

“GLORYING IN THE CROSS”¹
Galatians 6:14

I want to introduce you to a great American evangelist. His name is Dwight L. Moody. He is the one after whom the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago is named. He is a great illustration of a man who gloried in the cross. He had a passion for souls. When he died there was a great outpouring of grief both in America and Europe. Mr. Moody began his working life early as a poor under-educated shoe salesman. Yet, when he began to preach his messages moved the hearts of thousands in both Britain and the United States. His education was minimal, and his grammar was atrocious, but his zeal was boundless and his enthusiasm was infectious. When he came to faith in Jesus it was without reservation or hesitation. He held nothing back from following Jesus. There was no rivalry in his life. There were no refusals. There was no retreat! He was now a follower of Jesus and nothing could compete with that!

When the World’s Fair came to Chicago, so did D.L. Moody. Before long, Moody captured the crowds, and the fair had to close on Sundays! The fair had the program but Moody had the people. He chatted to thousands as though he were chatting to a half dozen. People from every walk of life came to hear him preach, and went away with faith in Jesus.

What was the power in this extraordinary life? His focus was on following Jesus Christ and making Him known. He said, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” On another occasion he said, “I should rather say ‘this one thing I do’ than say ‘these forty things I dabble with’”. For him the main thing was the cross of Christ. He gloried in the cross.

The Apostle Paul writes about that in Galatians 6:14. This verse, Galatians 6:14, will be our text for today. As Paul closes his letter to the Galatians, he addresses, “those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh” (verse 12) by getting as many people as possible to follow them in their way of being a believer. In the first century Jewish community it was to get as many Gentiles circumcised as possible. The more they could convince, the more spiritual they were. Verse 13 sounds like the old “notches on the belt” point of view. I’m afraid there is some of that attitude in all of us.

Then Paul reminds us of the correct point of view in verses 14-16. READ NASB. I like the way the New Living Translation reads: "As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world’s interest in me has also died. It doesn’t matter whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation. May God’s peace and mercy be upon all who live by this principle; they are the new people of God." (Galatians 6:14-16, NLT)

Tucked inside this verse are four things that will help us get, or stay, focused on that which brings real, lasting, and eternal glory to us.

I. THE CROSS PROVIDES A GREAT DENIAL. “God forbid, that I should glory or boast except...”

1. **He could boast in his remarkable circles.** Paul came from an influential and affluent family. He had been given a first-class education. He comfortably spoke at least three

¹ This message is taken from John Phillips, *The View From Mount Calvary*, chapter 22.

languages. He possessed a rare and very valuable treasure beyond the price of rubies---he was a freeborn Roman citizen.

Paul was cosmopolitan and comfortable in three worlds: the Jewish world, the Greek world, and the Roman world. He was raised as a Jew who became a rabbi and a Pharisee. He grew up in a Greek city knowing Hellenism with its appeals and problems. He was a citizen of Rome that protected him from most kinds of persecution, some kinds of punishments, and allowed him to “appeal to Caesar” if need be. [See Acts 16; 19-24, 35-40; 22:27-28]

He once said that he was a native of “no little city”. His hometown was Tarsus. Tarsus was a busy seaport. Its harbors bulged with sailors from all over the Roman world. A continual tide of commerce flowed through its docks. Its schools were world famous. The city rivaled both Athens and Alexandria as centers of learning. Its greatest citizen was Paul himself. Paul could have boasted because of his **remarkable circles**, but he didn't.

2. He could boast because of his religious credentials. Not only did Paul move in the right circles, he also had the right credentials. Today we refer to it as “right pedigree”. He was a pureblood Jew of the prestigious tribe of Benjamin. He belonged to the elite sect of the Pharisees. His zeal for the Law of Moses was remarkable. He fasted at least three times a week. He tithed all his income down to the mint in his garden. He kept the Sabbath, the feasts, and the requirements of the Mosaic Law. He was a trained rabbi, having sat at the feet of the famous Gamaliel, who was the grandson of the revered scholar Hillel. At the feet of Gamaliel he studied Scripture, but especially the oral law, “the traditions of the elders”. On top of all of that, he was a zealot. He recognized that Christianity and Judaism were incompatible. He became the most feared persecutor of the early church in his day. He once cited his credentials as “a Hebrew of the Hebrews” [Phil. 3:4-6]. He had plenty of credentials to boast about but instead said “those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ” [Phil. 3:7].

3. He could boast as a regenerated child of God. Even after his conversion, he had plenty to boast about. He could have been a proud apostle. Had he wished to list his achievements he could have filled volumes. It appears he traveled more miles, visited more cities, pioneered more new territory, won more people to Christ, planted more churches, and trained more people for ministry than all the other apostles together. While the other apostles were sitting in Jerusalem, he was out evangelizing, pastoring, and teaching in Europe and Galatia. He was the first to take the Great Commission “to the utter most parts of the world”. In miracles, languages, gifts of the Spirit, and healings he *excelled* them all. In writing the New Testament, he *exceeded* them all. In being beaten, bruised, and bashed he *eclipsed* them all. In being stoned with real rocks, shipwrecked, standing before kings and governors, being disowned by family and in some cases by other Christians, and most other categories he *elapsd* them all.

Paul had one word for boasting in such things. He called it *worldly*. He had one way of dealing with it. He took it to Calvary, to the cross, where he crucified it. He said “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”. He had thoroughly mastered the technique of the great denial. Every time self exerted itself, he took it to the Cross because there he remembered: ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE EYES OF MEN, AS GREAT AS THEY MAY BE; ARE REALLY NOTHING WHEN COMPARED TO THE GLORY OF ETERNITY; THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF MAN ARE COUNTED AS NOTHING BUT DROSS WHEN COMPARED TO WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY JESUS ON THE CROSS.

II. THE CROSS PROCLAIMS A GREAT DOXOLOGY. "...in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

In the Roman world nothing was more despised, dreaded, disgraceful, dishonorable, and disrespected than a cross. To glory in a cross of that day would be like glorying in a gallows or an electric chair today. The cross was an instrument of torture and death. It indicated the death of a criminal and was a horrible death. It was death by execution and exposure. For a Jew it had the additional terror of being death by excommunication, the death of one accursed.

Paul, however, by writing that he would glory in the cross, was not viewing it as a Roman citizen, or as a Greek intellectual, or even as a Hebrew rabbi. He was viewing it as a believing Christian.

Certainly this does not mean that he gloried in the brutality or suffering of the cross. He was not looking at the cross as a piece of wood on which a criminal died. He was looking at the cross of *Christ* and glorying in it. Why would Paul glory in the Cross?

1. He knew the Person of the Cross. Jesus Christ is mentioned at least forty-five times in the Galatian letter, which means that one third of the verses contain some reference to Him. The person of Jesus Christ captivated Paul, and it was Christ who made the Cross glorious to him.... The legalists did not glory in the cross of Christ *because they did not glory in Christ*. It was Moses—and themselves—who got the glory. They did not really know the Person of the Cross.

2. He knew the power of the Cross. To Saul, the learned Jewish rabbi, a doctrine of sacrifice on a cross was utterly preposterous. That the Messiah would come he had no doubt, but that He would come to die—and to die *on a cursed cross*—well, there was no place for this in Saul's theology. The cross in that day was the ultimate example of weakness and shame. Yet Saul of Tarsus experienced the power of the Cross and became Paul the apostle. The cross ceased to be a stumbling block to him and became, instead, the very foundation stone of his message: "Christ died for our sins."

For Paul, the Cross meant *liberty*: from self (Gal. 2:20), the flesh (Gal. 5:24), and the world (Gal. 6:14). In the death and resurrection of Christ the power of God is released to give believers deliverance and victory. It is no longer *we* who live; it is Christ who lives in us and through us. As we yield to Him, we have victory over the world and the flesh. There is certainly no power in the Law to give a man victory over self, the flesh, and the Law. Quite the contrary, the Law *appeals* to the human ego ("I can do something to please God"), and encourages the flesh to work. And the world does not care if we are "religious" just so long as the Cross is left out. In fact, the world approves of religion—apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So, the legalist inflates the ego, flatters the flesh, and pleases the world; the true Christian crucifies all three.

3. He knew the purpose of the Cross.² The cross represents the greatest *tragedy* in man's dealing with God. For on that cross, man murdered the incarnate Son of God. The human race has gloried in what it has done. Just like Joseph's brothers stripped the colorful, long-sleeved tunic from him, rolled it in the blood of a dead goat, and then flung it back at their father, so men took Jesus, shed his blood, and flung Him back in God's face declaring "we will not have this man to reign over us" [Luke 19:14]. They "gloried in the cross" for the death that it brought.

But the cross also represents the greatest *triumph* in God's dealing with mankind. The cross! It was once the very symbol of suffering and shame has become the most important symbol of God's love and grace to us. When the world looks at the cross they see *tragedy* and death. When we look at the cross we see *triumph* and life. It is at the cross of Jesus that God meets us and solves life's greatest problem: my sin! The hymn writer sang: *In the old rugged cross*,

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ga 6:14

*stained with blood so divine, a wondrous beauty I see; For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify me.*³ My, what a different perspective! No wonder Paul exclaims, “May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”!

III. THE CROSS PRODUCES A GREAT DIVIDE. “...the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

The cross divides us from the world. The cross of Jesus divided the two criminals who were crucified with Him. One of them went to heaven and the other to hell. The cross drives a wedge between saints and sinners, family and friends, and between nations. Jesus said He would have this effect: “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. “They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”” (Luke 12:51-53, NASB95)

The world is no friend to those who would be godly. Think of the “world” as human life and society with God left out. It is not without its appeal to our fallen natures. Its wares are described as the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” [1 John 2:16]. The world is the Devil’s lair for sinners and his lure for the saints. The world is never more dangerous to us than when it holds out its hand in friendship. This is illustrated during the wandering years of the nation of Israel when they encountered the two nations of Ammon and Moab. Ammon presented itself to Israel as the *foe* and resisted Israel and was ready to fight. Moab, on the other hand, presented itself as a *friend*. Moab was the more dangerous of the two. When Israel encountered Moab, the Moabites said, “We don’t want to fight you. We offer you our daughters for your sons. We would like to share our institutions, and our ideals, and our inheritance with you. Come and embrace our goals, our girls, and our gods”. [Num. 25] Israel did and suffered greatly for it.

The cross helps put an end to that kind of friendship. The cross shows the world and those in it for what they really are. The cross sets before us the *great divide*. Between the world and the believer stands the bloodstained cross of Jesus. When the world offers its hand in friendship, we need to reply: *Nay world, I turn away; Though you seem fair and good, That friendly, outstretched hand of thine, Is stained with Jesus’ blood.*

Paul put it in terms of crucifixion: “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”. If you live close to the cross you will not get entangled in the world because the cross produces a great divide.

But there is one more thing.

IV. THE CROSS PAYS A GREAT DIVIDEND. “...peace and mercy be upon them”, v. 16. Look at v. 16: “those who walk by this rule [of measuring everything in this world against eternity], peace and mercy be upon them...”. So often Christians think that if they get to close to Jesus He will ask them to give up more than they are willing. They see the world as fun and the Christian life as famine. Not so. Look at what glorying in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ pays: peace and mercy. I first applied this principle of glorying in the cross when I was in high school. I watched what my friends were doing and the misery they were creating in their own

³ *On A Hill Far Away [The Old Rugged Cross]*, by George Bennard. Pg 236 in *Hymns for the Living Church*.

lives and in the lives of others. They called it fun. I didn't see anything funny about hangovers and pregnancies. By living close to the cross I avoided much of the emotional pain and ruined relationships they had to deal with. I still had to deal with a broken heart when a girl friend broke up with me or I with her, but there wasn't a lot of damage. Glorifying in the cross pays with peace of conscience, a clean life, and peace with God because I'm not living counter to His word. Living close to the cross pays mercy, mostly by avoiding the situations that would have produced penalties. But when we do mess up, we often don't suffer the consequences we should.

What are you glorying in? The things of this world or the pardon, sanctification, and eternal life given from the cross?

I urge us to learn to live close to and glory in the cross because that gives us the perspective of eternity. Amen.

Let's close by singing Hymn 236: On A Hill Far Away [The Old Rugged Cross].