

## GLORY IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST

*6* <sup>11</sup>See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. <sup>12</sup>Those who desire to make a good impression “in the flesh,” they are the ones who are compelling you to be circumcised—[they do so] only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup>Not even those who are circumcised keep the law themselves, but they desire you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh! <sup>14</sup>But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world—<sup>15</sup>for neither circumcision means anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup>[I say concerning] all those who will walk in line with this standard, peace and mercy be upon them, indeed, upon the Israel of God. <sup>17</sup>Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body. <sup>18</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (Gal. 6:11-18)

### **Introduction**

A church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, received a large memorial gift. They debated how they should spend the money. It was suggested that they use the money to purchase a cross and place it atop their steeple. But that idea was rejected for fear they might offend potential new comers. Here was a church that rejected the cross.

A college chaplain removed the cross that was prominently displayed in the center of the communion table. He tucked it away in the cabinet, out of sight; and replaced it with a candle as an innocuous symbol of Christianity. Here was a chaplain who hid the cross.

In contrast to these examples, there is the prayer set to music offered by the hymn writer, Fanny Crosby:

Jesus, keep me near the cross,  
There a precious fountain  
Free to all –a healing stream,  
Flows from Calvary’s mountain.

In the cross, in the cross,  
Be my glory ever,  
Till my raptured soul shall find  
Rest beyond the river.

We must not imitate those who seek to avoid the stigma and the shame of the cross because they desire the respect and acceptance of the world.

Whereas the world shuns the cross of Christ, we, as Christians, are to glory in our Savior’s cross: We are to accept it as the heart of Christianity. We are to rejoice in it as the means of our salvation. We are to appreciate it as the place of our Lord’s awesome sacrifice. We are to willingly identify ourselves with it.

## **I. Glory in the Cross of Christ, ...Because of What It has Done for You (6:14-16)**

As has been noted, a delegation of heretical teachers made their way to the province of Galatia and were disrupting the churches with their doctrine. They taught that the way to God, the way of salvation, was by means of submitting to the sacrament of circumcision followed by one's own personal efforts to conform to the law of God, we refer again to Acts 15:1,5, a passage that summarizes their teaching:

*Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ... <sup>5</sup>Then certain men of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them [the Gentile converts] and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." (Acts 15:1,5)*

The Apostle Paul boldly refutes them, firmly asserting, *"neither circumcision means anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation"* (Gal. 6:15.) That is to say, what is required of a man if he is to be reconciled to God is nothing less than his being made into a new creation. The natural man thinks that all that he needs to make himself acceptable to God is the religious ceremonies of the church and superficial conformity to the law of God. But the Word of God declares that we must be born again: *"Jesus replied to him by saying, I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... <sup>7</sup>Do not be amazed because I tell you, You must be born again"* (Jn. 3:3,7.)

The natural man views himself as being morally respectable and capable of saving himself by means of the law. But the Word of God declares that by nature we are all spiritually dead in our sins and each one of us needs to be resurrected from spiritual death to new life; writing to the converts in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul declares, *"And [he raised you also], when you were dead in your transgressions and sins"* (Eph. 2:1.)

What is required for our salvation is not circumcision, (or any other religious ceremony or religious work;) what is required is that we be made a new creation: *"neither circumcision means anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."*

And the only way for this to be accomplished is by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ: *"far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"* (Gal. 6:14.) Here Paul is once more re-stating the doctrine he first presented in this epistle back in chapter two: *"I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20.) True saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ consists not only in trusting Him to take your place on the cross of Calvary and there pay the awful penalty of your sins, but also in entrusting

yourself to Him and allow yourself to be joined with Him in His death to sin and His resurrection life lived unto God:

*Do you not know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?<sup>4</sup>We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Rom. 6:3-4)*

Note: The New Testament sacrament of water baptism is the sign and seal of the spiritual baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, which one experiences when he believes in Christ. By way of illustration: Let us suppose that your high rise apartment building is on fire. You have managed to get to the balcony, but your valuables are still inside the apartment. When the fireman climbs his ladder to your tenth floor apartment, you not only allow him to enter the apartment on your behalf to save your possessions, you also allow him to carry you over the balcony railing and down the ladder to safety. Likewise, true faith in Christ not only trusts Christ to go to the cross in our place, it also causes us to entrust ourselves to Christ in order that He might convey us safely through the experience of judgment and into the blessed life of God.

When you believe in Jesus with true biblical faith, two supernatural things happen: Jesus died in your place, paying the penalty of your sins; and you were placed into His bosom and joined Him in His death, becoming spiritually dead to the world and alive unto God, by virtue of Christ's subsequent resurrection.

As a Christian, glory in the cross of Christ, because of what it has done for you.

*... far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)*

## **II. Glory in the Cross of Christ, ...Even When It Means Bearing Reproach (6:11-13,17-18)**

In contrast to the Apostle Paul, a man who gloried in the cross of Christ, the heretical teachers are described as men who shun the cross. They shunned the doctrine of the cross because they sought to avoid being persecuted on account of the cross of Christ (vs. 12b.) They would not imitate the Apostle Paul as he describes his preaching in Galatians 3:1, *"Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was publicly proclaimed to be crucified."* On the contrary, they would imitate the Apostle Peter on that occasion when he unwittingly served as a tool of the devil and sought to deter Christ from going to the cross:

*Then he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>Now he spoke these things publicly. So Peter took*

*him [aside] and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But [Jesus], turning around and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and said, Get behind me, Satan; for your mind is not focused the things of God, but on the things of men. (Mk. 8:31-33)*

In chapter five verse eleven Paul described himself as being persecuted because of the offense of the cross: *“But I, brothers, if I am still preaching [the doctrine of] circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?—[for] then the offense of the cross has been removed.”* Despite the opposition and persecution he encountered, Paul was true to his God-given calling: *“we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles”* (1 Cor. 1:23.)

How is it that the cross of Christ is an offense and a stumbling block to men, especially to self-righteous people in the first century Jewish community? The cross was the Roman instrument of execution, reserved for the vilest criminals. The cross was the first century equivalent to the electric chair or the gallows: the instrument and the symbol of death, execution, and judgment. To identify the Christ, the Messiah, the Holy One of God, as being the Crucified One was incomprehensible and utterly repulsive to the Jews. How could the Messiah, the Holy One of God, possibly be executed as the vilest of criminals? The only solution to this dilemma was even more unacceptable to the self-righteous man: Christ was not crucified for any crime that He Himself had committed, on the contrary, He was crucified in the place of His people to make atonement for our crimes against God, even as was foretold by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah:

*... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. (Isa.53:5-6)*

This is the solution. But it is a solution that strips us of all self-righteousness, of all reason for confidence in our own goodness and ability to personally meet God’s standard of holiness. It is a solution that forces us to humble ourselves before God and trust in Him alone for our salvation and join with the tax collector in his prayer: *“the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, the sinner’”* (Lk. 18:13.)

The doctrine of the cross of Christ is a great offense to the natural man—because it dismantles the view he entertains about himself and his relationship to God—that is why there are many who would seek to avoid identification with the cross of Christ. Recall the church that rejected the proposal of having a cross atop its steeple; recall the chaplain who hid the cross in favor of an inoffensive candle.

In verse 17 Paul testifies that he bears branded on his body *“the marks of Jesus.”* In the first century, a slave owner would brand his personal mark upon his slave, thus identifying that slave as the personal possession of the master.

What are *“the marks of Jesus”* that Paul bore—and that we as Christians may expect to bear? Most prominently, *“the marks of Jesus”* include the ridicule, the scorn, and the persecution of the world. Recall again Paul’s testimony to the churches of Galatia: *“But I, brothers, if I am still preaching [the doctrine of] circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?—[for] then the offense of the cross has been removed”* (Gal. 5:11.)

Why did Paul willingly bear *“the marks of Jesus”*? He did so for the sake of the Lord Jesus Himself, note his testimony recorded in Acts 20:24, *“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”* Furthermore, he did so for the sake of Christ’s church: *“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church”* (Col. 1:24.) Note: When Paul speaks of “filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ,” he is by no means suggesting that Christ’s work of atonement was in any way insufficient. The great theme of the Epistle to the Galatians, and the uniform teaching of all the New Testament epistles, is the all-sufficiency of Christ’s work of atonement. What Paul is referring to in Colossians 1:24 is one aspect of sharing in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (Phil. 3:10.) Just as our Lord Jesus suffered affliction (the hostility of the world and persecution unto death) during the days of His earthly ministry, so His affliction continues to be carried on (in the life of His church.) When Paul, the persecutor of the Christian church, was confronted by the risen Jesus, the Lord inquired of him, *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”* (Acts 9:4.) In this sense, Christ’s “afflictions” (Paul uses a term distinct from the term, “sufferings,” which is used with regard to Christ’s work of atonement) continue throughout the New Testament age in the opposition and persecution encountered by His church as His disciples bear His name and witness to the gospel. As Paul ministered to the churches, he encountered a great deal of opposition and persecution, which he identifies as *“the afflictions of Christ.”* But he was willing to continue carrying out his ministry despite such “afflictions,” doing so for the sake of Christ’s church.

As a Christian, glory in the cross of Christ, even when it means bearing its reproach.

## **Conclusion**

We must not imitate those who seek to avoid the stigma and shame of Christ’s cross because they desire the respect and acceptance of the world. For us to do so would be to deny the Savior and to disparage His great sacrifice at Calvary:

*Then he called to himself the [whole] crowd [along] with his disciples, and said to them, If any man desires to be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup>Whoever wants to save his life, will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the [sake of the] gospel shall save it ... <sup>38</sup>Whoever shall*

*be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (Mk. 8:34-35,38)*

Whereas the world shuns the cross of Christ, we, as Christians, must glory in our Savior's cross.