

GLORYING IN THE CROSS

"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."
Galatians 6:14.

There are four degrees of attachment for a person or a cause: inclination, fondness, love and glorying. Glorying in an object implies having a sincere regard for it, a deep interest in it and a real joy from it. Glorying is one of the most characteristic propensities of human nature. This characteristic is seen in every class of society and in every portion of the human race. Every person discovers something in which he thinks he can glory.

One may glory in his character, reputation, education, possessions, achievements or gifts. If it is said that one glories in his good name, in his riches, or in his friends, it is meant that he sets a great value upon them. As a consequence he thinks and talks much about them, and nothing excites his indignation quicker than to hear them undervalued or censured. All glory in somebody or something. The avaricious glory in wealth, the vain in distinction, the ambitious in power, the self-righteous in virtue, the philosophical in wisdom and the Christians in their Lord.

Once Paul gloried in traditions, rites and ceremonies. Later in his experience there was a diversity of things in which he might have gloried. Paul might have gloried in the fact that he was a Jew. It meant much to be a Jew. The Jews were signally blessed of God and given a great mission to the rest of the world. Paul said, "What advantage hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:1-2). Paul might have gloried in the fact that he was a Pharisee. He said, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee." The Pharisees were the religionists of their day, but in many respects they were a remarkable people -- educated, cultured and refined.

Paul might have gloried in his singular and remarkable conversion. It was a catastrophic intervention of a transcendent God which broke the shackles of sin that bound him and caused the scales of sin to fall from his eyes.

Paul might have gloried in his scholarship. He was one of the best educated men of his day. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of all time. Certainly many men would have gloried in this. Paul also might have gloried in the fact that he was one of the outstanding leaders among the Jews, recognized by all the nation for his ability and leadership.

The Apostle might have gloried in his extraordinary call into the ministry, for no man ever received a call as persuasive as his unless it was Isaiah the prophet. Paul might have gloried in his usefulness as a minister in working for Christ. He preached to multitudes. He founded many of the greatest churches of the Christian era and thousands were saved under his ministry. He might have gloried in his Christian achievements, especially as a writer. Yet in none of these things would he glory. Instead of looking upon any of these things as an object in which to glory, the giant apostle of grace asked that God keep him from glorying in anything except the cross of Christ. It was as if he had said, "Among friends or foes, in liberty or in bonds, in life or in death, I will glory in the cross of Christ."

In the days when Christ was here in the flesh the cross was a symbol of crime, shame and degradation. It was far more hideous than the hangman's gallows of today. Christ transformed the cross so that today it is a symbol of love and purity. Why should we glory in the instrument of the sufferings and death of Christ? Because in the cross we see the character and glory of God displayed; because Christ's sufferings and death brought our redemption; and because the cross raises believers to the level of true greatness.

Our text does not say that Paul gloried in Christ, although he did so with all his heart. He gloried most in the cross of Christ, which in the eyes of men was the very lowest and most inglorious part of total experience. Paul might have gloried in the incarnation of Christ. Angels sang of it, and the wise men came from the east to behold it. He might have gloried in the life of Christ. There was never another so blameless or so benevolent. He might have gloried in the resurrection of Christ. It is the world's greatest hope concerning those who are asleep. He might have gloried in our Lord's ascension. He "led captivity captive", and all of His followers glory in His victory. Paul might have gloried in the second coming of Christ. Instead, he selected the cross of Christ in which to glory.

It appears to me that Paul gloried in the cross of Christ as in nothing else on account of three things.

I. The Position Of The Cross.

1. It holds the central place in the Word of God.
The cross of Calvary is to the Word of God what the sun is to the solar system and what the needle is to the compass. The vicarious death of Christ on the cross is the vital center of the whole Christian system. All the truth of God's Word leads to the cross of Christ.
2. It is the most prominent thing portrayed in the Scriptures.
It is so prominent that it displays divine love, infinite mercy, incomprehensible wisdom, resistless power, inflexible justice and spotless purity.
3. It is the foundation of the gospel.
Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, summarized the gospel of Christ in these words: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3-4)
4. It is the heart of the Christian message.
Those of us, whose privilege and duty it is to proclaim the gospel of Christ, may roll the thunders of eloquence, dart the coruscations of genius, scatter the flowers of poetry, diffuse the light of science, and enforce the precepts of morality; but, if we do not make the cross of Christ central in our preaching, we have forgotten our mission and we shall do very little good.

II. The Purpose Of The Cross.

1. To vindicate the divine justice.
God's law could not be altered. It had to be satisfied. Man had broken God's laws by sinning, so his sin had to be punished. On the cross of Calvary Christ paid the penalty for sin and made it possible for God to forgive sinners without destroying His law.

2. To reveal the love of God.

The cross is the best revelation of the love of God that the world has ever seen. The cross is visible, definite, unmistakable, universal and eternal proof of God's love for sinners. It will ever be the unshakable proof that God is love. It reveals the love of God as nothing else does.

It is an unexampled display of God's love. "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). As an expression of the love of God for sinners the cross of Christ has never been equaled. Through this cross men come to know God. When we gaze upon it we are reminded of the height, depth, breadth and length of His love.

Perhaps you recall the story of the boy who played truant from school for three days, whereupon his teacher went to talk with his father about it. After the teacher left, the father announced that he would punish the boy by making him stay in the attic for three days. The boy was sent to the attic, but that night the father could not sleep with him there. The father said, "I will go to the attic and spend the time with him." He went to the attic and shared the punishment with the boy for the rest of the time. So, God did not set His law aside, but in the Person of Christ He went to the cross and bore the punishment of man's sin for him.

3. To procure the greatest blessings for man.

Among these blessings are the following: the forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, peace of mind, joy of heart, victory over the world, eternal life and the glories of heaven.

People are not saved by the waters of baptism, by observing the Lord's Supper, by morality, by liberality or by human efforts, but by the application of the blood of Christ to their repenting and believing souls. The blood of Christ can remove all the stain of sin from the soul that trusts in Him.

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty."

Mercy was never so merciful nor pardon so broad as at the cross of Calvary.

"Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty
At Calvary!"

III. The Power of The Cross.

1. To convict men of their need of salvation.

The cross of Calvary displayed the divine character and revealed the divine perfection in such a way that an unsaved person cannot see the truth and light of these things without automatically seeing his

wretchedness and lost condition and need of forgiving mercy. The basic need of every person is to be right with God. We cannot be right with God unless our sins are blotted out, our iniquities removed and our transgressions forgiven. Herein lies the great value of the cross. Our sins are forgiven because Christ bore them in His own body on the tree. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

There was no other way of making an atonement for our sins. We glory in the great doctrine of substitution, or the vicarious sacrifice of Christ in our stead. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

2. To persuade the convicted ones to receive Christ as Saviour. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:32-33).
3. To enable Christians to live victorious and useful lives. There the Son of God "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Galatians 1:4). As a beneficiary of the saving power of the Christ of the cross, I am grateful beyond expression for it, and as long as my Lord permits I intend to preach the gospel of the cross and try to bring lost souls to its efficacious power.

Let all of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, because of what He did for us on the cross, serve Him faithfully until He calls us home!