE the light. Jesus said in Matthew 5:11, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil falsely on my account." And Jesus said in Luke 6:22, "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man."

The cross has always been a test- it tests the one who professes to be a Christian; it tests the one who is a member of a Christian church; it tests the person who does not believe for no one can remain neutral when they

stand in the very presence of the cross. It has a way of dividing us, everyone of us. And so we do one of two things with the cross- either we find it offensive or we glory in it. Do we know where we stand- offensive or glory? And a person cannot say, "Well, it is not offensive to me, but I cannot honestly say I glory in it," for it is either one or the other. No waffling in the middle with the cross.

Let me explain further. **The non-believer**. For the non-believer the cross is offensive. Paul says in I Corinthians 1:23, "But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles." People don't like the cross, they don't want the cross and they don't want to hear anything about the blood of Christ being poured out for the forgiveness of sins- why I have even heard people in the church say they don't want to hear about this theology of blood. Why? It is offensive. And let me just put in a side note- the person who might praise it the most on the surface might, under the surface, find it terribly offensive.

How you say? Well, those who have elevated the cross to a thing of beauty- think about those who wear it for the beauty of the look and do not understand it's meaning, who wear it as jewelry, or people who philosophize it into an aesthetic object, who sentimentalize the cross maybe are the ones who experience the offence of the cross. The cross was never, ever meant to be a thing of beauty.

The point I want to make is that for the person who is not in Christ, the cross is offensive and it is only when we are "in Christ," when we are born again and therefore "in Christ" that the cross is not offensive and so we glory in the cross.

But why is it offensive? First, **there is this thing called intellectual pride**. Pride was the ultimate sin in Genesis, Adam and Eve thought they were big enough, smart enough to be like God. But prior to and at the time of Jesus there were those, who, for centuries, had preconceived notions and beliefs that the Messiah would come and raise up an army and defeat the

enemies of Israel. And, in the meantime this Messiah would make Jerusalem the greatest city the world would ever know. But then the Messiah came and at first, there were those taken by Him for He gathered large crowds of people and He seemed to be brilliant and He seemed to have power. But, over time, they became impatient with Him. Why, they tried to make Him King, take Him by force, but He fled to the hills. So here Jesus is, claiming to be Messiah and in weakness and helplessness hanging from a cross and the people are offended. I mean, what kind of a King, what kind of a Savior dies. He should be killing others not dying Himself.

Second, **it is offensive because it is morally wrong**. Why should an innocent man die? I mean, Pilate even said in Luke 23:14-15, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death."

So people say His death was morally wrong and I cannot believe in a God who would let His own Son die for others, I cannot believe in a God who would cause the death of His Son so that others could be forgiven. But those who say this don't understand **a doctrine called substitutionary atonement**. This doctrine of the church says that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God came to take away the sins of the world. And by Christ dying on the cross our sins, your sins, my sins, are transferred onto Him so that He became sin for us. And folks, to the person not "in Christ" this sounds ludicrous, this sounds crazy, this sounds unjust, unrighteous and any other "un" word you can think of. And so that person hates the cross and rejects the cross. And to the person who is not "in Christ," let's call them "not Christianly spiritual," this stuff that I am saying baffles that person and they can't understand it. And if I can't understand something I will reject it. Their position is, "if I cannot comprehend all truth, if I cannot comprehend

everything, if I cannot fully comprehend God then forget the cross because I cannot understand it.”

It was the great hymn writer and co-founder of the Methodist Church, Charles Wesley, along with his brother John, who wrote the hymn, *And Can It Be*, where it says, “And can it be that I should gain, An interest in the Savior’s blood! Died He for me who caused His pain! For me who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? ‘Tis mystery all; th’Immortal dies!” Friends, the cross is a mystery, the mystery of substitution, the mystery of the immortal, the Son of God dying. It just can’t be. And I would say it doesn’t sound possible, in human terms; it is beyond us; ah, it is divine; it is a miracle, it is out of this world; it is something we cannot understand. And the person not “in Christ” hates the cross for all the reasons just mentioned.

And third and finally, **the cross is offensive because it makes no distinction**. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man

[Jesus is speaking about Himself] came to seek out and to save the lost.”

OK, people thought, “that’s great He has come to save those people, those sinners over there, that’s just fine.” But when Jesus said that these righteous, upstanding people were also sinners, why, now that is where it all breaks down. They didn’t want to hear that they were sinners, too; they didn’t want to hear that they had failures; that they were no different than “those” people.” Jesus was saying that we are all failures, we’re equal, and that didn’t cut it. And Paul reiterated this message when he says in Romans 3:22b-23, “For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” And this made people mad and when Paul went on to say that there was no difference between the Jew and the Greek when it came to salvation; just because you were born a Jew didn’t save you; just because you were circumcised didn’t save you; just because you have the Law didn’t save you. I mean, who wants to be told you are as bad as the next person when you are feeling pretty good about yourself; when you are told you are

as helpless as the person next to you? Do you resent being told this? The person who is not "in Christ" hates it. And so for them, the cross is of no value, it is worthless.

Ah, but here is the Good News- yes there is Good News. The Christian does not find the cross offensive but the Christian glories in the cross. The Christian doesn't sit back and admire the cross and say it is marvelous; the Christian doesn't just believe the cross or accept what it stands for intellectually; no, the Christian glories in the cross.

If we are believers in Jesus Christ the question is, "Are we glorying in the cross? Are we glorying in the cross or do we say, "Well, Yes, I believe, but...." Are we glorying in the cross where we exult in the cross, where we boast in the cross? Do we say the cross is everything to me and without the cross I am nothing; the cross and what Christ did on the cross is what saved me? For this is what it means to glory in the cross; this is what it means for Paul to say I boast in the cross. And because Jesus died for me I am willing

to surrender my all to Him for, as the words of *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* declare, "Love so amazing so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Friends, if we really believe that Jesus became one like us, human and yet was God, if we really believe that the Son of God came from heaven to earth and died on a cross for me and you; if we really believe it, then guess what? We cannot believe it without glorying in it for the cross means everything to you and to me and we will respond. Oh, we will do our all for Him. Amen.

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Introduction: Sunday, January 3rd, "Fox News Sunday," and analyst Brit Hume...

John 3:17, 21-22
 Matthew 5:11
 Luke 6:22

The cross has always been a test...

The non-_____ I Corinth. 1:23

Theology of blood...

The cross was never meant to be a thing of beauty

Why is the cross offensive?

First, **there is this thing called intellectual _____**

Second, **it is offensive because it is morally _____**
Luke 23:14-15

A doctrine called _____ **atonement**

Third, **the cross is offensive because it makes no _____**
Luke 19:10; Romans 3:22b-23

The Good News...

Conclusion: We cannot believe it without glorying in the cross, for when we believe, the cross means everything to us, and we respond.

