

FIERY DARTS AGAINST THE CROSS

By Keith Greer

Despite all the opposition Jesus encountered during His personal ministry here on earth, He did try to help his enemies understand. "But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'" {John 15:25} How could anyone oppose God's own Son who came to earth to supply a remedy for our greatest need? Consider the example He set before us: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth." {1 Peter 2:21,22} Even after Christ died on the cross, when His disciples preached about it, they encountered more opposition. "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake." {Luke 21:16,17} Under inspiration, Paul wrote that this opposition would not end with the early disciples. "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." {2 Timothy 3:12} God's people will always need patience and endurance.

Sadly, much of the early opposition did not come from outsiders, but from some within Christ's own body. He warned that a man's foes "would be from his own household," {Matthew 10:36}. These professed followers, by their actions, undermined all the cross represented to a world lost in the darkness of sin. Since the first-century firing of the first fiery dart aimed at destroying God's people, many more have followed—and they will continue until time ends. Let's examine some of them.

Spiritual Ignorance. This plagued God's people in Old-Testament times. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." {Hosea 4:6} Peter knew that many of the religious leaders who murdered Jesus did it in ignorance. "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers." {Acts 3:17} Paul conceded the same fact in his first letter to the church in Corinth. "Which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." {1 Corinthians 2:8} But ignorance did not relieve the Jewish leaders of the consequences to be suffered because of it. God does provide a remedy for the condition—the application of the knowledge contained in His word. "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'" {John 8:31,32}

Worldly Behavior. We cannot claim to desire the benefits provided by the cross and live as the world lives; God finds this unacceptable. "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." {James 4:4} When we become Christians, receiving the blood Christ shed on the cross, we must change. "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." {Colossians 3:1-3} Those who walk in the ways of the world are enemies of the cross. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and

whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things." {Philippians 3:18,19} If, after we become

Christians, we continue to walk in the ways of the world, we fire darts at the cross. Christ died to release us from our bondage to sin and death. Sadly, many think they can hold on to both Christ and the world.

Worldly Wisdom. Since the church began, worldly wisdom has always been opposed to the simplicity of Christ's gospel, and it continues to belittle His cross. "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." {1 Corinthians 1:17,18} In chapter 3, Paul added, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness;' and again, 'The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" {1 Corinthians 3:19,20} Such wisdom is not from above. "This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic." {James 3:15} The sound of worldly wisdom in many of the pulpits in the Lord's church today is surely an abomination to Him. More fiery darts at the cross!

Love of the World. Yes, we must live in the world, but we must not become enamored with this temporal dwelling place. Demas made this mistake in the first century. "For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica--Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia." {2 Timothy 4:10} To avoid this dart, develop an understanding of what is in the world and where it is headed. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." {1 John 2:15-17} Those in the world continually seek to convince us to mold our lives around its principles and guidelines. God's children must fight against this temptation. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." {Romans 12:1,2} Lovers of the world are enemies of Christ's body.

Hypocrisy and Pretense. Another dangerous fiery dart is members who are not truly converted and committed to the Lord and His church. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron." {1 Timothy 4:1,2} Paul warned the young preacher Timothy of the danger of such conduct. "For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" {2 Timothy 3:2-5} We cannot serve two masters – we must choose one or the other {Matthew 6:24}. There's no greater threat to the cross than that presented by those who play at Christianity. Nothing is more harmful to the body of Christ than members who give the Lord a few hours of the week and devote the remainder to the devil.

Does it come as a surprise to you that people continue to throw fiery darts at Christ's cross? Not only are they content to reject the cross for themselves, they also seek to discourage and lead others away from the

hope it contains. The cross is what provides us with the tools we need to make sense of this thing called life. Real hope and security belong to those who humbly bow their hearts to the greatest act of love this world has ever known. ***