

# The Cross

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The teaching of the Galatian epistle as to the death and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the moral lessons which flow from its application is of the utmost importance. Speaking of this holy and solemn theme we refer first to Acts 2: 23, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

There are, decidedly, two aspects of the death of our Lord here. First, it was according to God's counsel and foreknowledge; secondly, it was the culminating action of the hatred and rebellion of men. Thank God, from long before time began, in view of the incoming of sin with all its dread consequences, a divine counsel determined that the establishment of the will and glory of God, and the laying of a righteous basis for the blessing of men, should rest on that very death which was the crowning act of man's hatred. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross is the basis of all God's designs for the blessing of men. Indeed, we can rightly and thankfully say that the cross is the centre of eternity. Eternity past, as we speak, looked forward to the cross, and eternity to come will look back to the cross. By the cross, with the sacrificial death of our Lord, God has been vindicated; sin has been dealt with; the devil defeated; righteousness established; and the love of God has flowed out towards those who otherwise would have been, deservedly, banished from His presence for evermore.

The cross is the touchstone for righteous judgment, as our Lord has said — "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12: 31).

There are many references to the death and crucifixion of Christ in the Galatian epistle. In Galatians 1: 1 we have His death referred to in the words — "God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." Thankfully we are not left finally with His death. Whilst we speak freely on this occasion of that death, we do so in the knowledge of the triumph of His resurrection. If the first verse reminds us that Christ has been into death, verses 3 and 4 tell *why* He died. Let us pause and ponder these words — "our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself . ." Wonderful indeed, as we read in Matthew 13: 44-46, that in order to obtain the treasure or the pearl He should sell all that He had; but here we learn that He "*gave Himself.*" Amazing love! And He gave Himself for "our sins."

We may say with the hymn writer — "My sins deserve eternal death but Jesus died for me." We might have thought that His sole object in doing so was to deliver us from eternal judgment; that He has done so is blessedly true, but here we read that He "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world."

We shall surely be taken out of the present course of things, spirit, soul and body, when He comes for His own. Yes, we shall be transported from this world where He has been crucified into that world where He has been glorified. Praise God for such a blessed prospect; but He desires that we should be for Him in this world, separated from its spirit, its habits and its pleasures. Praise Him again and again for bearing the cross for us — our sins have been so satisfactorily dealt with to the glory of God that when the stroke of judgment falls, as it most surely shall, it will not fall upon those who have trusted Him as Saviour. The stroke of judgment fell on Him at the cross and we are for ever free. May we, in response to that "love so amazing, so divine," stand apart from the world which rejected and crucified Him. May we be non-conformist to this Christ-rejecting world, and stand apart in holy separation from its religion, politics, pleasures of sin, and pride of life, so coming under the transforming power of His attractive grace that we may be more conformed to His image.

We observe, too, that He has so given Himself, "according to the will of God, and our Father." The pleasure of God is involved in the work that Christ did when He gave Himself for our sins. He is glorified in having the saints in holy separation from this present evil world in response to that love that gave Christ to die. And God is "our Father;" we are brought into relationship with Himself as revealed in the Person of the Son. Christ has been crucified to remove all that stood in the way. Well might we worship before God saying — "to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

In Galatians 2: 20 we read (the apostle speaks in the first person), "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and 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." The law is not a rule of life but of death, and Paul had said, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." He had gone through the exercise of an awakened soul under the law and learned that instead of giving life it ministered death on account of what he was. Not one of us has power to keep the law, and the law has not the power to vitalise us — it can only accuse and condemn. So Paul said, as to the responsible life to which the law addressed itself, "I am crucified with Christ."

Christ had actually died and risen again, and if God in His pre-determinate counsel had associated Paul with Christ's death wherein the consequences of the broken law had been fully met, then Paul, by faith, identified himself with that death. What a wonderful identification on the part of Paul with Christ in crucifixion — that death which speaks of the awful judgment of God against sin in the flesh. Crucifixion speaks of the shameful death which our Lord died; truly, in the eyes of the world He was the off-scouring of all things — a spectacle for heaven and earth — outcast from the earth. Paul applied the truth of Christ's death to himself. Taking stock of himself in all that he was as a man in the flesh under the law with its complete inability to remedy his fallen condition, he said, "I am crucified with Christ."

As to that condition which had come under the condemnation of God in the cross he took his place with the crucified Christ. He did not say, "We are . . .," for he had come to this judgment of *himself*, and so speaks of it experimentally, "I am . . ." The road is open for every believer to travel the same way, but we must do it for ourselves and say — "If God has come to an end of man after the flesh and expressed that in the crucified Christ, then I say Amen to God. I accept that He has judged me. I am crucified with Christ." The Paul also said, "nevertheless I live."

Crucifixion with Christ is not the end of the story, for Christ lives in a life to which sin, law, or death, have nothing to say. We have Christ for our life. The apostle said — "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

He still lived in the responsible condition here upon earth, but he lived to God, for he has Christ for his life. He lived by faith — faith which has the Son of God for its object; and the Son of god exerts the most powerful influence, unlike the law which demands and prohibits, and accuses and condemns the man incapable of complying — "the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." God grant that we all might take our place in association with Christ, saying "I am crucified with Christ," and thus prove for ourselves the motivating and empowering effect of the love of the Son of God.

Galatians 3: 1, ". . . before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you . . ." Of course, this does not mean that our Lord had been actually crucified among these Galatians; rather that the gospel preaching of Paul among them had graphically portrayed the truth that Christ *had been crucified*. Why then had Paul thus portrayed Christ among them? To emphasize the truth that the end of all flesh had come before God in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that they, each and all of them, might for themselves take up the truth, appreciating that the entire legal system was entirely

incapable of perfecting them before God either positional or practically. All that the law can do, being weak through the flesh, is to accuse and to condemn. Indeed, Christ as we read in the Roman epistle (Rom. 10: 4), "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

So the apostle would have them obey the truth in spite of their apparently having been bewitched by those who oppose the truth. Have we reached the end of the old man? Have we really arrived at the truth that we are no longer in the flesh? God's judgment upon all that man after the flesh is, whether religious or irreligious, has been most plainly declared in the cross. God is finished with man of fallen Adam's line — am I? His trial of man has ended at the cross. There He has for ever condemned sin in the flesh. Oh, may we thankfully respond and sincerely say, "Yes, I am crucified with Christ."

Here then we learn that the only way of deliverance is by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in Galatians 3: 13 we read, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

The curse of the broken law must be sustained; were it sustained in us we must be for ever damned. Praise God it has been sustained by One competent to do so. Our blessed Saviour has redeemed us from the curse of the broken law, and He has done so by having been crucified, thus Himself bearing the curse. This then is the only way of redemption for the Jew to whom God gave the law, and for the Gentile to whom God did not give the law, as we read in verse 14, "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ;" in verse 13 the reference is especially to the Jew — "us;" then Christ having been made a curse — the judgment thus being borne — blessing extends in verse 14 to Gentiles, that whether Jew or Gentile "we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Christ bore the curse — the judgment of God for breaking the law — by being made a curse. He so completely identified Himself with the condition of those who had broken the law — let it be clearly said and emphasized, *sacrificially* in His being crucified — that blessing flows freely beyond all Jewish limits.

Attention has been drawn to Deuteronomy 27 in regard to the "curse." There Moses charged that six tribes should stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless, the other six should stand upon Mount Ebal to curse. When the pronouncement is given only the curses are mentioned. How significant then is that word — "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Galatians 3: 10). It has been said, "As sure as they took legal ground, they could only get a curse; and accordingly the curses only are heard." How glad we are to know that the cross removes the curse.

We turn to Galatians 4: 4, 5 — "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

The deepest judgment yields the highest blessing! In consequence of what Christ has done, and as having been sent forth from God for the purpose, redemption and sonship are available for those who believe. We do not here expound the background of the Epistle's teaching as to the condition of servile bondage which obtained under the law, but desire only to stress the blessed fruits of our Lord having been crucified. "The fullness of time" refers to the close of God's probationary dealings with men. God has sent forth His Son — God has done it! Here is the unfolding of the story of the sovereignty and the love of God. How wonderful the epitome of the ways of God in verse 4! There are three aspects of Christ's Sonship — Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David. The grace of His incarnation is before us here. Think of God's Son made of a woman! A real Man, sin apart, to be available to men, and to bring the richest blessings of God to them. For as the woman's seed He would bring deliverance from the thralldom of Satan, sin, and death; He would bruise the serpent's head; yet not without suffering to

Himself. The necessity of His crucifixion lies behind these blessings of redemption and sonship. "Made under law" He would, as we have seen, remove the curse by bearing it Himself. those that were under the law thus receive sonship by virtue of what He has done in being crucified; and Gentiles, too, "because *ye are* sons," fruit of love divine. Note, we are not sons by *attainment*; we do not reach sonship by acquiring the consciousness of sonship; nay, but having been brought into the *relationship* we have been given the Spirit of God's Son that we might know the sweet intimacy and consciousness of the relationship. Every barrier to our being brought into such blessing has been removed righteously by the death of God's Son; to Him be everlasting glory! We are now no more servants, but sons, "and if a son, then an heir of God *through Christ*."

We pass on to Galatians 5: 11 — "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence (the scandal) of the cross ceased."

Paul certainly did not preach circumcision anywhere, nor at any time, whatever may have been alleged against him. It is plain that the enemies of the gospel of saving grace, the enemies of the cross of Christ, did not hesitate to calumniate the apostle, hoping thereby to strengthen their own case. The only circumcision which Paul taught at any time was that spiritual answer to the literal — "ye are complete in Him, . . . In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands . . . by the circumcision of Christ" (Colossians 2: 10-12).

Indeed, had Paul preached circumcision, as did those Judaisers who came to Antioch, saying — "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved," he would not have been persecuted (Acts 15: 1). It was the refusal to acknowledge man after the flesh which incurred for the apostle such bitter and inveterate hatred and suffering. In the cross there was, as we have seen in considering chapter 2, the judicial end of man after the flesh — religious or irreligious.

God seeks nothing, asks nothing, of that man; but offers everything necessary to set man up in righteousness. Why, the apostle said — If there is no persecution it would mean that the "offence (scandal) of the cross is ceased." In the eyes of the religious world the cross is a scandalous thing. How indignant man is that the gospel declares that righteousness is only available by faith in the crucified One. As our Lord went forth "bearing His cross" How exultant were the boastful religionists at having (as they thought) so accomplished His end! Hence the Scripture announced that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." Let those who have trusted Christ as Saviour cry out — "but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1: 18-19). There God fulfilled the Scripture which said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." What a blow then to man is "the scandal of the cross."

So we see from our verse in Galatians 5 there has been no mitigation, neither of man's scorn, nor of God's judgment. No! the scandal of the cross has certainly not ceased! All hope of blessing is found alone in the redemption that the crucifixion of Christ has wrought. Our wisdom lies in confessing our utter ruin, and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour in faith which rests entirely on His finished work. In verses 19-21 the works of the flesh are seen in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22 and 23. May we say *no!* to the works of the flesh in the spontaneity of the living power of the Spirit who ever delights to occupy us with Christ; He who perfectly exemplified in the moral beauty of His life, as He walked through the world, the ninefold fruit of the Spirit. Thus shall we practically evidence the truth — "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5: 24).

We turn now to Galatians 6: 12 — "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only let them should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ." This is

an extension of the theme we have considered from chapter 5. Evidently the truth of the cross is inimical to the glory of man. If we set out to make a fair show in the flesh we set aside the truth of the cross. Further down we read in verse 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."

Both man and man's world are judged in the cross. Estranged from God, man has surrounded himself with a system of things in which he can be content without God. The true character of the world is seen in the cross of Christ, for while man thought he had judged Christ there as being unworthy of a place in man's system of things, God in the cross has judged the world as unfit for Himself. If then the world has been crucified to me in the cross of Christ, then I am finished with the world; and just as clearly if I am crucified unto the world then the world is finished with me. God grant this to be true practically of everyone of us. Thus the apostle brings back to Galatians 2: 20, and to the truth of identification with Christ in His crucifixion — "I am crucified with Christ;" and also to Galatians 1: 4 — "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world."

If we enter into these truths we shall stand in holy separation now in view of that day when He will take us out of the world altogether. Thus we close — "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." Amen.