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CARTS BEFORE HORSES

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When a person gets confused in his thinking--when he gets his logic mixed--when he puts effect before the cause--we have a way of saying he gets the cart before the horse. And this is a very apt metaphor of the confused thinking of many people in religion.

At a horse show it would be rather funny to see carts hitched to horses instead of horses hitched to carts, as if the carts were to pull the horses. The simplest sort of person knows that the horse pulls the cart. It would be a simpleton indeed who would argue that the cart caused the horse to run. And yet

this is the very thing many people do in their religious thinking: they get the cart before the horse--they have the effect or evidence before the cause--they confound the ground of something with the evidence of it: they put man where they ought to put God.

The natural man--the man who has not been born from above--can think straight in everything except in matters pertaining to God and spiritual things. Men do not get mixed up in physics as they do in religion. In the physical senses it is very important to keep cause and effect properly related. In the laboratories at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, they are careful about this matter of cause and effect. The cart before the horse in dealing with atomic energy would be a tragedy--someone would be blown into eternity.

The Bible says that the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit. The unregenerate man is in

the dark about the truths of saving religion. Religious truth is foolishness to him, for it has to be spiritually discerned or understood and the natural man is without the Spirit. I Corinthians 2:13-15, *"Which things we also speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the*

natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are

spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."

FEELING BEFORE FAITH

In this message we shall deal with faith and feeling in their relation to each other. I do not believe in a cold speculative religion that has no emotion or feeling. I do not have a salvation that has no feeling. Whatever religion I have there is a deep feeling connected with it. I believe and therefore I feel. My feelings are the result of my faith. But feelings can be dangerous and deceitful. When one puts feeling before faith and refuses to believe in Christ until he can have a certain feeling, he is getting the cart before the horse.

There can be a religious feeling where there is no saving faith, and there can be a feeling which is anti-faith--the very essence of doubts.

Illustration: Suppose I offer you something. It is something you want and need, but you say that you just can't feel that I will give it to you. By your feelings you would be saying that you doubt my word. You would be making a liar of me. Christian doctrine not mere religious feeling, is the cause of Christianity as a distinctive religion.

FEELING A PRODUCT OF FAITH

Feeling is the effect of saving faith and not the cause of it. In our preaching we must not aim at feeling but at faith--even faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST as Saviour. And where there is true faith the feeling will take care of itself. And we will not have to resort to sob-stories to produce faith. It is my firm conviction that the sob-story technique in evangelism has done much harm to our churches and has deceived many lost people. Most anybody can be made to cry and there is danger of mistaking his crying for faith. However, if the sinner weeps under the conscious burden of his sins that is all well and good. Sin is something to cry about and Christ is something to shout about. So, if he is happy when he trusts the Lord Jesus Christ that is also well and good. The sinner ought to weep over his sins and the believer ought to rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ. The point I am trying to drive home is this: There can be a religious feeling when there is no real conviction for sin, and no real saving faith in Christ. John 3:5, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

I am not so sure we ought to drama-

tize the death of Christ in an effort to break down resistance and create sympathy for the dying Saviour. A man may be made to weep over the death of Christ and not trust him for salvation. Even the death of a dog may be told in such a dramatic fashion as to make people cry. If the Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement were true, this method would be safe and sound. Anything to make people tender and sympathetic towards Jesus would work. But Jesus does not want mere sympathy; he wants our trust and obedience. To the women who followed him to the cross, bewailing and lamenting him, Christ said, *"Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children,"* Luke 23:28. It is not our tears but our trust that saves.

MANY WAYS TO HAVE A GOOD FEELING

A. The way of the atheist. He begs others to give up religion and enjoy life with him. The atheist has a good feeling because he has persuaded himself to believe there is no God to fear. He has no concern for the eternal future because he has believed he will not exist beyond death. If a good feeling is the important thing, I would recommend atheism and say, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

B. The way of the self-righteous. If one can build himself up in his own eyes until he feels he is the pink of perfection, he will have a good feeling. The Pharisee had a much better feeling than the Publican. He had a feeling but no faith in the sprinkled blood behind the veil. The Publican had faith in the flood, for he literally said, as he thought about the blood, *"Be thou propitiated for me the sinner,"* Luke 18:13. He was trusting the atoning blood of Christ.

C. The way of the drunkard. The drunkard has a good feeling for a while. Whiskey deranges the mind and builds a man up in his own mind. The drunk man feels rich and important--but the morning after is quite different. Any religious feeling apart from faith in Christ is like that of the drunkard.

D. The way of the physician. Psychiatry proceeds upon the assumption that sin is only a mental disease and that peace of mind is the important thing. Most psychiatrists recommend

religion--just any religion for that purpose. They often effect a cure by making a person feel better. Physicians and preachers alike are more and more resorting to the technique of the psychiatrist to help people live with worry and frustration. But this does not touch the question of eternal salvation. One may enjoy this life and miss the life to come. One may learn how to relax and how to keep from getting upset and yet spend eternity in hell. One may have peace of mind and not have peace with God or have the peace of GOD. It is not enough to be mentally sane; one must be upright in heart.

SAVED BY FAITH AND NOT BY FEELING

We are saved by faith, not by feeling. We are not saved because we feel good; we feel good because we are saved.

Illustration: Word comes to me that I have fallen heir to a large sum of money. If it should be the first day of April, I am apt to think it is an April fool trick--and so the news does not arouse any good feeling. But if I am convinced of the truth of the report, I will feel good. My faith in the report produces a feeling of gladness. While waiting for the money, I rejoice in the hope of getting it. Now the basis of my faith would be the word of the person who told me the good news that a certain person had died and left me the money. My hope of getting it would be the good feeling caused by my faith in the report.

Now let us apply this to salvation. In Romans 10:17 we are told that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. God tells of the wonderful blessings laid up for us in heaven because of what Christ did in his death and resurrection. The gospel is the good news of salvation we have in Jesus Christ. God tells us there is justification now and glory to come through faith in his Son. I take God at his word and put faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST. I am happy in present forgiveness and in the promise of future glory. Paul puts it better than I can: *"Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of*

God," Romans 5:1-2. In conclusion, let me say that any good feeling that is not the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ is dangerous and deceptive. Let's keep the horse before the cart. Faith precedes and produces a feeling--a feeling of love for our Saviour and faith and trust in His word.

"PERSUADING THEM CONCERNING JESUS"

BY: C. D. COLE

"And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening," Acts 28:23.

The Christian ministry is a ministry of persuasion. We cannot force sinners to believe on Christ, neither can we drive saints into the service of Christ. Everything must of necessity be on a voluntary basis. God does not want any kind of service that the heart is not in. He wants all service to be free expression of the heart and mind. Everybody in Christ's army is an enlisted man. He drafts nobody into his service. He wants slaves in His kingdom, but they must be voluntary slaves from an internal constraint; not from external force.

For the conversion of men to faith in Christ we can do nothing more than give the facts concerning Jesus and pray to God for results as we persuade them to act upon the facts of the gospel--the good news of how Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, was buried and rose from the dead the third day according to the scriptures. We cannot force faith from without; faith comes by a work of grace in the human heart and mind, and when this work is wrought by the Holy Spirit, faith is the voluntary attachment to Jesus of Nazareth as both Lord and Christ.

We cannot run a church like an army or a worldly business. The man who works for a coal company is not showing any love for the firm; he is really working for himself and his family. As an honest man, he will give an honest day's work from a sense of duty, and if he fails, the foreman may demand

better work or his resignation.

The word of our text refer to Paul's ministry at Rome among the Jews. On reaching Rome as a prisoner in chains, he is allowed to live in his own hired house in charge of a soldier at all hours. Three days after his arrival, he calls the chief Jews of the city to his house for a conference. He explains the occasion of his presence in Rome. He tells of his experience in Jerusalem and of his appeal to Caesar. He is not there to bring any charge against his nation. He is there for the hope of Israel, that is, he is there as a prisoner because he had preached the gospel of Jesus Christ as the hope of his people. The hope of Israel was not in Christ's second coming, but in his first coming and in what he had done in his death and resurrection.

These prominent Jews tell him they had received no letters from Jerusalem about him, and that no new arrivals from there had spoken any harm of him. But they told him they would like to hear from him because "this sect" as they called the Christians were spoken against everywhere.

They make an appointment with Paul and when the day arrives the Jews are there in great numbers to hear what he has to say.

Our text tells us that he said: "*He persuaded them concerning Jesus.*"

I. His theme was Jesus. He paid no attention to their slur in referring to believers as "*this sect.*"

A. He did not tell his experiences on his trip. He could have recited a long and interesting story about what happened at various places during his voy-

age. He could have told of his shipwreck. He could have told of the time he was bitten by a poisonous snake on the island of Melita without injury and how the natives looked upon him as a god. He could have told of the healing of the father of Publius and others on this island, and how the natives had honored him with many honors and gifts.

B. He did not court their sympathy because he was a prisoner. He wasn't weeping because he was in chains, but happy that he could talk about Jesus. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the apostle was one of the grand proofs of Christianity. He once thought he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth, but the time came when this same Jesus meant everything to him. He could say, "*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" He gladly called himself a bondsman to Jesus Christ.

C. He did not talk about politics, or economics, or social matters. He didn't waste his time talking about Caesar and the cruelty of the Roman government.

D. He talked to them about Jesus. His heart was full of this one subject and what was in his heart came forth from his lips. He knew his subject. He had met Jesus and was fully convinced He was the Messiah, the Christ of God, and the one hope of Israel and of all men.

II. His source of information was the Bible--the Old Testament. Our text says, "*persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*" Everywhere he found texts that applied to Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth was the suffering servant of Jehovah in Isaiah; he was the Lord our righteousness in Jeremiah; he was David's Lord and Shepherd in the twenty-third Psalm. Some people do not like the Old Testament, but the Old Testament was the only

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Bible Paul had in those days.

III. The length of his message: all day--from morning till evening. This does not necessarily justify long sermons today, but Paul made the most of his opportunity.

IV. The manner of his preaching: He expounded, that is, explained the scriptures and showed their fulfillment in Christ. Explanation of scripture or teaching is important in preaching. He testified, that is, he gave his personal conviction about the kingdom of God. He persuaded. He did not give cold bare facts without any care of whether they received them or not. He was persuasive. He wanted them to believe in Jesus. He was not mad at anybody. He did not want to harm anyone. He wanted to help the people.

But he was also in earnest. He realized the danger sinners were in and wanted them to see no hope except in Jesus. A man once took his doctor's prescription to his druggist for his sick wife. A while after filling it, the druggist discovered he had made a terrible mistake--he had put too much of a sleeping potion in the medicine. Realizing that if the woman took it and ever went to sleep, she could never be aroused, he hurried to the home of the man with the sad news and instructed him by any and every way to not let his wife go to sleep--that it would mean her death. He told him if she could be kept awake until the crisis passed, she would be all right. You know what this man did? He kept her awake. He walked her around while she begged him to let her lie down and sleep. He threw water in her face. And when it seemed she would go to sleep in spite of all he could do, he slapped her in the face. Why such seeming cruelty? Because he was angry at her? No, because he loved her and was interested in her. *"And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh,"* Jude 22, 23.

This is a natural illustration of the earnestness we should show in persuading people concerning Jesus. Pulling them out of the fire is not done physically. *"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things*

in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," Philippians 2: 10, 11.

V. The results of his preaching? Some believed and some believed not. This is always the case. From scripture and observation, no preacher can hope everybody who hears him will be saved.

Why will men not believe such a glorious gospel? It is not bad news but good news. It is in their interest that they believe. Then why won't they? It is because of the ruined condition of their mind and heart.

Those who do believe the gospel do so through grace. *"And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace,"* Acts 18:27. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast,"* Ephesians 2:8, 9.