

The Crux of the Cross, part 2

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.”

What is the meaning of life? Why is there so much talk about excellence but such a feeling of emptiness? The empty victory of endless vanity plagues our society. What is life really all about?

The Courtroom: For a moment, picture yourself sitting on the jury listening to lawyers arguing about these issues. In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul confronted two opponents. These enemies are like lawyers at work in the human conscience to this day. They are *Mr. Legalism* and *Mr. License, the Libertine*. The first insists on “Christ plus something” for divine salvation; his stated motive is to protect God’s standard but he boasts in the power of human conduct (Gal. 6:11-13). Mr. License, the Libertine, insists that Christ has lowered God’s divine standard; his motive is to use Christian liberty as an opportunity to act on evil desires (Gal. 5:13). Both groups attempt to quench the real power of the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:17, Galatians 3:17). But Paul’s emphatic argument (Galatians 6:14) brings every one of us to the point of decision: *Choose to glory in the cross of Christ by faith and not in your flesh and its conduct.*

Why is this a very important decision? The Gospel teaches that Christ alone atoned for the sin of humanity. False religion teaches that sin must be addressed by some achievement of humanity. At this very moment, you are making the choice as to which of these you will depend upon. Choose wisely and well.

Boasting: Flesh or Faith? Across the ages, men have boasted in God, bragging about their keeping of the Law (Romans 2:17,23); they boast of their ability to get others to do the same (Galatians 6:11-13). Others have made evil boasts in their human power to plan and control events (James 4:14-16). But the Gospel of Jesus Christ excludes such boasting. *“Where is boasting then? It is*

excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:27-28) The Good News of Jesus Christ is a death blow to human boasting: *“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9) So, in the strongest possible terms (and written in large letters, Gal. 6:11), Paul stressed, *“God forbid that I should glory!”* Yet, he goes on to say that there is one thing in which he can boast. What is it? He can boast *“in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The Lord [God Most High], Jesus [“Jehovah is salvation”], Christ [the Messiah], is ours only through the work of His cross! This is glorious news, worthy of broadcasting and boasting about to the entire world. This is not the defensive boasting of the flesh; this is glorifying our blessed dependence upon faith in Christ alone. To understand this, we need to remember just how horrible a Roman crucifixion really was. As we do, remember the choice: *Choose to glory in the cross of Christ by faith and not in your flesh and its conduct.*

One commentator explained it this way: *“But the nobler object of Paul’s present boasting was, by all ordinary standards of his day, the most ignoble of all objects – a matter of unrelieved shame, not of boasting. It is difficult, after sixteen centuries and more during which the cross has been a sacred symbol, to realize the unspeakable horror and loathing which the very mention or thought of the cross provoked in Paul’s day. The word ‘crux’ was unmentionable in polite Roman society (Cicero, Pro Rabirio 16); even when one was being condemned to death by crucifixion the sentence used an archaic formula which served as a sort of euphemism; [arbori infelici suspendito], ‘hang him on the unlucky tree’ (Cicero, ibid. 13). In the eastern provinces of the empire the Greek word σταυρος [stauros] must have inspired comparable dread and disgust to its Latin equivalent.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

F.F. Bruce went on to observe, *“One could have understood it if the early Christians, knowing that the crucifixion of Jesus was an undeniable fact, had admitted it reluctantly when they were compelled to do so. But Paul, Roman citizen by birth and religious*

*Jew by upbringing, not only dismisses as the merest refuse (σκύβαλα] [skubala] Phil 3:8), those things in which he had once taken a proper pride in but embraces as the most worth-while goal in life the knowledge of the crucified Christ and boasts in his cross – a shocking paradox indeed.”*ⁱⁱⁱ Paul glorified this as the real meaning, the real purpose for life!

How could the message of the cross – which brought to mind an utterly vile, unspeakable horror – be accepted in that society or any society? We see a remarkable contrast in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. The crucifixion of Christ is like the smell of death to those who are lost. They view Christians, who glorify the Crucified One, the same way. But to God the Father, and to those who are saved, the crucifixion and Christians are the fragrance of life.

This question helps us to understand Paul’s comment in 1 Corinthians 1:18, *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”* The preaching of the cross flies in the face of sanitized, respectable religion. Why would God demonstrate His majestic glory through such a vile means as the crucifixion? Paul explained the reason in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, *“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”* To the great glory of God, the cross is an assault on human pride. In the crucifixion we see, at once, the righteous indignation of God against sin and the mercies of God in sending the Savior. The cross destroys boastful, human pride and praises the power of our Heaven-sent Deliverer.

The cross of Christ is what makes Christianity unique; there is nothing else like it. If you do not know Christ, the Crucified and Resurrected One, then we appeal to you to turn to him alone for

salvation (Acts 4:12). As we approach the 80th anniversary of Calvary Baptist Church, this remains as our central message to the public. This message is at the heart of our congregational unity. It gives meaning to our work – instead of the empty victory of endless vanity; this is the work of our eternal Lord that gives us eternal life. The work of Christ on the cross radically transforms human living and human families. Christ’s amazing work enables you to say from your heart, *“For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”* (Romans 11:36).

The Crux of 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.”* The cross of Christ brings us to the point of decision about the Lord and about life. In what will you choose to glory and boast? In yourself? In humanity and its achievements? In Christ alone? When you stop to consider the utterly vile horror of a crucifixion, you realize that it brings you to the greatest intersection in life. The vertical line of the cross pictures God’s gracious intervention into human life. The horizontal line represents humanity’s existence. The great intersection of the cross brings you to the point of decision. Wicked humanity, with all its horror, crucified the Lord of glory. Those who trust God’s gracious work through Christ now know that *“the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”* Here at Calvary, our desire is to help you trust Christ and take up your cross. Jesus said to all, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”* (Luke 9:23); For the world is crucified to us as we are to the world. Those who embrace these glorious, divine promises of salvation confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Why? It is because their eyes are on their heavenly homeland (Hebrews 11:13-14). Make your choice today: *Choose to glory in the cross of Christ by faith and not in your flesh and its conduct.*

ⁱ Bruce, F.F., NIGTC *The Epistle to the Galatians*, (Eerdmans, 1982) p.271

ⁱⁱ Ibid. 271