

GLORYING IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST Galatians 6:14

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

We do not have to read very far into Paul's epistles without seeing that the cross of Christ was of prime importance to him. Without doubt Paul was the most Christ-centric man who ever lived. In all of Paul's life Christ was the center of it. In all his labours it was Christ. In all his sufferings it was Christ. In all his triumphs it was Christ. He said, "For to me to live is Christ, . . ." (Philippians 1:21). It is no wonder that God chose this man to be a pattern to all who should hereafter believe, i.e. believe in the cross of Christ. Paul would glory in nothing except the cross. If there were ever a man on earth that had something to glory in, it was Paul (Philippians 3:4-6).

1. What Paul would not glory in.

- A.** He would not glory in his national privileges as a Jew.
- B.** He would not glory in his own works. He laboured more abundantly than they all (1 Corinthians 15:10); he traveled and preached all over the then known world; and he endured the sufferings which he encountered by preaching the cross (2 Corinthians 11:22-28).
- C.** He would not glory in his knowledge. Though Paul had received his revelation from the risen Christ Himself, though he had the gifts of the Spirit for a time, though he wrote over half of the N.T., though he could argue with infidels at Corinth, Pharisees at Jerusalem, or the self-righteous in Galatia, and though he knew many deep things having been caught away to the third heaven, he would not glory in them.
- D.** He would not glory in his graces. Paul was very tender and affectionate (1 Thess. 1:7,8). He was a bold man not caring whom he opposed when the truth was at stake, yet he spoke the truth in love. He risked his life to reach some with the Gospel. He was self-denying, humble, less than the least of all saints, a man of much prayer, and a thankful man.
- E.** He never gloried in a denomination, or belonging to a church, it was always Christ. The glory of most today is in their denomination, their church building, their numbers, their pastor, their morality, but not in the cross of Christ. Christ is rarely mentioned, and the cross is mentioned even less.

2. What did Paul mean by the cross of Christ? It has several meanings in Scripture.

- A.** It stands for the literal meaning of a wooden cross on which our blessed Saviour was nailed and put to death at Calvary (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26; Philippians 2:8). This is not the cross Paul meant for he would have shrunk with horror from the idea of glorying in a mere piece of wood. He would have denounced the Roman Catholic adoration of the crucifix as profane, blasphemous, and idolatrous.
- B.** The cross can also mean the afflictions and trials which believers may pass when faithfully following Christ. "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:43; Galatians 6:12). Paul knew this cross well and carried it faithfully.
- C.** The cross stands for all that Christ did for sinners in His sufferings and atoning death when He offered up His own body to be crucified. This is the meaning of Paul in this text, and also when he said, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Paul simply gloried in nothing but Christ crucified as the salvation of his soul.

3. Can we follow Paul in glorying in the cross?

Paul had more righteous works than any man alive, "an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal none could compare, and touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless," but he wrote over and over that no man is justified by the works of the law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16), and no man is saved except by grace (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Christ crucified was his joy and delight, his comfort and peace, his hope and confidence, his foundation, his rest, his refuge, and the food of his soul. Paul did not meditate or speak of his own goodness or righteousness, but of Christ's blood, Christ's work of redemption, Christ's righteousness, and Christ's finished work. In this he gloried much and often. This was his message, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (1 Corinthians 1:17). "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

As Paul went, wherever he went, he proclaimed the love of Christ, His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul was a blaspheming, persecuting Pharisee, but redeemed by the blood of Christ, and he could not hold his peace about his conversion. Many times a testimony of saving grace is more effective than an eloquent sermon.

Paul loved to dwell on the cross of Christ when he wrote his epistles to the saints. His epistles are generally full of the sufferings and death of Christ, His resurrection for our justification, and his words run over with "thoughts that breathe, and words that burn," of this subject. The cross of Christ, His death, burial, and resurrection, are like a golden thread that runs through all Paul's doctrinal teaching and practical exhortations. Paul knew the newest or advanced believer can never hear too much about the cross of Christ. "Tell me the old, old story," is a hymn we sing, and it is true to those who have experienced the forgiveness of the cross.

Paul lived upon this truth his whole life (Galatians 2:20). This was the truth which inflamed his heart and made him labour tirelessly, persevere, and be patient. He lived on the meat and drink of Christ's cross and shed blood.

4. The Cross of Christ is the central theme of all Scripture.

The cross of Christ as the atonement for sinners begins in Genesis 3:15, with the promise of the seed of the woman bruising the serpents head, i.e. a prophecy of Christ crucified. It is in the law of Moses (though veiled), and in the history of Israel. The passover before deliverance from Egypt, the daily sacrifice, and the continual shedding of blood in the Tabernacle and Temple. The actual event is recorded in all four Gospels, there is a constant reminder of the blood in the epistles, and at last, ". . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain, . . ." (Revelation 5:6,8,12).

If we take away the cross and Christ crucified from the Bible, we have but a dark book, and it is of no real value or use. We can know much about the Bible, its character, its history, its dates, etc., but without knowing Christ crucified it profits us little. We can also have a head knowledge of the facts of Christianity, but without the power of Christ's cross in experience, His blood for cleansing from our sin, and believing entirely on His finished work, Christ will profit us nothing.

We live in an age of religion where there is not much of a cross, but it is a time when this message is sorely needed. There are hundreds of churches in which there is

everything but the cross. Rituals, ceremonies, stained glass windows, ordinances, and all kinds of activity, but the real cross of Christ is absent. Jesus Christ crucified is not preached, nor is salvation by faith in His finished work. Thus all is wrong. They would not have satisfied Paul, and he would preach the same message as he did on Mars Hill, i.e. to the unknown God. "How to books," and "rules to live by," are published, but they contain nothing of the cross of Christ. Ministers, church buildings, ordinances, and rituals, are not Christ crucified, but they see no peculiar glory or beauty in the cross. We must not give Christ's glory to another (Jeremiah 9:23,24; 1 Corinthians 1:31).

5. Why we are to glory in the Cross of Christ.

I believe it is an excellent thing to be continually dwelling and meditating on the cross of Christ. To be reminded how He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, how He was condemned with the most unjust judgment, how they spit upon Him, how they scourged and beat Him, how in mockery they crowned Him with thorns and cloaked Him with a purple robe, how they led Him forth as a lamb to the slaughter without any murmuring or complaining on His part, how they drove the nails through His hands and feet, crucified between two thieves as one Himself, pierced His side with a spear, mocked Him in His sufferings, and let Him hang there naked and bleeding until He died. Of these things we should be reminded for it makes us humble and thankful.

The sufferings and the cross of Christ were foreordained (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:18-20). The sufferings and the cross of Christ were **necessary** for man's salvation (Hebrews 10:4). Christ had to bear our sins if they were to be borne at all. This was the one and only payment for our debt that God would accept. This is the sacrifice on which our eternal life depended.

The sufferings and the cross of Christ were voluntary. He willingly obeyed the His father's will and laid down His life (John 10:17,18; Hebrews 10:5-14). The heart of Christ was set on saving sinners, and He would open that fountain for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1). If we would know the length, breadth, height, and depth of God's love we shall see it most displayed in the cross of Christ. We know the Father loves us because He spared not His only Son (Romans 8:32). but the cross of Christ is also where we see most clearly the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Sin so great and abominable that nothing except the blood of Christ can cleanse it away.

It is in the cross of Christ we see the fulness and completeness of the salvation God has secured for His people. Here we find the balm for a sore conscience and a troubled heart, we find the payment for our great debt, the laws demands are all met, and all our doubts are answered in the blood of Christ. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). There is salvation for the vilest of men at the cross of Christ. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

The sufferings and cross of Christ is the strongest motivation to be holy. It is not the Ten Commandments, or keeping any laws, but the cross of Christ. It is there we see the love of Christ constraining us to live unto Him and not for ourselves. It is there we are bought with a price. It is there He "gave Himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, . . ." (Titus 2:14). It is there that we see that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness (1 Peter 2:24). There is nothing so sanctifying as a clear view of the cross of Christ. " . . . by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

All religions and cults have laws and moral precepts, forms and ceremonies, rewards and punishments, but none can tell of a dying Saviour, or show us the cross. Miserable indeed are those religions which call themselves Christian and yet contain nothing of the cross. Those who teach without the cross are like a professor explaining

the solar system without saying a thing about the sun. The cross of Christ is the crown and the glory of the Gospel.

The cross of Christ is the power and strength of the believer. Without the cross the believer is like a soldier without arms, a pilot without a compass, or an artist without a brush. We cannot prosper if Christ crucified is not continually held up. **J. C. Ryle states**, "No church will ever be honored in which Christ crucified is not continually proclaimed. Nothing whatever can make up for the lack of the cross. Without it all things may be done decently and in order. Without it there may be splendid ceremonies, charming music, gorgeous churches, learned ministers, crowded communion tables, and huge collections for the poor. But without the cross no good will be done. Dark hearts will not be enlightened. Proud hearts will not be humbled. Mourning hearts will not be comforted. Fainting hearts will not be cheered. Sermons about baptism and the communion table, or about unity and schism, or church fathers and saints, will never make up for the absence of sermons about the cross of Christ. They may amuse some. They will feed none. A gorgeous banqueting room and splendid gold plate on the table will never make up to a hungry man for the lack of food. Christ crucified is God's order for doing good to men. Whenever a church keeps back Christ crucified, or puts anything whatever in that foremost place which Christ crucified should always have, from that moment a church ceases to be useful. Without Christ crucified in her pulpits, a church is little better than a cumberer of the ground, a dead carcass, a well without water, a barren fig tree, a sleeping watchman, a silent trumpet, a dumb witness, and ambassador without terms of peace, a messenger without tidings, a lighthouse without fire, a stumbling block to weak believers, a comfort to infidels, a hot-bed for formalism, a joy to the devil, and an offence to God."

6. Application for us.

Identification (union) in the cross of Christ is the source of power for the believer. Without identification in the cross of Christ, i.e. death to our old nature, we cannot but walk in the flesh. Without identification in the cross of Christ we cannot overcome the sin which so easily besets us, nor the sins which plague us. The temptation to sin is shattered by a look at the crucified Christ and His cross. Without identification in the cross of Christ we will cannot be holy. Meditate, think, and look to the cross, and then go set your affections on the world if we can. Holiness is learned well at the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ sanctifies our feelings, and our tastes are made more spiritual. The cross of Christ darkens the false splendor of this world, and when seen by faith takes all the sweetness out of the pleasures of the world. As the stars are concealed by the light of the sun, so when the Son of righteousness is seen in all the splendor and brightness of the cross, earthly pleasures fade away.

Without identification in the cross of Christ we are filled with doubts as to our standing with God. Without identification in the cross of Christ we remain unlearned and cannot reconcile our own corruption and responsibility to God.

Without identification in the cross of Christ we cannot endure sufferings. We think our sufferings to great and forget whose hand is chastening us. It is the same hand of He who was crucified, and the same hand that in love allowed Himself to be nailed to the accursed tree. Our comfort will come when we realize a crucified Saviour will never lay upon us anything that is not for our good, and that it must be well.

When it comes our time to launch into a world unknown in death, our only source of peace will be the cross of Christ. We must look steadily at the cross of Christ, fix our eyes firmly on Christ crucified, and He shall deliver us through the dark valley. He will never leave us nor forsake us. A dying missionary said, "Ah! there is but one thing needful on a death bed, and that is to feel one's arms round the cross."

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