

Cross Evasion: The Subterfuge of Our Modern Christianity

by Art Katz

The sermon warns against the evasion of the cross in modern Christianity, highlighting the consequences of ignoring the crucified Christ and the importance of confronting the truth of the cross.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23, John 14:6, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 2:8, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "The Cross", "True Discipleship"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the profound significance of the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the pivotal event in human history, which has been trivialized and evaded by both the nations and the Jewish people. He warns against the dangers of modifying the truth of the cross into a mere decoration, leading to a Christianity that lacks power and demands. Katz challenges listeners to confront their own evasions of the truth and the implications of the cross, asserting that true faith requires a willingness to embrace the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. He critiques contemporary Christianity for often presenting a domesticated version of Jesus that fails to demand true discipleship. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the centrality of the crucified Christ in faith and practice.

Transcript

God's actual visitation, the coming of Himself, and the form that it took, and the way that it was culminated in His crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection has got to be the single greatest epochal event in the whole history of the human race. I marvel that the nations are completely oblivious to that fact, and that the Jewish people themselves have found a way to remove the event from their own consideration. But even in Christendom the event has become modified, sentimentalised, trivialised, cheapened, and rendered almost into a "non-event."

There are unplumbed meanings in the cross that wait to be unearthed, or we will remain participants with those who seek to modify and remove the cross of its content and power--even in our ignorance. "Nothing reveals the falsity of man more than the evasion, the side-stepping of man from God, and from the crucified Christ" (See footnote). In other words, by side-stepping the crucified Christ, we reveal that man is, in his very nature, a liar, phoney, false, and flees from truth.

What shall I say about my own Jewish people? The event took place in our history; our Messiah, in our Jerusalem; and yet we rejected Him, and made of His life a non-event, as if Jesus was some kind of pitiful Presumer who ran afoul of the political authorities and had to suffer their judgments. We missed the entire truth of His coming, as the very Son of God, as Sin-Bearer, fulfilling a necessary sacrifice that no animal could provide, and was Himself both the sacrifice and the High Priest--and we suffered the consequences for our dismissal of Him.

Evasion means trying to find another place where the truth can no longer reach or affect man, where he is secure from the invading hand of its knowledge and from its implications. An event of this magnitude is not for decoration. It has implications for all the world, and all mankind. But these are implications that men shun because it is an ultimate statement from God, and makes an ultimate requirement (See footnote). He might well have been writing about my own Jewish people.

I recently wrote an article to try and explain the days of rage that have broken out in Israel. The greatest threat to the life of the nation Israel is from Islam, and in that little article I suggest that Islam itself is a judgment against Israel, that Islam is a monotheistic heresy, inspired by Israel's own example of rejecting the triune God and the revelation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as was demonstrated at the cross. The cross reveals unspeakable depths about God's character: His righteousness, His justice, His mercy, His self-sacrifice, His love.

To miss what was revealed by God at the cross is to miss all. In Israel's wilful missing and shunting aside of the cross as a non-event, it missed the profound revelation of God, as God. Well, it is one thing to have a monotheistic view that was superior to paganism; but once God has revealed Himself in fullness in a triune way, we will invite consequences upon ourselves if we persist in monotheism--especially as the elect nation of God. Mankind cannot dismiss the crucifixion of Christ from history and time, and from his consideration; but there is a way in which the truth of the crucified Christ can be diminished and removed from the challenge that it represents.

It can be transformed by taking it and putting it in forms by which one seems to be acknowledging it, but in fact subvert it. We can avoid the implications of a crucified God by rendering the event in such a way as to become innocuous, mild, religious, and therefore rob it of its meaning. There is a way in which truth can be evaded, while, at the same time, we say we are embracing it. In other words, we have not shunned the truth of the cross, as if it had not taken place, but we have allowed it to take on forms of meaning in such a way as to be hardly anything more than a decoration we wear around our neck; but we have avoided the implication of the cross.

That is cross evasion because we have defused it, modified it, and thereby render it in null and void. Man will confirm the cross only in the sense in which he can regard it as tolerable and useful. He will understand and improve and grasp and champion it, but only in the form of a picture, which is divested of the distinctive menace which caused him to back up from it, and only in a way in which it seems to be brought under his control and promises to become his willing and powerful servant, consoler and helper (See footnote).

There is a way in which we can make Jesus our errand boy: The benefits you are going to receive by accepting Him. He will get you a ticket to heaven, a spouse, a job, He will get you well, etc. Compare that "gospel" with its first proclamation by Peter that made thousands cry out, "Men and brethren, what must we do to be saved?" They were pierced through in their hearts. The author goes on to try to expose

evasion of the truth. He calls it: A masterly way of escape when man succeeds, or thinks he succeeds in handling the truth by facing it as he must, and yet at the same time avoiding it, namely by changing or transposing it into a translation of his own, into an improved edition in which it looks most deceptively like itself, and yet by a hardly noticeable alteration of accent is no longer itself, but has become the truth which is mastered by him, instead of the truth which masters him (See footnote).

What is the end of this deceptive misuse of Jesus and of the cross and fashioning it into an acceptable, domesticated Christianity? Instead of being mastered by the truth, the ones who perform that make themselves the master, and so they have muffled the faith, and rendered it ineffective and non-threatening. The only thing now is that it is directed into exactly the opposite of the original direction or intention of God, this is the accomplishment, or the attempted accomplishment, of falsehood, of the man of sin in the Christian era which is the age of the Holy Spirit.

In the cross of Christ, God confronts the whole of mankind, not only in that generation, but every subsequent generation. When I challenge my Jewish people, I do not begin with: "Do you know Jesus?" I begin with the truth: "What! You spent hours in your local library pursuing some minute piece of information to facilitate your career, or the attainment of some doctorate degree or credential, and you never once opened the New Testament to search out the credentials of a man who allowed Himself to be worshipped by Jews as their Lord and their God!

Well, you will be held accountable for what you have chosen to major in and what you have chosen to ignore. Your very evasion, your unwillingness to spend any time on this momentous subject of eternal import condemns you. You are in a flight from truth. I do not care what you have done in the pursuit of your career. This evasion of Jesus will condemn you." Remember what Jews of Jesus' generation said when they had the Roman soldiers guard the tomb: "This presumer said that He will rise again on the third day, so rather than the end be worse than the beginning, see that this tomb is greatly guarded."

Well, what happened? The Lord came out from the closed tomb, and the soldiers could not find Him. So the Jewish authorities bribed them and said, "You tell everyone that at night his disciples came and stole His body." Then the scriptures say, "And this is believed to this day." What we willingly believe will condemn us. It is staggering that anyone could believe that a group of fearful Jewish disciples, disappointed and shattered by the crucifixion of their Master, would overpower Roman soldiers and steal the body away at night!

And that story is believed to this very day. We will be held accountable for what we choose to believe, and what we choose to reject. We are evasive, we are liars, and we want to avoid the implication of this great event because it could not take place without making of us an ultimate requirement. Nothing is more dangerous than the falsehood in which man manages, or at least tries and thinks he manages to use the truth to silence the truth, or the True Witness by finding for Him a place, by championing Him, by making Him its hero, example and symbol, yet all the time patronising, interpreting, domesticating, acclimatising, accommodating, and gently, but very definitely and significantly correcting Him (See footnote).

We must be prepared to see the falsehood of man appear in a very earnest, respectable, devout, and Christian forms. That is what German Christianity had become just before the advent of Hitler. It was devout, it was pious, orthodox, earnest, respectable; but it was lifeless and inert. It had no power to discern the Nazi phenomenon as coming from the pit of hell. Its orthodoxy was shallow, only technical in word, but lacking the vitality of a real faith, because it had come to serve the interests and needs of men

who want a supplementary Sunday Christianity that makes no real demand upon them.

It meant they could then allow themselves to pursue their real interests, their businesses, their careers, and their ambitions. That makes Christianity a non-faith. The rejection of the true faith was judged by Nazism, the demonic phenomenon that came to the land of the Reformation. Germany was not some backwater place in the world, some pagan people who did not know better. This is the land of philosophy, art, culture and theology. The most profound scholarship on the Old Testament is German, and yet that generation participated in, or was silent in, the rise to power of a Nazi regime.

Their devout, formal, correct religion lacked apostolic power and reality, and therefore collapsed like a proverbial deck of cards. Jesus Christ neither is, nor ever will be, identical with the figure which, in His name, the man of sin causes to enter and to act under his patronage and advocacy. He is not ensnared by the yes with which this man greets him, the more surely to deny him. God will not lend Himself to those things that seek to exploit Him and to employ Him in their own purpose and ends.

So what is it that man fears when Jesus Christ encounters him? What is the oppressive and painful element of the truth which he would like to evade, and which sense he has to face it? He can evade only by reinterpreting and transforming the truth into untruth (See footnote). What is it that falsehood seeks to silence, suppress and eliminate? What is the truth which the man of sin hates, yet does not expel, but tries to absorb into falsehood as his supreme achievement, and thus to transform it into untruth?

In His answer, in defence against that, is the man Christ Jesus who is called the True Witness. Since this man is identical with the Truth, and the Truth with Him, the encounter with the Truth and therefore with Him, and we refer to the encounter with Jesus Christ, becomes an absolute and vital, binding, incisive and even revolutionary affair. That is why the man of sin would like to escape it. He cannot accept this identity, and since he cannot alter the fact, he tries to reinterpret, to transform it into a non-identity.

The truth may be accepted on the one side, by the one who attests, but because they separate it, they don't allow it to violate or offend him, nor cause him any discomfort or demand any decision (See footnote) The false thing is accepted because it does not make requirement. Judaism is acceptable because it does not make requirement. The offence which man takes in the encounter with Jesus Christ, and which he seeks to avoid in his falsehood, consists in the fact that the True Witness is the man of Gethsemane and Golgotha, and therefore the truth is the truth of His death and passion (See footnote).

How do you distinguish the true from the false? From a false Christ, or a verbalisation about him? You cannot separate the truth of the faith, and of God, from the person of Jesus as the one who suffered the death and the passion of Gethsemane and Golgotha. When you remove that content and that reality, you really are a candidate for deception. This is intrinsic, this is central, this is the event which has come down. This is the suffering and the death that was experienced, and unless you are rooted in that reality as central and intrinsic to God's act at the cross, you are a candidate for deception.

If you shrink from the necessity for the suffering, the agony of the cross, if you have supplemented, taken Jesus out of it, then another Jesus can be put in His place, but it is not the same. This is the distinction. That is why Paul said, "I'm determined not to know anything but Christ and Him crucified." It is the crucified Christ, it is the suffering Saviour, it is the garden and the Cross, that distinguishes the truth of this Christ (See footnote). To see Him today is to see this one condemned and expelled and rejected in our place.

To believe in Him, it is necessary to realise that His place ought to have been ours. To love Him, and to hope in Him, is to be required in remembrance of what we deserved, and as a sign of fellowship with Him to take up and bear our much smaller crosses, and not to be able to escape this requirement. The narrow way of the Christian belongs to him, leads to the strait gate of discipleship, means neither more nor less for men than that in order to win his life he should give it up for lost, and really lose it.

It is thus that Jesus Christ is the True Witness and Himself the Truth. What is the issue of this Truth and the communicating of this Truth? Those who have really believed it have entered and maintained the narrow way of discipleship, the suffering, the loss of their own life for His name's sake. In that very act they duplicate and repeat what is the heart of His act. They give up their own life, and in giving up their own life, they validate His sacrifice, and commend the truth of it to others by their own example, and by their own walk.

That is the truth. That is how the truth is maintained, that's how the truth is conveyed. It requires the narrow way of discipleship and the willingness of ourselves to give up our life and to lose it. It is thus that Jesus Christ is the True Witness and Himself the Truth (See footnote). Any kind of thing that employs the name of Jesus, that does not make this requirement, and does not call the believer to this narrow way, is itself fraudulent and a deception. You would say, "Art, you are pretty much describing contemporary Christianity."

Yes, that is right. To what degree is it fraudulent? To what degree is it in deception? To what degree has it evaded the costly truth of God and leaves the world without a witness to Him? Disclaimer by editor: This article is a transcribed message spoken before an audience, but edited for the reader. It is not known who Art is quoting from, but suspect it would be Jurgen Moltmann in his book: "The Crucified God." There is likely to be some interspersing of Art's thoughts with the author, but feel that neither Art nor the author suffer negatively because of that.

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