



THE
CROSS

J. C. RYLE (1816-1900)

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THE CROSS

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

—Galatians 6:14

Introduction

Reader, What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ? You live in a Christian land. You probably attend the worship of a Christian church. You have perhaps been baptized in the name of Christ. You profess and call yourself a Christian. All this is well; it is more than can be said of millions in the world. But all this is no answer to my question, *“What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ?”*

I want to tell you what the greatest Christian that ever lived thought of the cross of Christ; he has written down his opinion. He has given his judgment in words that cannot be mistaken. The man I mean is the apostle Paul. The place where you will find his opinion is in the letter that the Holy Ghost inspired him to write to the Galatians. And the words in which his judgment is set down are these, *“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Now what did Paul mean by saying this? He meant to declare strongly, that he trusted in nothing but Jesus Christ crucified for the pardon of his sins and the salvation of his soul. Let others, if they would, look elsewhere for salvation. Let others, if they were so disposed, trust in other things for pardon and peace. For his part, the apostle was determined to rest on nothing, lean on nothing, build his hope on nothing, place confidence in nothing, glory in nothing—except *“the cross of Jesus Christ.”*

Reader, let me talk to you about this subject. Believe me, it is one of deepest importance. This is no mere question of controversy. This is not one of those points on which men may agree to differ, and feel that differences will not shut them out of heaven. A man must be right on this subject, or he is lost forever. Heaven or hell, happiness or misery, life or death, blessing or cursing in the last day—all hinges on the answer to this question: *“What do you think about the cross of Christ?”*

- Let me show you,
- I. What the apostle Paul did not glory in
 - II. What he did glory in
 - III. Why all Christians should think about the cross as Paul.

I. What Not to Glory In

A. Paul's view of himself

There are many things that Paul might have gloried in if he had thought as some do in this day. If ever there was one on earth who had something to boast of in himself, that man was the great apostle of the Gentiles. Now, if *he* did not dare to glory, who shall?

1. He never gloried in his *national privileges*. He was a Jew by birth, and as he tells us himself, “an Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phi 3:5). He might have said, like many of his brethren, “I have Abraham for my forefather. I am not a dark, unenlightened heathen. I am one of the favored people of God. I have been admitted into covenant with God by circumcision. I am a far better man than the ignorant Gentiles.” But he never said so. He never gloried in anything of this kind. Never for one moment!

2. He never gloried in his *own works*. None ever worked so hard for God as he did. He was more abundant in labors than any of the apostles. No living man ever preached so much, traveled so much, and endured so many hardships for Christ's cause. None ever converted so many souls, did so much good to the world, and made himself so useful to mankind. No father of the early Church, no reformer, no missionary, no minister, no layman—no one man could ever be named who did so many good works as the apostle Paul. But did he ever glory in them, as if they were in the least meritorious and could save his soul? Never! never for one moment!

3. He never gloried in his *knowledge*. He was a man of great gifts naturally and, after he was converted, the Holy Spirit gave him greater gifts still. He was a mighty preacher, a mighty speaker, and a mighty writer. He was as great with his pen as he was with his tongue. He could reason equally well with Jews and Gentiles. He could argue with infidels at Corinth, Pharisees at Jerusalem, or self-righteous people in Galatia. He knew many deep things. He had been in the third heaven,¹ and heard unspeakable words (2Co 2:12). He had received the spirit of

¹ **third heaven** – dwelling place of God and angels (2Co 12:2); the first heaven is understood to be the earth's atmosphere; the second heaven to be the region of the planets and stars.

prophecy and could foretell things yet to come. But did he ever glory in his knowledge, as if it could justify him before God? Never! never! never for one moment!

4. He never gloried in his *graces*. If ever there was one who abounded in graces, that man was Paul. He was full of love. How tenderly and affectionately he used to write! He could feel for souls like a mother or a nurse feeling for her child (1Th 2:7). He was a bold man. He cared not whom he opposed when truth was at stake (Gal 2:14). He cared not what risks he ran when souls were to be won (Act 17:23). He was a self-denying man: in hunger and thirst often, in cold and nakedness, in watchings and fastings (2Co 11:23-29). He was a humble man. He thought himself less than the least of all saints, and the chief of sinners (1Ti 1:15). He was a prayerful man; see how it comes out at the beginning of all his epistles. He was a thankful man: his thanksgivings and his prayers walked side by side. But he never gloried in all this, never valued himself on it, never rested his soul's hopes in it. Oh, no! never for a moment!

5. He never gloried in his *churchmanship*. If ever there was a good churchman, that man was Paul. He was himself a chosen apostle. He was a founder of churches, and an ordainer of ministers. Timothy, Titus, and many elders received their first commission from his hands. He was the beginner of services and sacraments² in many a dark place. Many a one did he baptize. Many a one did he receive to the Lord's table. Many a meeting for prayer, praise, and preaching did he begin and carry on. He was the setter up of discipline in many a young church. Whatever ordinances, rules, and ceremonies were observed in them, were first recommended by him. But did he ever glory in his office and church standing? Does he ever speak as if his churchmanship would save him, justify him, put away his sins, and make him acceptable before God? Oh, no! never! never! never for a moment!

And now, reader, mark what I say. If the apostle Paul never gloried in any of these things, who in all the world, from one end to the other, has any right to glory in them in our day? If Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory in anything whatever except the cross," who shall dare to say, "I have something to glory of—I am a better man than Paul"?

² **sacraments** – "A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers"—*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 92. Many Protestants today use the word "ordinances" instead of "sacraments" to distinguish from the Roman Catholic Church. The Bible teaches there are two ordinances instituted by Christ in the New Testament: baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which are His gifts to the church by which the church is blessed in remembering Christ. The Roman Catholic Church erroneously believes its seven sacraments are meritorious for earning God's favor.

B. Our view of ourselves

1. Who is there among the readers of this message that trusts in any *goodness* of his own? Who is there that is resting on his own amendments, his own morality, his own performances of any kind whatever? Who is there that is leaning the weight of his soul on anything whatever of his own in the smallest possible degree? Learn, I say, that you are very unlike the apostle Paul. Learn that your religion is not apostolical³ religion.

2. Who is there among the readers of this message that trusts in his *churchmanship* for salvation? Who is there that is valuing himself on his baptism, his attendance at the Lord's table, his church-going on Sundays, or his daily services during the week—and saying to himself, “What lack I yet?” (Mat 19:20). Learn this day, I say, that you are very unlike Paul. Your Christianity is not the Christianity of the New Testament. Paul would not glory in anything but the cross. Neither ought you.

Oh! reader, beware of *self-righteousness*. Open sin kills its thousands of souls; self-righteousness kills its tens of thousands. Go and study humility with the great apostle of the Gentiles. Go and sit with Paul at the foot of the cross. Give up your secret pride. Cast away your vain ideas of your own goodness. Be thankful if you have grace, but never glory in it for a moment. Work for God and Christ with heart and soul, mind and strength, but never dream for a second of placing confidence in any work of your own.

Think, you who take comfort in some fancied ideas of your own goodness; think, you who wrap up yourselves in the notion, “all must be right, if I keep to my church”—think for a moment what a sandy foundation you are building upon (Mat 7:26-27)! Think for a moment how miserably defective your hopes and pleas will look in the hour of death and in the Day of Judgment! Whatever men may say of their own goodness while they are strong and healthy, they will find but little to say of it when they are sick and dying. Whatever merit they may see in their own works here in this world, they will discover none in them when they stand before the bar⁴ of Christ. The light of that great day of assize⁵ will make a wonderful difference in the appearance of all their doings. It will strip off the tinsel, shrivel up the complexion, expose the rottenness of many a deed that is now called “good.” Their wheat will prove nothing but chaff. Their gold will be found nothing but dross. Millions of so-called Christian actions will turn out to have

³ **apostolical** – pertaining to the twelve apostles' experience of vital Christianity in the first century.

⁴ **bar** – judgment seat; court of justice.

⁵ **assize** – session of a court of justice.

been utterly defective and graceless (Mat 25:31-46). They passed current⁶ and were valued among men; they will prove light and worthless in the balance of God. They will be found to have been like the whitened sepulchres of old, fair and beautiful without, but full of corruption within (Mat 23:27). Alas! for the man who can look forward to the Day of Judgment, and lean his soul in the smallest degree on anything of his own!⁷

Readers, once more I say, beware of self-righteousness in every possible shape and form. Some people get as much harm from their fancied virtues as others do from their sins. Take heed lest you be one! Rest not, rest not till your heart beats in tune with St. Paul's. Rest not till you can say with him, "God forbid that I should glory in anything but the cross."

II. Glory in the Cross

A. What "the cross" is

Let me explain, in the second place, what you are to understand by the cross of Christ.

The cross is an expression that is used in more than one meaning in the Bible. What did St. Paul mean when he said, "I glory in the cross of Christ," in the *Epistle to the Galatians*? This is the point I now wish to make clear.

1. The cross sometimes means that *wooden cross* on which the Lord Jesus was nailed and put to death on Mount Calvary. This is what St. Paul had in his mind's eye when he told the Philippians that Christ "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phi 2:8). This is not the cross in which St. Paul gloried. He would have shrunk with horror from the idea of glorying in a mere piece of wood. I have no doubt he would have denounced the Roman Catholic adoration of the crucifix as profane, blasphemous, and idolatrous.

⁶ **passed current** – presented and accepted as truth.

⁷ "Howsoever men, when they sit at ease, do vainly tickle their own hearts with wanton conceit—of I know not what proportionable correspondence between their merits and their rewards that in the trance of their high speculations, they dream that God hath measured and laid up as it were in bundles for them—we see notwithstanding by daily experience, in a number even of them that when the hour of death approacheth, when they secretly hear themselves summoned to appear and stand at the bar of that Judge Whose brightness causeth the eyes of angels themselves to dazzle, all those idle imaginations do then begin to hide their faces. To name merits then is to lay their souls upon the rack. The memory of their own deeds is loathsome unto them. They forsake all things wherein they have put any trust and confidence. No staff to lean upon, no rest, no ease, no comfort then, but only in Christ Jesus."
—Richard Hooker (1554-1600)

2. The cross sometimes means the *afflictions and trials* that believers in Christ have to go through if they follow Christ faithfully, for their religions' sake. This is the sense in which our Lord uses the word when He says, "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, cannot be my disciple" (Mat 10:38; *see also* 16:24). This also is not the sense in which Paul uses the word when he writes to the Galatians. He knew that cross well; he carried it patiently. But he is not speaking of it here.

3. But the cross also means in some places the doctrine that *Christ died for sinners* upon the cross, the atonement⁸ that He made for sinners by His suffering for them on the cross, the complete and perfect sacrifice for sin that He offered up when He gave His own body to be crucified. In short, this one word *cross* stands for Christ crucified, the only Saviour. This is the meaning in which Paul uses the expression when he tells the Corinthians, "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness" (1Co 1:18). This is the meaning in which he wrote to the Galatians, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross." He simply meant, "I glory in nothing but Christ crucified, as the salvation of my soul."⁹

B. What the cross meant to Paul

1. Jesus Christ crucified was the joy and delight, the comfort and the peace, the hope and the confidence, the foundation and the resting place, the ark and the refuge, the food and the medicine of Paul's soul. He did not think of what he had done himself and suffered himself. He did not meditate on his own goodness and his own righteousness. He loved to think of what Christ had done and Christ had suffered—of the death of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the atonement of Christ, the blood of Christ, the finished work of Christ. In this he *did* glory. This was the sun of his soul.

2. This is the subject *he loved to preach about*. He was a man who went to and fro on the earth proclaiming to sinners that the Son of God had shed His own

⁸ **atonement** – act of bringing reconciliation by paying the debt owed for an offense.

⁹ "By the cross of Christ the apostle understandeth the all-sufficient, expiatory, and satisfactory sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, with the whole work of our redemption—in the saving knowledge of, whereof he professeth, he will glory and boast."

—*Cudworth on Galatians*

"Touching these words, I do not find that any expositor, either ancient or modern, Popish or Protestant, writing on this place, doth expound the cross here mentioned as the sign of the cross, but of the *profession of faith* in Him that was hanged on the cross."

—*Mayer's Commentary*

"This is rather to be understood of the cross that Christ suffered for us, than of that we suffer for Him."—*Leigh's Annotations*

heart's blood to save their souls. He walked up and down the world telling people that Jesus Christ had loved them and died for their sins upon the cross. Mark how he says to the Corinthians, "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins" (1Co 15:3). "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1Co 2:2). He, a blaspheming, persecuting Pharisee, had been washed in Christ's blood. He could not hold his peace about it. He was never weary of telling the story of the cross.

3. This is the subject *he loved to dwell upon* when he wrote to believers. It is wonderful to observe how full his epistles generally are of the sufferings and death of Christ—how they run over with "thoughts that breathe and words that burn" about Christ's dying love and power. His heart seems full of the subject. He enlarges on it constantly; he returns to it continually. It is the golden thread that runs through all his doctrinal teaching and practical exhortations. He seems to think that the most advanced Christian can never hear too much about the cross.¹⁰

4. This is what *he lived upon* all his life from the time of his conversion. He tells the Galatians, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). What made him so strong to labor? What made him so willing to work? What made him so unwearyed in endeavors to save some? What made him so persevering and patient? I will tell you the secret of it all. He was always feeding by faith on Christ's body and Christ's blood. Jesus crucified was the meat and drink of his soul. And, reader, you may rest assured that Paul was right.

C. The central point of the Bible

Depend upon it, the cross of Christ—the death of Christ on the cross to make atonement for sinners—is the center truth in the whole Bible. This is the truth we begin with when we open Genesis. The seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head is nothing else but a prophecy of Christ crucified (Gen 3:15). This is the truth that shines out, though veiled, all through the Law of Moses and the history of the Jews. The daily sacrifice, the Passover lamb, the continual shedding of blood in the Tabernacle and Temple—all these were emblems of Christ crucified. This is the truth that we see honored in the vision of heaven before we close the *Book of Revelation*. "In the midst of the throne and of the four beasts," we are told, "and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain" (Rev

¹⁰ "Christ crucified is the sum of the gospel and contains all the riches of it. Paul was so much taken with Christ that nothing sweeter than Jesus could drop from his pen and lips. It is observed that he hath the word 'Jesus' five hundred times in his epistles."

—*Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)*

5:6)—even in the midst of heavenly glory, we get a view of Christ crucified. Take away the cross of Christ, and the Bible is a dark book. It is like the Egyptian hieroglyphics¹¹ without the key that interprets their meaning—curious and wonderful, but of no real use!

Reader, mark what I say. You may know a good deal about the Bible. You may know the outlines of the histories it contains and the dates of the events described, just as a man knows the history of England. You may know the names of the men and women mentioned in it, just as a man knows Caesar, Alexander the Great, or Napoleon. You may know the several precepts of the Bible and admire them, just as a man admires Plato, Aristotle, or Seneca. But if you have not yet found out that Christ crucified is the foundation of the whole volume, you have read your Bible hitherto to very little profit. Your religion is a heaven without a sun, an arch without a keystone, a compass without a needle, a clock without spring or weights, a lamp without oil. It will not comfort you. It will not deliver your soul from hell.

Reader, mark what I say again. You may know a good deal about Christ by a kind of head knowledge, as the dead Oriental¹² churches know the facts of Christianity as well as we do. You may know who Christ was, and where He was born, and what He did. You may know His miracles, His sayings, His prophecies, and His ordinances. You may know how He lived, how He suffered, and how He died. But unless you know the power of Christ's cross by experience, unless you have reason to know that the blood shed on that cross has washed away your own particular sins, unless you are willing to confess that your salvation depends entirely on the work that Christ did upon the cross—unless this be the case, Christ will profit you nothing. The mere knowing Christ's name will never save you. You must know His cross, and His blood, or else you will die in your sins.¹³

¹¹ **hieroglyphics** – words in the ancient Egyptian language, made up of simplified pictures of what they represented. When hieroglyphics were first discovered, they could not be interpreted until another discovery that had a narrative in multiple languages about the same event. One of those languages that was known, was used to decipher the unknown hieroglyphics.

¹² **Oriental** – pertaining to the Orient or East.

¹³ “If our faith stops in Christ's life, and does not fasten upon His blood, it will not be a justifying faith. His miracles, which prepared the world for His doctrines; His holiness, which fitted Him for His sufferings, had been insufficient for us without the addition of the cross.”—*Charnock*

D. A warning

Readers, as long as you live, beware of a religion in which there is not much of the cross. You live in times when the warning is sadly needful. Beware, I say again, of a religion without the cross.

There are hundreds of places of worship in this day, in which there is almost everything except the cross. There is carved oak and sculptured stone. There is stained glass and brilliant painting. There are solemn services and a constant round of ordinances. But the real cross of Christ is not there. Jesus crucified is not proclaimed in the pulpit. The Lamb of God is not lifted up and salvation by faith in Him is not freely proclaimed—and hence all is wrong. Beware of such places of worship. They are not apostolical; they would not have satisfied St. Paul.¹⁴

There are thousands of religious books published in our times, in which there is everything except the cross. They are full of directions about sacraments and praises of the church. They abound in exhortations about holy living and rules for the attainment of perfection. They have plenty of fonts¹⁵ and crosses both inside and outside. But the real cross of Christ is left out. The Saviour and His dying love are either not mentioned, or mentioned in an unscriptural way. And hence they are worse than useless. Beware of such books. They are not apostolical; they would never have satisfied St. Paul.

Dear reader, remember that St. Paul gloried in nothing but the cross. Strive to be like him. Set Jesus crucified fully before the eyes of your soul. Listen not to any teaching that would interpose anything between you and Him; do not fall into the old Galatian error. Think not that anyone in this day is a better guide than the apostles. Do not be ashamed of the old paths in which men walked who were inspired by the Holy Ghost. Let not the vague talk of men who speak great swelling words about catholicity,¹⁶ the church, and the ministry, disturb your peace and make you loose your hands from the cross. Churches, ministers, and sacraments are all useful in their way, but they are not Christ crucified. Do not give Christ's honor to another. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (2Co 10:17).

¹⁴ "Paul determined to know nothing else but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1Co 2:2). But many manage the ministry as if they had taken up a contrary determination, even to know anything [except] Jesus Christ and Him crucified."—*Robert Traill* (1642-1716)

¹⁵ **fonts** – church receptacles, usually of stone, that hold water used for baptism.

¹⁶ **catholicity** – broadmindedness; regarding the Church: pertaining to the universal Church (all true believers in Christ).

III. Christians Glory in the Cross

A. Christ's sufferings

Let me show you why all Christians ought to glory in the cross of Christ.

I feel that I must say something on this point because of the ignorance that prevails about it. I suspect that many see no peculiar glory and beauty in the subject of Christ's cross. On the contrary, they think it painful, humbling, and degrading. They do not see much profit in the story of His death and sufferings. They rather turn from it as an unpleasant thing.

Now I believe that such persons are quite wrong. I cannot hold with them. I believe it is an excellent thing for us all to be continually dwelling on the cross of Christ. It is a good thing to be often reminded how Jesus was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, how they condemned Him with most unjust judgment, how they spit on Him, scourged Him, beat Him, and crowned Him with thorns; how they led Him forth as a lamb to the slaughter, without His murmuring or resisting; how they drove the nails through His hands and feet, and set Him up on Calvary between two thieves; how they pierced His side with a spear, mocked Him in His sufferings, and let Him hang there naked and bleeding till He died. Of all these things, I say, it is good to be reminded. It is not for nothing that the crucifixion is described four times over in the New Testament. There are very few things that all the four writers of the gospel describe. Generally speaking, if Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell a thing in our Lord's history, John does not tell it. But there is one thing that all the four give us most fully, and that one thing is the story of the cross. This is a telling fact, and not to be overlooked.

a. Men forget that all Christ's sufferings on the cross were *fore-ordained*.¹⁷ They did not come on Him by chance or accident. They were all planned, counseled, and determined from all eternity. The cross was foreseen in all the provisions of the everlasting Trinity for the salvation of sinners. In the purposes of God the cross was set up from everlasting. Not one throb of pain did Jesus feel, not one precious drop of blood did Jesus shed, which had not been appointed long ago. Infinite wisdom planned that redemption should be by the cross. Infinite wisdom brought Jesus to the cross in due time. He was crucified by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Act 2:23).

b. Men forget that all Christ's sufferings on the cross were *necessary for man's salvation*. He had to bear our sins if ever they were to be borne at all (Rom 5:8). With His stripes alone could we be healed (1Pe 2:24). This was the one payment of

¹⁷ **fore-ordained** – appointed authoritatively beforehand; predestined.

our debt that God would accept. This was the great sacrifice on which our eternal life depended. If Christ had not gone to the cross and suffered in our stead, the just for the unjust (1Pe 3:18), there would not have been a spark of hope for us—there would have been a mighty gulf between ourselves and God, which no man ever could have passed.¹⁸

c. Men forget that all Christ's sufferings were endured *voluntarily* and of His own free will (Joh 10:15, 17). He was under no compulsion. Of His own choice He laid down His life; of His own choice He went to the cross to finish the work He came to do. He might easily have summoned legions of angels with a word, and scattered Pilate and Herod and all their armies like chaff before the wind (Mat 26:53). But he was a willing sufferer. His heart was set on the salvation of sinners. He was resolved to open a fountain for all sin and uncleanness by shedding His own blood.

B. What the cross teaches

Now, when I think of all this, I see nothing painful or disagreeable in the subject of Christ's cross. On the contrary, I see in it wisdom and power, peace and hope, joy and gladness, comfort and consolation. The more I look at the cross in my mind's eye, the more fullness I seem to discern in it. The longer I dwell on the cross in my thoughts, the more I am satisfied that there is more to be learned at the foot of the cross than anywhere else in the world.

a. Would I know the length and breadth of *God the Father's love* towards a sinful world? Where shall I see it most displayed? Shall I look at His glorious sun shining down daily on the unthankful and evil? Shall I look at seed-time and harvest returning in regular yearly succession? Oh, no! I can find a stronger proof of love than anything of this sort. I look at the cross of Christ. I see in it not the cause of the Father's love, but the effect. There I see that God so loved this wicked world, "that he gave his only begotten Son"—gave Him to suffer and die—"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Joh 3:16). I know that the Father loves us because He did not withhold from us His Son, His only Son. Ah! reader, I might sometimes fancy that God the Father is too high

¹⁸ "In Christ's humiliation stands our exaltation; in His weakness stands our strength; in His ignominy our glory; in His death our life." —*Cudworth*

"The eye of faith regards Christ sitting on the summit of the cross as in a triumphal chariot; the devil bound to the lowest part of the same cross, and trodden under the feet of Christ."

—*Bishop Davenant on Colossians*

and holy to care for such miserable, corrupt creatures as we are. But I cannot, must not, dare not think it, when I look at the cross of Christ.¹⁹

b. Would I know *how exceedingly sinful and abominable sin is* in the sight of God? Where shall I see that most fully brought out? Shall I turn to the history of the flood and read how sin drowned the world (Gen 6-8)? Shall I go to the shore of the Dead Sea and mark what sin brought on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19)? Shall I turn to the wandering Jews and observe how sin has scattered them over the face of the earth? No! I can find a clearer proof still. I look at the cross of Christ. There I see that sin is so black and damnable, that nothing but the blood of God's own Son can wash it away (Isa 1:18; 1Co 6:11). There I see that sin has so separated me from my holy Maker, that all the angels in heaven could never have made peace between us—nothing could reconcile us short of the death of Christ. Ah! if I listened to the wretched talk of proud men, I might sometimes fancy sin was not so very sinful. But I cannot think little of sin when I look at the cross of Christ.²⁰

c. Would I know the *fullness and completeness of the salvation* God has provided for sinners? Where shall I see it most distinctly? Shall I go to the general declarations in the Bible about God's mercy (Lam 3:22-23)? Shall I rest in the general truth that God is a God of love (1Jo 4:8)? Oh, no! I will look at the cross of Christ. I find no evidence like that. I find no balm for a sore conscience and a troubled heart, like the sight of Jesus dying for me on the accursed tree. There I see that a full payment has been made for all my enormous debts. The curse of that Law which I have broken has come down on One Who there suffered in my stead. The demands of that Law are all satisfied (Mat 5:17). Payment has been made for me, even to the uttermost farthing;²¹ it will not be required twice over (Heb 10:26). Ah! I might sometimes imagine I was too bad to be forgiven. My own heart sometimes whispers that I am too wicked to be saved. But I know in my better moments this is all my foolish unbelief. I read an answer to my doubts in the

¹⁹ "The world we live in had fallen upon our heads, had it not been upheld by the pillar of the cross, had not Christ stepped in and promised a satisfaction for the sin of man. By this all things consist; not a blessing do we enjoy but may put us in mind of it. They were all forfeited by sin, but merited by His blood. If we study it well, we shall be sensible how God hated sin and loved a world."—*Charnock*

²⁰ "If God hateth sin so much that He would allow neither man nor angel for the redemption thereof, but only the death of His only and well-beloved Son, who will not stand in fear thereof?"—*Homily for Good Friday* (from Church of England's Prayer Book)

²¹ **farthing** – coin formerly used in Great Britain worth one-fourth of a penny; thus, fulfilled to the finest detail (Mat 5:26).

blood shed on Calvary. I feel sure that there is a way to heaven for the very vilest of men, when I look at the cross.

d. Would I find strong *reasons for being a holy man*? Whither shall I turn for them? Shall I listen to the Ten Commandments merely (Exo 20)? Shall I study the examples given me in the Bible of what grace can do? Shall I meditate on the rewards of heaven and the punishments of hell? Is there no stronger motive still? Yes! I will look at the cross of Christ. There I see the love of Christ constraining me to live not unto myself, but unto Him (2Co 5:14). There I see that I am not my own now; I am bought with a price. I am bound by the most solemn obligations to glorify Jesus with body and spirit, which are His (1Co 6:19-20). There I see that Jesus gave Himself for me, not only to redeem me from all iniquity, but also to purify me and make me one of a “peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14). He bore my sins in His own body on the tree, that I being dead unto sin “should live unto righteousness” (1Pe 2:24). Ah! reader, there is nothing so sanctifying as a clear view of the cross of Christ! It crucifies the world unto us, and us unto the world (Gal 6:14). How can we love sin when we remember that because of our sins Jesus died? Surely none ought to be so holy as the disciples of a crucified Lord.

e. Would I *learn how to be contented and cheerful* under all the cares and anxieties of life? What school shall I go to? How shall I attain this state of mind most easily? Shall I look at the sovereignty of God, the wisdom of God, the providence of God, the love of God? It is well to do so; but I have a better argument still: I will look at the cross of Christ. I feel that He Who spared not His only begotten Son, but delivered Him up to die for me, will surely with Him give me all things that I really need (Rom 8:32). He that endured that pain for my soul, will surely not withhold from me anything that is really good (Luk 11:11-13). He that has done the greater things for me, will doubtless do the lesser things also (2Pe 1:3). He that gave His own blood to procure me a home, will unquestionably supply me with all [that is] really profitable for me by the way (Phi 4:11-13). Ah! reader, there is no school for learning contentment that can be compared with the foot of the cross.

f. Would I gather *arguments for hoping that I shall never be cast away*? Where shall I go to find them? Shall I look at my own graces and gifts? Shall I take comfort in my own faith, love, penitence, zeal, and prayer? Shall I turn to my own heart and say, “This same heart will never be false and cold?” Oh, no! God forbid! I will look at the cross of Christ. This is my grand argument. This is my main stay. I cannot think that He Who went through such sufferings to redeem my soul, will let that soul perish after all, when it has once cast itself on Him (Joh

6:37). Oh, no! what Jesus paid for, Jesus will surely keep. He paid dearly for it; He will not let it easily be lost. He died for me when I was yet a dark sinner. Ah! reader, when Satan tempts you to doubt whether Christ is able to keep His people from falling, bid Satan look at the cross.

C. Importance of the cross

And now, reader, will you marvel that I said all Christians ought to glory in the cross? Will you not rather wonder that any can hear of the cross and remain unmoved? I declare I know not greater proof of man's depravity than the fact that thousands of so-called Christians see nothing in the cross. Well may our hearts be called stony, well may the eyes of our mind be called blind, well may our whole nature be called diseased, well may we all be called dead (Eze 36:26; Isa 1:6; Rom 8:10)—when the cross of Christ is heard of and yet neglected. Surely we may take up the words of the prophet, and say, "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid" (Jer 2:12). Christ was crucified for sinners, and yet many Christians live as if He was never crucified at all!

1. Reader, the cross is the *grand peculiarity of the Christian religion*. Other religions have laws and moral precepts, forms and ceremonies, rewards and punishments. But other religions cannot tell us of a dying Saviour; they cannot show us the cross. This is the crown and glory of the gospel. This is that special comfort which belongs to it alone. Miserable indeed is that religious teaching which calls itself Christian, and yet contains nothing of the cross. A man who teaches in this way might as well profess to explain the solar system, and yet tell his hearers nothing about the sun.

2. The cross is the *strength of a minister*. I for one would not be without it for all the world. I should feel like a soldier without arms, like an artist without his pencil, like a pilot without his compass, like a laborer without his tools. Let others, if they will, preach the Law and morality. Let others hold forth the terrors of hell and the joys of heaven. Let others be ever pressing upon their congregations the sacraments of the church. Give me the cross of Christ! This is the only lever that has ever turned the world upside down hitherto, and made men forsake their sins. And if this will not, nothing will. A man may begin preaching with a perfect knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; but he will do little or no good among his hearers unless he knows something of the cross. Never was there a minister who did much for the conversion of souls, who did not dwell much on Christ crucified. Luther, Rutherford, Whitefield, Cecil, Simeon, and Venn²² were all most eminent-

²² **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German Roman Catholic monk, theologian, university professor, and church reformer whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

ly preachers of the cross. This is the preaching that the Holy Ghost delights to bless. He loves to honor those who honor the cross.

3. The cross is the *secret of all missionary success*. Nothing but this has ever moved the hearts of the heathen. Just according as this has been lifted up, missions have prospered. This is the weapon that has won victories over hearts of every kind in every quarter of the globe. Greenlanders, Africans, South-Sea Islanders, Hindus, Chinese—all have alike felt its power. Just as that huge iron tube which crosses the Menai Straits²³ is more affected and bent by half an hour's sunshine than by all the dead weight that can be placed in it, so in like manner the hearts of savages have melted before the cross, when every other argument seemed to move them no more than stones.

“Brethren,” said a North American Indian after his conversion, “I have been a heathen. I know how heathens think. Once a preacher came and began to explain to us that there was a God, but we told him to return to the place from whence he came. Another preacher came and told us not to lie, nor steal, nor drink, but we did not heed him. At last another came into my hut one day and said, ‘I am come to you in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth. He sends to let you know that He will make you happy and deliver you from misery. For this end He became a man, gave His life a ransom, and shed His blood for sinners.’ I could not forget his words. I told them to the other Indians, and an awakening began among us.” I say, therefore, preach the sufferings and death of Christ, our Saviour, if you wish your words to gain entrance among the heathen. Never indeed did the devil triumph so thoroughly as when he persuaded the Jesuit missionaries in China to keep back the story of the cross!

Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) – Scottish Presbyterian theologian and author; educated at Edinburgh University. He was one of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. As minister of Anwoth in Galloway, he was banished to Aberdeen for nonconformity.

George Whitefield (1714-1770) – one of the greatest itinerant preachers in the history of the church; born in Gloucester, England; studied at Oxford University; an ordained minister of the Church of England. When opposition to his preaching closed church doors to him, he led the way in preaching outdoors.

Charles Simeon (1759-1836) – evangelical Anglican preacher who had lasting influence on English evangelical thought; the agonizing experience of his conversion impressed him forever with the power of the Cross. He preached for three purposes: “to humble the sinner, to exalt the Savior, to promote holiness.”

²³ **huge iron tube...Menai Straits** – suspension bridge between the island of Anglesey and the mainland of Wales. Designed by Thomas Telford and completed in 1826, it was the first modern suspension bridge in the world.

4. The cross is the *foundation of a church's prosperity*. No church will ever be honored in which Christ crucified is not continually lifted up. Nothing whatever can make up for the want²⁴ 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, 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 the catholic Church and an apostolic ministry; sermons about baptism and the Lord's supper; sermons about unity and schism; sermons about fast and communion; sermons about fathers and saints—such sermons 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 want of food. Christ crucified is God's grand ordinance 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, an 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!

5. The cross is the *grand center of union* among true Christians. Our outward differences are many without doubt. And what may be the importance of those differences that now in a measure divide such as faithfully hold the head, even Christ, we cannot here enquire. After all, what shall we hear about most of these differences in heaven? Nothing most probably; nothing at all. Does a man really and sincerely glory in the cross of Christ? That is the grand question. If he does he is my brother; we are travelling in the same road. We are journeying towards a home where Christ is all, and everything outward in religion will be forgotten. But if he does not glory in the cross of Christ, I cannot feel comfort about him. Union on outward points only is union only for time; union about the cross is union for eternity. Error on outward points is only a skin-deep disease; error about the cross is disease at the heart. Union about outward points is a mere man-made union. Union about the cross of Christ can only be produced by the Holy Ghost.

²⁴ **want** – lack.

Application

Reader, I know not what you think of all this. I feel as if I had said nothing compared to what might be said. I feel as if the half of what I desire to tell you about the cross were left untold. But I do hope that I have given you something to think about. I do trust that I have shown you that I have reason for the question with which I began this message: "What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ?" Listen to me now for a few moments, while I say something to apply the whole subject to your conscience.

1. *Are you living in any kind of sin?* Are you following the course of this world, and neglecting your soul? Hear, I beseech you, what I say to you this day: "Behold the cross of Christ." See there how Jesus loved you!²⁵ See there what Jesus suffered to prepare for you a way of salvation! Yes! careless men and women, for *you* that blood was shed! For you those hands and feet were pierced with nails! For you that body hung in agony on the cross! You are those whom Jesus loved and for whom He died! Surely that love ought to melt you. Surely the thought of the cross should draw you to repentance. Oh! that it might be so this very day. Oh! that you would come at once to that Saviour Who died for you and is willing to save. Come and cry to Him with the prayer of faith and I know that He will listen. Come and lay hold upon the cross and I know that He will not cast you out. Come and believe on Him Who died on the cross, and this very day you will have eternal life. How will you ever escape if you neglect so great salvation? None surely will be so deep in hell as those who despise the cross!

2. *Are you inquiring the way toward heaven?* Are you seeking salvation but doubtful whether you can find it? Are you desiring to have an interest in Christ but doubting whether Christ will receive you? To you also I say this day, "Behold the cross of Christ." Here is encouragement if you really want it. Draw near to the Lord Jesus with boldness, for nothing need keep you back. His arms are open to receive you; His heart is full of love towards you (Luk 15:20-22). He has made a way by which you may approach Him with confidence. Think of the cross. Draw near, and fear not.

3. *Are you an unlearned man?* Are you desirous to get to heaven, and yet perplexed and brought to a stand-still by difficulties in the Bible that you cannot explain? To you also I say this day, "Behold the cross of Christ." Read there the

²⁵ The author is proclaiming a free offer of the gospel to all who will hear. His focus is upon the love of God for all who will respond to the gospel proclamation in repentance and faith. It is not his purpose here to delineate between the eternally lost and God's elect children. See *For Whom Did Christ Die?* by Charles Spurgeon, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Father's love and the Son's compassion. Surely they are written in great plain letters that none can well mistake. What though at present you cannot reconcile your own corruption and your own responsibility?²⁶ Look, I say, at the cross. Does not that cross tell you that Jesus is a mighty, loving, ready Saviour? Does it not make one thing plain, and that is that if [you are] not saved, it is all your own fault? Oh, get hold of that truth, and hold it fast!

4. *Are you a distressed believer?* Is your heart pressed down with sickness, tired with disappointments, overburdened with cares? To you also I say this day, "Behold the cross of Christ." Think whose hand it is that chastens you. Think whose hand is measuring to you the cup of bitterness that you are now drinking. It is the hand of Him that was crucified. It is the same hand that in love to your soul was nailed to the accursed tree. Surely that thought should comfort and hearten you. Surely you should say to yourself, "A crucified Saviour will never lay upon me anything that is not for my good. There is a needs be."²⁷ It must be well."

5. *Are you a believer that longs to be more holy?* Are you one that finds his heart too ready to love earthly things? To you also I say, "Behold the cross of Christ." Look at the cross. Think of the cross. Meditate on the cross, and then go and set affections on the world if you can. I believe that holiness is nowhere learned so well as on Calvary. I believe you cannot look much at the cross without feeling your will sanctified, and your tastes made more spiritual. As the sun gazed upon makes everything else look dark and dim, so does the cross darken the false splendor of this world. As honey tasted makes all other things seem to have no taste at all, so does the cross seen by faith take all the sweetness out of the pleasures of the world. Keep on every day steadily looking at the cross of Christ, and you will soon say of the world as the poet does—

*Its pleasures now no longer please,
No more content afford;
Far from my heart be joys like these,
Now I have seen the Lord.
As by the light of opening day
The stars are all conceal'd,*

²⁶ Reference is to the apparent conflict between two biblical truths: 1) man is totally corrupted in heart so that he has no desire for God (Psa 14:2-3), and 2) man is responsible unto God to repent and believe the gospel, to turn to God from his sin (Rom 1:20; Mar 1:15). See *God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* by J. I. Packer, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

²⁷ **needs be** – necessary reason (for God allowing it).

*So earthly pleasures fade away
When Jesus is reveal'd.*²⁸

6. *Are you a dying believer?* Have you gone to that bed from which something within tells you you will never come down alive? Are you drawing near to that solemn hour when soul and body must part for a season, and you must launch into a world unknown? Oh! look steadily at the cross of Christ, and you shall be kept in peace. Fix the eyes of your mind firmly on Jesus crucified and He shall deliver you from all your fears. Though you walk through dark places, He will be with you. He will never leave you, never forsake you (Heb 13:5). Sit under the shadow of the cross to the very last, and its fruit shall be sweet to your taste. "Ah!" said a dying missionary, "there is but one thing needful on a deathbed, and that is to feel one's arms round the cross."

Reader, I lay these thoughts before your mind. What you think now about the cross of Christ I cannot tell; but I can wish you nothing better than this, that you may be able to say with the apostle Paul before you die or meet the Lord, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."



²⁸ From the hymn "Let Worldly Minds the World Pursue" by John Newton (1725-1807).

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

The following questions are designed to reinforce understanding and application.

A separate study guide with complete questions covering all aspects of the text also is available, for correspondent, independent, or group study. Contact Mount Zion Bible Institute at the same address or school@mountzion.org.

1. Why is the subject of the cross so important?
2. List some of the things men trust in for salvation when they do not trust in the cross of Christ.
3. What is it to “glory in the cross”?
4. How is the cross the “central point of the Bible”?
5. List some of the key Scriptures for the cross of Christ and give their meanings.
6. How does the cross illustrate
 - a. God’s wrath?
 - b. God’s love?
7.
 - a. What reasons to be holy are in the cross?
 - b. Where is a source for assurance of salvation? Why?
8. How is Christianity different from all other religions in the world?
9. What are you trusting in for salvation? Will it stand in the Day of Judgment? Explain.