

Tree or Pole

LONG HAVE WE HAD THE TERM "tree" before us in the C.V. In the version the word "tree" has not been discriminated against "pole". This has been done with a certain deference to the idiom of convention. Like the word "cross", the word "tree" was retained as a small concession to the general practice or convention. But this retaining of the terms has tended to cloud that Peter (Acts 2) used terms which pointed to Jewish customs, and that he laid upon his fellow Jews that they had really committed a crime of which there was the fullest reason to repent before their God. They had made their Messiah to be accursed!

Peter, however, was not recommending the "snare of the cross" to his hearers, nor yet in his writings. The cross snared Israel, for by it they lost their own righteousness, as also the prerogative of circumcision. It was Paul's presentation of the cross which contained the snare, for the cross allowed no advantage to the Jew. At the best the cross would assure them of the promises to Abraham, but this, in its major value, gave Israel the higher values in the new earth, and the new Jerusalem. Israel does not reach the fuller values of the cross until the new earth. The fourth eon does not admit the cross.

In Acts 2, Peter's description is by the word "gibbet" (23) along with "assassinate" (24). The last term stresses the treatment given to a public character who is put out of society without lawful authority; the other term (gibbet) claims the right to have done so, for the infamy of the person was considered to warrant it! This was within the provisions of the law (Dt. 21:23), and to that extent was allowed. Such a person became a curse in that way.

It was, then, the Jewish treatment to which Peter pointed, and he first used expressions which presented this to them. Then, at Acts 5:30, Peter spoke directly of their hanging Him on a pole, and this indicated the degrading to which they subjected Him. On the other hand, Paul used the term related to the methods of the Romans, that is, the nations, in fact, and thus he used the term cross (though to be sure, it was a stake, without any cross piece).

Peter, when speaking to Cornelius, is charging to the Jew these matters as a crime, and is using the terms which put the case as nearly as possible in the category of Jewish customs (see Acts 10:39). The Jew first stoned to death, and then hung on a pole, when desiring to exhibit the infamy and degradation of the victim. The term "assassinate" is introduced because "gibbet", and so "pole", are not used as means to kill, that is, within Jewish methods. The word "assassinate" queries their right to do so.

In the case of "pole", suffering on the part of the victim was almost eliminated, for death was prior to the point of hanging on a "pole". Death had been inflicted ere this was done. Not so with the cross, for the suffering continued on the cross and, indeed, it intensified. Peter's presentation regards suffering as being wholly prior to the hanging on a pole. Peter views that suffering of Christ which occurred in the course of Christ's footprints, whilst He was able to react to it (1 Pt. 2:21-22). There was for Him one "welt" in which there was healing for them (1 Pt. 2:24) and that welt, according to Isa. 53:5, came from God.

The case of 1 Peter 2:24 has long been used in a sense which considers it as equivalent to the cross, but Peter was not recommending "the snare of the cross" to the dispersion, when he wrote of Christ that He "carries up our sins in His body to the pole", and so exhibited them as accursed thing. True Peter also adds that we "coming away from sins, we should be living for righteousness". But Peter was not expressing that which is the equal of Romans 6, for this latter deals with SIN rather than sins. Peter was not affirming the secret of God's Evangel, that is, the conciliation. Nor yet was he stating death to law.

To the ecclesias of Galatia, Paul writes in a strain, the understanding of which ought to aid us to discriminate around the terms "pole" and "cross". Paul wrote (Gal. 3:13) that Christ reclaims US from the curse of the law, and this Christ did by coming to be within the curse of the law, wherein it is written: accursed is everyone hanging on a pole. In some measure, this comes within the defense of the Evangel of God, for it applies to circumcision or uncircumcision, and it takes them back to the promise, given 400 years prior to the law.

What, in brief, then is the particular point in discriminating these two terms, pole and cross? Since Christ

actually died on the cross (which is not the case around the term pole), then the cross allows the believer to have been crucified together with Christ thereon. This fits the figure of death to SIN (in contrast to SINS) with Christ, and then the associated rousing together with Him. Here SIN is dealt with, which accords with the glorious values needed by the believer in conciliation: the one dying has been justified FROM sin (Rom. 6:7): the fact of sin is dealt with through the cross, whereas, the pole looks at the acts which sin does, and it forgives them.

For Peter to have pressed the "cross" upon those He addressed, that is the dispersion, this would have been contrary to his references to the special and exclusive privileges to which he has referred earlier in the chapter of his first epistle, that they were a "royal priesthood" etc. Israel does not come to the cross until the new earth. And, in its earlier stages, this allows to them a measure of their premier position.

Attention to the detail of this essay will confirm that Peter wrote for his own nation, and that the nations should look to Paul as the one who dispenses the Evangel of God concerning His Son.

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