

'Enemies Of The Cross Of Christ'

Don Fortner | Added: Apr 15, 2026 | Category: Theology

A faithful pastor has many responsibilities. As I stand before eternity-bound sinners to preach the gospel of Christ week after week there are several things which I must do. If I would be faithful to the Lord my God who has called me, faithful to the Holy Scriptures, faithful to the souls of men and faithful to my own conscience, I must give myself wholeheartedly to these things. I must seek God's message for the hour; I must boldly deliver that message, considering neither men's approval or their disapproval of it.

The faithful servant of God must preach the gospel with simplicity and clarity. He must instruct the people of God in doctrinal truth. Christ's sheep must be fed with knowledge and understanding. Sometimes God's servant must deliver a message of reproof and rebuke for the discipline of God's family. The discipline of the church is to be done in the pulpit.

God's servants must endeavour to comfort and encourage the people of God in the faith of the gospel. At times the people of God must be challenged and stirred with regard to their responsibilities. Sometimes the people of God simply need to have their hearts warmed and cheered. And the faithful servant of God must sometimes sound a word of solemn warning.

I know some people get upset when a preacher warns a congregation in plain terms about false prophets, false doctrine and false religion. But if I am to faithfully watch over the souls of men, as one who must give account, I dare not keep silent about 'the enemies of the cross'.

The men whom Paul describes as 'the enemies of the cross of Christ' were teachers and preachers in the church at Philippi. They claimed to be true believers. They claimed that they were the servants of Christ. They claimed to be preaching the gospel of Christ. I have no doubt that these men preached what we call 'the fundamentals of the faith'. They preached the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and the second coming of Christ. Yet, Paul calls these men, 'the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction'.

Paul spoke in plain terms about these cunning, crafty seducers who made merchandise of the souls of men, not because he was a bitter antagonist who loved a good fight but because he was devoted to the glory of God, the gospel of Christ and the souls of men.

These men at Philippi were bitterly opposed to Paul, and vehemently opposed to the gospel of the grace of God which he preached. They did everything they could to discredit Paul and to mar the beauty of the gospel. The way they did it was to raise a smoke screen and a cloud of dust, falsely accusing him of many evil things.

They accused Paul of being a false apostle and an antinomian. They accused him of being a divider of men. These accusations were made by these false prophets in an attempt to hide the one real issue. They themselves were 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'. They hated the God whom Paul proclaimed. They hated the Christ he preached. They hated the gospel message of the cross.

Things are no different in our day. The church of Christ is plagued today, as never before, with men in her pulpits who are 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'. They rebel against the preaching of the gospel and they despise those who preach it. They raise many false issues and make many false accusations against those who preach the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ, as an excuse for their own rebellion to the Word of God. By their many false accusations they are attempting to excuse, or at least to cover over, their own heart-enmity toward the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are only smoke screens, raised to hide the real issue. The real issue is just this, they are 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'. The cross of Christ is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them. What causes such great uproar and bitter antagonism among devoutly religious people is simply the doctrine of the cross.

In Philippians 3:18, 19, the Apostle Paul weeps as he warns the church of God about 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'. The messenger of Christ in tears delivers the solemn warning. Yet, the enemies of Christ are unmoved; pretending to be his friends they are full of hostility toward him. Here is a preacher so heartbroken he weeps and a congregation with hearts so hard that, though he told them the truth again and again, they do not regard it.

What is the cross of Christ which men vehemently oppose?

Paul tells us that 'the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness'. He tells us that there are many who reject the gospel because of 'the offence of the cross'. Yet, men and women talk about the cross all the time. They sing about the cross. They wear crosses around their necks. They put crosses on top of their church buildings. What then is that cross of which Paul speaks when he says, 'They are the enemies of the cross of Christ'?

When Paul speaks of the cross, he is talking about the doctrine of the atonement. Man is not at all offended by the fact that God's Son died upon a Roman cross. But the enmity of man's heart is evident when you begin to proclaim the doctrine of the cross, the doctrine of the atonement which our Lord accomplished on the cross.

Those who oppose the doctrine of the atonement are 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'. Those who accept the atonement and rest their souls upon it are the friends of the cross. Here are four words that describe the doctrine of the cross and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross.

Sovereignty

'The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep' (John 10:11). Throughout the ordeal of His crucifixion and death our Saviour displayed His total sovereignty as God. Never was He the helpless victim of circumstances. He voluntarily laid down His life for us.

Substitution (Isaiah 53:4-10)

Our Lord Jesus Christ died as a Substitute in our place. Bearing our sins in His body on the tree, He died in our place.

Success (Isaiah 42:4)

All that the Lord Jesus Christ intended to accomplish in His death, He has accomplished. All He intended to do, He has done. All He tried to perform, He has performed.

Satisfaction (Isaiah 53:11)

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was an infinitely satisfactory atonement for sin. There is complete satisfaction in His blood. His blood satisfied the decrees of the Father, the demands of the law, the declarations of the prophets and the desire of His people.

Those who are 'the enemies of the cross' try to belittle our Lord's great work of redemption. They make it out to be a very small thing. They teach that the Son of God did something or other, which in some way or other, in some measure or other, is connected with our redemption. But to assert that the Lord Jesus Christ has effectually accomplished the redemption of His people is most offensive to them.

When Paul talks about the cross of Christ, he is talking about the gospel message of the cross (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). This message declares:

1. Free forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:9).

2. Salvation by grace alone (Eph. 2:8, 9).

3. Justification by faith alone (Romans 5:1). This is the theme of the Bible. 'The just shall live by faith.' This makes the gospel good news. This is the cause of every martyr's blood from Abel down to this day. No man's blood was ever shed for preaching salvation by works. This was the theme of the reformation; grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone. This is the only hope for a sinner, the only assurance for a believer and the only comfort for a dying man.

4. Acceptance in a Substitute (Ephesians 1:6). The Lord Jesus Christ has stood, is standing and shall forevermore stand before God as our Substitute. In Him we have no condemnation (Romans 8:1). In Him we have no sin and are righteous (1 John 3:5).

Sometimes in the Scriptures the cross refers to that life which is the result of faith in Christ (Matthew 10:38, 39). The way of the cross is a life of self-denial. The true believer cannot, he will not, he dare not, live for himself, either in the accumulating of wealth or the getting of fame or the enjoyment of pleasure.

The way of the cross is a life of submission, surrender and dedication to Christ as Lord. We are submissive to His will. We surrender to His authority. We are dedicated to His glory.

Those who are 'the enemies of the cross' rebel against the claims of Christ upon their lives. His yoke is a gall to their shoulders. They will not have it.

Why are some people the enemies of the cross of Christ?

What is there about the preaching of the cross which evokes such enmity and hostility from men and women? What is there in the preaching of the cross which is so offensive to them? People are not opposed to religion. They are not opposed to the idea of eternal salvation. Why then are some, 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'?

The cross of Christ is opposed to the pride and dignity of man. The doctrine of the cross is humiliating. It leaves nothing for man to boast of or glory in. The cross stands as a vivid emblem of man's hatred of God. The cross of Christ is a clear reminder and portrayal of human sin. It destroys all human notions of human ability, human merit and self-salvation. The cross of Christ makes man's religion, man's works, man's traditions, man's customs, man's moral dignity and self-righteousness a heap of rubbish.

The cross of Christ is offensive to men because its simplicity is opposed to human wisdom. The cross of Christ is a most unaccommodating doctrine. It will not bend to man's prejudice. It will not bow to man's passions. It will not give space for man's goodness. It will not allow room for man's wisdom. The gospel of Christ must be revealed. Otherwise, man will perish

in his intellectual foolishness.

The cross of Christ evokes man's wrath and enmity because it puts all men and women on one level. All who enter heaven must enter by the same Door. All who go to glory must go in the same Way. Harlots and queens, drunkards and educators, whoremongers and moralists are all the same in the eyes of God. All are sinners. There is but one place of cleansing for sinners, the cross of Christ.

The cross of Christ is offensive to men and women because it demands total surrender. God has set the terms of peace before you. He will never alter them. He demands total surrender to Christ. The cross of Christ is offensive because it shuts all up to Christ alone.

Who are the enemies of the cross of Christ?

Paul tell us that they are those men and women 'whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things'. The enemies of the cross are people who live for self. 'Whose god is their belly.' The enemies of the cross are people who are shamefully proud. 'Whose glory is their shame.' The enemies of the cross are people who live for this world. 'Who mind earthly things.'

Some who are the enemies of the cross are in the pulpits of our churches. They preach for profit; they preach for personal gain; they preach for love of ease. Therefore, they endeavour to alter the doctrine of the cross. They do not out and out deny the cross. They simply alter its doctrines to accommodate their hearers.

They preach sovereignty, but not total sovereignty. They preach about sins, but never about sin or total depravity. They preach redemption but not effectual, accomplished redemption. They preach grace but not free, sovereign, irresistible grace.

Some who are the enemies of the cross of Christ are in the pews of our churches. These people whom Paul describes as 'enemies of the cross of Christ' were members of a church which he had started. They were professed Christians. They were outwardly and by profession moral, religious people. But in reality, in their hearts, they were 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'.

While they believed the doctrine of the cross in their heads, it had no effect upon their hearts. While they talked about the cross on Sunday, it had no power over their lives. While they held to the doctrine of the cross, they lived for the world. Their religion was only a profession. There was no self-denial, no sacrifice, no dedication and no commitment to the cross.

What becomes of those who are 'the enemies of the cross of Christ'?

Paul describes the enemies of the cross as men and women 'whose end is destruction'. Their profession will be destroyed. All their hopes will be destroyed. All their happiness will be destroyed. In the end, they themselves will be destroyed.

How should we act before the enemies of the cross?

There is but one thing for us to do. We must go on preaching 'the cross of Christ'. The more I see man's enmity toward the cross, the more I am compelled to preach the doctrine of the cross. Those points of gospel truth which are most offensive to carnal men shall be my most constant theme.

I will proclaim God's absolute, total and universal sovereignty. I will declare the total depravity, guilt and inability of Adam's race. I will proclaim God's unconditional election of His people in Christ. I will preach the blessed gospel doctrine of limited, effectual atonement by the blood of Christ. I will declare that salvation is accomplished by the irresistible grace of God the Holy Spirit. I will preach the certain final perseverance and preservation of God's elect in Christ.

Ours is the gospel of grace; pure grace, eternal grace, sovereign grace, immutable grace, effectual grace, saving grace through the cross of Christ. Let us hold high the blood-stained banner and preach the cross in all its power and glory.

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