

To Glory In The Cross

Chapter One:

In What Cross Should We Glory?

“But God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

Galatians 6:14

Many Christians read this verse and believe that they are in total agreement with the apostle Paul concerning glorying in the cross. Yet, which cross is it in which they glory? Is it indeed the same one in which Paul gloried? If you ask the average Christian what it is about the cross that they glory in, they will tell you of salvation, healing, blessing, or eternal life. All the things they mention have validity in the scriptures, but they are aspects of the cross which have benefits toward them personally. They may not realize that their reason for glorying in the cross is completely different than that of the apostle Paul. It all depends on the view taken of the death of Jesus.

The question before us is not whether we have personal reasons for which we might glory in the cross, but “Do we glory in the cross on the same basis as the apostle Paul?” And an even greater question must be asked: “Do we glory in the cross on the same basis that the scriptures set forth as the way in which GOD WANTS US TO GLORY IN THE CROSS”?

Our personal reasons for glorying in the cross may seem to be everything to us, but God has given us guidelines through the scriptures as a basis upon which we should proceed. Whether our choices for glorying in the cross are our own or the general consensus of the modern day church is not the important thing. The real issue is what God has to say concerning this subject. There are those who take me to task over my view of the cross. They want to make it an issue of what I believe as opposed to what they believe, but neither my opinion nor theirs means anything ultimately, only God’s as outlined in the Word of God.

Because some men hold to their opinion more than to God and His Word, two separate views of the cross have emerged. In fact, the divide has become so great that literally two different crosses are evident in today’s theology. Let us approach this subject with a true heart to find the biblical explanation, and having found it, pursue it with all that is in us. And let us seek to truly follow Jesus and His teachings. We should not hold on to traditional views simply because they are more widely accepted in today’s modern churches. Let’s face it: there are many popular teachings today that are in great contrast to that of the church fathers who set forth the true way of God for us.

The Cross in Which Paul Gloried

The word “glories” in this verse can also be translated “boasts”. What are we boasting in, and what are we proud of? Paul glories in nothing; he boasts in nothing but the cross that crucified him. Notice that I did not say that he glories in the cross THAT

SAVED HIM. When we boast in the cross, are we boasting in a cross that frees us? God's apostle boasts in a cross that crucifies us. When we glory, is it in a cross that gives us finances, success, fame, and the goods of this world? The man whom God used to write most of the New Testament glories in a cross that crucified the world to himself and him to the world so that all material objects of the world were non-factors in his life.

The heart of the cross that Paul is presenting in these verses is not the death of Jesus on the cross but the death of himself. Paul glories in the cross, not over the great things the cross has done for him but for what it took away from him. To remove us from the death of the cross is not to water it down but to make it something it was never intended to be.

Are you glorying in THIS cross? Do not bring up how often you attend church, how much you give in offerings, or how God blesses you when you minister because the question is: Do you glory in the correct cross?

Crucified “Unto the World”

Let us take note of the particular application presented by Paul in this verse and how he applies the cross to our lives. Our verse from Galatians 6:14 shows plainly that our status before God is that we are crucified to THE WORLD. That is one of the main reasons why we died with Christ. So let it be clearly declared that Jesus did not die in order to advance our material welfare but to make all of us unaffected by the pulls and gains of the world. That being said, let us ask a few more questions. What is the remedy for teenagers, drug addicts, and all mankind against the pull of the world? Is the answer found in our getting Jesus to rush in as Savior and deliver us from its grasp? No! In order to deliver us from the world, the Deliverer dies and brings us into death with Himself.

But how do we know if we are of the world and therefore under its control? Someone who is of the world is a person who finds his way, not by Christ but by his own abilities, merits, and achievements. The dynamo of his philosophy is self at the helm, and behind all his actions is the motivation of personal benefit. Man is at the center and all revolves around him. This does not mean that those who proceed in this manner are devoid of God. They may be seeking God on a regular basis in order to get Him to give them the things of this world that they desire. They believe in a Christ who blesses but do not believe in Him as a selfless principle of Life or as One who demands the cross FOR US (cf. I Jn. 5:19).

According to Psalm 17:14, those of this mindset are offended at the word of the cross and fight to gain their portion in this world (cf. Ps. 17:12-14). All who want their portion in this life remain bound by a mentality possessed by fallen mankind and are swept along according to the course of this world. In contrast to them, the Psalmist wanted to be delivered from those kind of people. Paul was of a similar mind to David. He found the cross as a friend so that Christ would be his only portion. This apostle made it clear that the basis for our Christian experience was to be “*Not I but Christ*” (cf.

Gal. 2:20). The crux of the plan of God demands that “I” be crucified. However, there are those who void that out simply by saying, “I do not believe in the cross in that way.”

If you have not embraced your crucifixion with Christ, then your only resource for standing against the pull of the world is by means of human flesh, which has no power against the pulls but in fact joins sides with them. On the other hand, if you are crucified with Christ, then you are dead. A dead man also has no power against the world. The purpose for our being crucified is so that we might not rely on human flesh but rely on another Life within: “*Greater He that is in you than he that is in the world*” (I Jn. 4:4). Notice how John, the writer of I John, joins with Paul in bearing witness of the method which God has chosen for us to be able to overcome the world.

Paul’s Glory Was “In the Cross”

It is amazing how the central element that Paul chooses to emphasize is the cross. However, his choice is not the same as that of many others. That is not what much of modern day Christianity has held up as what we should consider to be most important. To a man, believers will declare that the resurrection is more important and is the thing in which we should glory. The common refrain of reproach thrown at those who hold the same view as that of Paul and the Bible is that there is too much emphasis on death. It is also stated that we should talk more about life, victory, and power instead of morbidity and crucifixion.

If a person has not yet comprehended the wisdom of God, I can see how they would come to such a conclusion about subjects other than the cross. Clearly the tendency to preserve self, along with a general aversion to the thought and subject of death, would push a person away from such a teaching (cf. Heb. 2:15). That being the case, how is one ever to bridge the gap between their view and a view of the cross that Paul seems to take? The answer is simple: We must find God’s priorities and not our own. We must not turn a blind eye to the multitude of scriptures that point to our death and to the cross as being the center-point of all Christianity. As Jesus said of Himself, “*My doctrine is not mine*” (Jn. 7:16). Even so, we will eventually have to give up doctrines that are more pleasing to our flesh or are more conducive to growing a big church. We will need to embrace a teaching that would not have been one we would have chosen or wanted to embrace as our own. Only God can bring a person to this, but man has the responsibility to be open to Jesus when He is outside knocking on the door of the church trying to get back in (cf. Rev. 3:20).

It is not easy to glory in a cross that brings about your own death, but I can see how it would be easy to glory in resurrection. The whole scene in our minds of what resurrection entails is bathed in glory. However, when Jesus spoke concerning the hour of His “glory”, it was not in reference to the resurrection but to His death (cf. Jn. 12:23-24). Until the believer is ready to drop his guard, sincerely ask the Lord what these things mean, and then open himself to the possibility of the Holy Spirit bringing him into another realm of viewpoint, he will continue to set up walls of resistance that keep him from discovering the fullness of the heart of God.

The Mount of Transfiguration presents to us another of those enigmas. There, Jesus is seen as outshining every one and everything. We assume that it is the closest thing to a view of resurrection we are going to get this side of eternity. Based on our view of the scene, we see Jesus in the height of glory, and gathered to Him some of the most renowned figures of God. But what is it you would hear if you were allowed to listen in on the conversation had by this glorious gathering? Is the topic as high in glory as this holy mount and of the glory of those present? Yes! The topic is the cross. When God's most spiritual men gather with Jesus to have a conversation, they talk about the cross (cf. Lk. 9:28-31).

Admiring the Cross That Crucifies Us

Once you begin to take Galatians 6:14 apart and analyze it, you realize that it communicates incredible things. For example, Paul does not merely say that he simply accepts his own death or is even resigned to it but that he admires the cross for bringing it about. He literally glories in it.

He follows a similar line of thought in Philippians 3:3-7, where he shows that he no longer boasts in what he had accomplished on behalf of God but boasts that being dead has stopped him from being the source of anything. Are you glorying in the cross that stills your hands, feet, and tongue, while only allowing for what is Christ? The result of one who truly comprehends the meaning of Romans chapter seven is that he will mightily have his boast in the cross of his own crucifixion (cf. Rom. 7:24-25).

So we see that God's apostle does not confine himself to the fact that he preaches the cross or even believes in it, but that he actually glories in it. Paul's definition of glorying in the cross means that there is a total allegiance with and an all-out surrender to it. To him, THIS CROSS is the most significant thing of all teachings, all subjects, and all realities set forth by the Holy Spirit. If, right now, you were able to ask Paul what he would suggest that you put your own greatest boast in, what would be his reply? He would tell you to glory in the fact that you were crucified with Christ. He is not here today, but be assured that if we would ignore him in the Word of God, we probably would ignore him if he appeared unto us in person (Lk. 16:27-31).

The Cross – Our Exclusive Message

The effect of the cross on Paul's life was so profound that he actually gloried in the thing that many Christians run from today. In the scope of his writings, we find that he gave total allegiance to this subject. But if we draw the magnifying glass even a little closer, we will discover how deep his commitment to the cross really was.

“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (I Cor. 2:2). We already have found that he glories in the cross, but in this verse it is revealed to us that he glories in it ONLY or exclusively. Paul has made THIS cross his exclusive subject and message. We may bring up the cross or our death with

Christ from time to time yet refrain from honoring it as our exclusive message. We may nod in its direction, but our heart may have chosen something else as our pet doctrine. What about you? What is your stance? Do you glory in the cross above all else, or do you hold back? What is your reaction to this cross as presented by Paul? HIS reaction was to hold it higher than any other subject and not to resist it but to glory in it.

Do we feel resistance within ourselves when confronted with this viewpoint? And if we feel some resistance toward a whole-hearted embrace of the cross, will we at least examine our deepest motives to see if we are deceiving ourselves and find out if the cross is an offense to our flesh? Some say, "It is not an offense to me." But do you glory in it exclusively above other truths? To test whether the cross is an offense to us will require one to read these verses as they are written in the Bible and examine our reaction. Do our hearts thrill over such a thing?

What Did THEY Glory In?

"As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh."

Galatians 6:12-13

"And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased."

Galatians 5:11

From these verses we are able to surmise that there were others in Galatia whose contradictory views concerning the cross were in opposition to those of Paul. We have specifically seen that his view relates to his own death on Calvary, and on that point he gloried. But now let us examine the opposing view and what it was that THEY GLORIED IN. He glories in the cross, but they "*glory in....(your) flesh*" (cf. Gal. 6:13). Though that was what they chose to boast in, Paul showed a contrast by stating "*but as for me...*". He could not glory in the flesh, for that would be the same as to glory in the thing that Jesus chose for crucifixion.

The flesh that they gloried in was not sinful flesh but flesh that would do certain things to gain acceptance with God and with other believers. They were producing "Ishmaels" (cf. Gal. 4:22-31). The thing that causes people to be offended with the cross, as mentioned in Galatians 5:11, is counting everything we have used to please God as being worthy of death. To avoid the offense of the cross, they preach the cutting off of flesh by other means than that of the cross. In so doing, then is the offense of the cross ceased for them.

But for those who embrace their crucifixion with Christ, there comes a change in the objects of which they boast. Because of death with Him, what things that remain are only what has been given of God and come as a result of His life within. If truly dead with Jesus, then we have earned nothing and do nothing to bring things about. Paul again is our example. Formerly he would glory in outward proofs that asserted his separation

and honorability before God: things such as his position as a Pharisee or his lineage. But we find that he gave all that up.

His death with Christ meant everything to this great apostle. Our death with Christ should mean everything to us also. Why? Because we are finally out of the way. By the cross, the strong man (us in our self-sufficiency) has had his goods spoiled. Paul boasts in the cross, not based on him being saved, for he does not mention THAT aspect. His boast is because GOD IS SAVED from having to put up with his flesh. Formerly he boasted in the fact that he was a Hebrew, but not anymore. Now, in resurrection, Christ is all.

Chapter Two: **Why Glory in the Cross?**

To this point in our study, we have examined the “What?” factor but not the “Why?” factor. Heretofore we have elaborated on WHAT was Paul’s view concerning the cross, and we have also considered WHAT was the view of those who opposed him. Now I think it is important that we consider WHY it was that the apostle held such a view and held it with such tenacity.

Why did Paul glory in a cross that brought him to death while we tend to resist such a presentation of the cross and only glory in a cross that saves us from death? If the apostle truly is God’s emissary sent to all of us with this message, then we must ask ourselves what is it that Paul saw that we fail to see? Why does he glory in THIS cross when so many today are opposed to it? Why?

One explanation is that the cross Paul saw and preached had been clearly taught to him by God Himself. However, this explains nothing to us and certainly does not throw up a contrast profound enough to cause us to examine our need for anything more than what we have already attained to. Why would that be the case? The answer is because we already believe that all the theological positions we hold were taught to us of God. Since that is our view, it is useless to try to use this idea as leverage to get people to open up their hearts to concepts to which they are opposed or ignorant.

The Problem of Self-Preservation

Having said that, let us examine this problem from another basis. The deepest force at work in humankind is that of self-preservation. We will do anything we possibly can to avoid death and save ourselves. This is demonstrated when a person is drowning. If a rescuer gets near a drowning man, he will grab hold of the rescuer and push him down in order to get on top and save himself. The drowning man gives no thought as to the right or wrong of drowning someone else just to save himself. At that point, morality is not a factor, only instinct. This example simply emphasizes the tremendous force at work in all mankind toward self-preservation.

For Paul, to glory in a cross that annihilates him would require that the seeing of it be so much more powerful than instinct that it breaks the human aversion to such a concept. Surely we understand that neither Paul nor any other great man of God who preached THIS CROSS was devoid of that powerful innate tendency toward self-survival. They too had the same force at work in their own being that would push EVEN THEM to put up strong resistance to a cross being preached in this manner.

Remember that our question was: Why did Paul glory in a cross that brought him to death, while we tend to resist such a presentation of the cross and only glory in a cross that saves us from death? The answer we just presented was that Paul experienced a seeing of the cross by revelation that impacted his being so profoundly that the instinct

toward self-preservation was rendered inoperative, granting him openness to a view of the cross that he would not naturally be drawn to.

If we truly comprehend the strength of man's core tendency toward self-preservation while not yet seeing the cross in a manner that would override that tendency within us, we must conclude that only a fool would preach and glory in their own death. Now we can see why Paul would say that some would view the cross he preached as foolishness (cf. I Cor. 1:18, 23).

Most people do not even recognize the force of self-preservation within them. It is not a mental process but something automatic within human nature. It is as natural to man as breathing and, of course, we are rarely aware of the act of breathing. Because of this, most would not even know why there would be an inner resistance toward this message; they simply would know that something inside them "does not bear witness". Little do they know that the witness is not coming from the Lord but from the very deepest core of "self".

A magnet feels the same repellency from another magnet whose poles are reversed from it. But we are not magnets! God has not made us so that we simply "reverse our poles" in order to properly align with His view. Instead of working upon the forces of self, God introduces another force altogether. Only the most powerful of forces could break a human free from that inner survival tendency and allow him to embrace, yea, glory in his own death. Only God could do that!

For a person to only hear someone talk about this cross that crucified us while knowing nothing of how the message points us to the power would mean that the resistance remains within. Therefore it is understandable (yet not excusable) why men would want to discredit this message. It also makes perfect sense why some who hang around the preaching of THIS CROSS would build excuses in their minds which would help them avoid direct confrontation with a death that they secretly resist. Our goal should not be to force this view of the crucifixion upon people but to find those who will press past their own tendencies in the flesh and seek God's heart, hear the truth from Him, and join with those of "like precious faith" (cf. II Pet. 1:1). My advice for those who have not seen THIS CROSS from the Lord and who really have no desire to embrace something that they see as robbery is to run! Run with all your heart, and find a place that will feed you on the things that are more amiable to human taste.

Because the carnal man cannot see how the cross leads to Jesus AS HIS RESURRECTION or really know what that means, he rebels against the message. All he is capable of seeing is what he loses and cannot see what he gains by Christ. So he moves into self-preservation, which is nothing more than the action of the self-life struggling to remain alive, to remain in control. It is the struggle of self against the cross that looms as a threat to the continuation of one's existence based upon self-love.

Other Enemies of the Cross

The inner core of self-preservation is not the only enemy of the cross. That force within man is hidden deep within and is almost imperceivable by the person in whom it is at work. There is another, more formidable foe that stands up and boldly displays its opposition before all, and that is PRIDE.

The presentation of THIS CROSS is usually mixed with certain statements about the worthlessness of the flesh. The preaching of the cross demolishes everything we believed because all of it had formerly been applied to an uncrucified self. When the cross says we are useless and our efforts have no value, this is offensive to the man of pride. Such “accusations” usually hurt the person’s pride. They do not like the harsh attitude taken toward self but want to put perfume upon what God says stinks. For example, they talk with high idealism about the subject and need for self-expression while the cross describes the very same behaviors as nothing more than self being expressed.

There is a dilemma in which those who are yet bound by pride and self-preservation find themselves. The cross is the answer that God offers, but those who cannot stomach the cross as the answer still find themselves in desperate need. In their frantic search for relief they ask this question: “Who or what is going to save us?” According to Paul, those who look away from the cross will look for answers within two realms: the Greeks or the Jews. Since that makes no sense to us, let us break it down into understandable thoughts. They either look to wise men or to men supernaturally endowed by God. If the categories of men are removed from the picture and the thing left for consideration is what it is they have to offer, then people who reject the cross as the answer will look to wise teaching or to supernatural manifestations for their answers.

Paul said that Jews seek after signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified (cf. I Cor. 1:22). Which one of these points of emphasis is yours? Are you aligned with God’s apostle or with one of the other two groups? I am persuaded, as is Paul, to preach a cross that culminates in our death and Christ as our life. If these others seek for signs and miracles, they will not like what we preach – Christ crucified. If they seek great wisdom on how to deal with everything, they will not like what we preach. So you can see that the very thing that we glory in is something completely different to them by reason of perception.

The Basis for Another View of the Cross

I realize that things are not quite as cut and dried as I have just presented them. There are other factors that are of a more positive tone as to why Paul gloried in a cross that brought him to death while we tend to resist such a presentation of the cross and only glory in a cross that saves us from death.

Let it be stated clearly at this point: There is a vast difference between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus in death and resurrection. It is possible to know many things about the Nazarene yet know little of Christ in death and resurrection. Most Christians gain their overall view of Jesus based upon the stories found in the Gospels, but in order to

truly know Him, the Spirit must reveal Him at the cross. To those who watched the Lord on a day to day basis, He turned and explained that their observations of Him were not sufficient. He made it plain that one cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to you (cf. Jn. 1:18). In His infinite wisdom, He chose to allow the fullest expression of Himself to take place at the cross. If you want to know anything about the wisdom of God, look at the cross. The cross is the greatest place of self-expression that God has ever given to mankind.

Even so, many never get beyond how Jesus was portrayed in His earthly ministry. For their whole Christian experience, some believers have only had Jesus presented to them as from the Gospels, which is why some believers may follow Jesus of Nazareth. Others may follow Jesus of Nazareth because the only presentation of Him that they have ever received at their home church was this Jesus. One's first introduction to the reality of being crucified with Christ can be quite disconcerting. Also, just hearing the utter newness of the preaching of Christ and Him crucified may make some wonder at the validity of the message, but any sincere believer will discover abundant scripture to support Paul's view of the cross concerning our crucifixion with Christ.

It does not take a Revelation of Christ to comprehend Jesus of Nazareth. Any person can read the Gospels and fellowship in the wonderful stories. However, once you get into the epistles, it will take a mighty act of the Holy Spirit to open one's eyes to the "Jesus of death and resurrection".

Maybe this contrast can be best illustrated by the example found in John chapter 12. In this portion of scripture, we find that certain Greeks were now seeking out Jesus. The words they used with Phillip in order to obtain an interview with the Lord were, "*Sir! We would see Jesus*" (Jn. 12:21). It appears that this new development of people beginning to come from other countries with the sole purpose of "seeing" Jesus was very exciting to the disciples. However, Jesus' response was less than encouraging. Instead of welcoming those who wanted to "see Jesus" with open arms, the Lord turned and presented an altogether different view of Himself. "*Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*" (Jn. 12:24). From this response, we can assume that Jesus was not interested in obtaining more followers of Him based on His earthly life and ministry but wanted real fruit based on crucifixion.

These Greeks wanted to "see" Jesus, but the seeing of Jesus of Nazareth is not the same as seeing Christ crucified. They sought to see the Blessor. This same contrast can be seen in Luke 12:50. When the disciples were asking for certain blessings and privileges, Jesus referred them to His death. They may have been seeking the Blessor, but He sought to present the Lamb to them and to all who would listen to Him. It is easy to understand how the disciples could make this mistake. Their complete time with Jesus on earth was filled with miracles and blessings. At this point, the cross was foreign to them and something about which they as yet had no clue (cf. Mk. 9:31-32; Lk. 9:44-45).

Even though that was the case at that time, after the resurrection we find the apostles presenting Jesus in a completely different manner. In their letters to the churches, these very same disciples have only one reference to Jesus' earthly ministry. They do not bring up miracles or stories of what they experienced with Jesus of Nazareth in order to explain Him to the people because it was our Lord in death and resurrection that was their subject, and that was the God-given answer for mankind.

In the Book of Acts, Peter begins his sermon by speaking of Jesus of Nazareth, the Blessor, but then he explains that it was HIM (the Blessor) that became crucified (Acts 2:22-23). At the cross you do not see Jesus of Nazareth healing, helping, and blessing: You see Jesus the Lamb.

Back in John 12:23, we take note that Jesus' fame (as Jesus of Nazareth) drew "some men", but His cross will draw all men (cf. Jn. 12:32). The "drawing" here in verse 23 was to the fame of a man and a ministry, but "the drawing" that Jesus referred to in verse 32 was to Christ and Him crucified. The "drawing" that Jesus mentions there is also not a reference for being drawn to salvation, either. Instead, the Lord is continuing the theme of the necessity of death in order to bring forth fruit (v. 24) and our place with Him in such a plan (v. 25-26). He is talking about us being drawn into our own death with Him on Calvary. When Jesus said, "*I will draw all men to myself*" He was referring to the cross. We are drawn to Him there for death (cf. Gal. 2:20).

Chapter Three: Two Kinds of Wisdom

Affixing Galatians 6:14 as our primary scripture, we have become aware of WHAT VIEW Paul had concerning the cross that was different from most believers. Having had that established, we then set out to discover WHY Paul would glory in a cross that CRUCIFIES himself. But to fully comprehend the great gulf between his commitments to the cross compared to ours, we must take a hard look at the KIND of wisdom that guided him as opposed to the KIND of wisdom by which most men are led.

In I Corinthians 2:6-7, Paul said he had a form of wisdom to preach but that it was not the same wisdom as what the world recognizes. They have what is described as “the wisdom of this age”. God’s definition of “the wisdom of this age” does not involve all the great concepts of math, technological advancements, and ideas concerning invention. It has nothing to do with the material realm per se but rather with the object of their use and with the motive behind the concepts that determine on what basis to proceed in life.

The wisdom of this age is an accumulation of thoughts, ideas, and methods that are intent on furthering the individual, helping them get ahead and win. The driving force behind that wisdom is self. All is based upon self-promotion. The combination of principles, methods, genius ideas, and master programs has the same goal built within them – the advancement of self. This aggregation of concepts and philosophies are woven together into one great motivating viewpoint called “the wisdom of this age”.

This wisdom is garnered with the strict intent to further a self-centered existence and put oneself above others. But built within the wisdom of this age are the seeds of its own destruction. Jesus stated it as an unchangeable law: “*Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it*” (Lk. 17:33). Since their wisdom causes them to seek to save themselves, they can only come to one end, and that is described as “coming to naught” (cf. I Cor. 2:6). However, cross wisdom, which seems to lead toward loss, actually ends in eternal gain.

Hidden Wisdom

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.”

I Corinthians 2:7

Why is God’s wisdom called “hidden wisdom”? It is called that for two main reasons: first, because God has hidden it, and secondly, because it is completely foreign to the human mind. First, let us look at it from God’s perspective. This eternal plan into which He seeks to bring us is an ancient plan. These verses tell us, “*Which God ordained before the world*”. That means this hidden wisdom existed BEFORE THERE WAS A WORLD, a material existence in which to become attached.

The cross is the core basis of God’s way. The wisdom of it has been hidden in the mind of God, having as its primary goal the cross becoming man’s object of glory. As the apostle said, it was ordained “*...unto our glory...*”. We can see that Paul embraced

this wisdom and only gloried in the cross. Though this wisdom has not been known on account of being hidden from the beginning of time, it is now destined to become our wisdom and what we glory in, for we have been chosen for it.

The other reason why the wisdom of God is hidden is due to man. The whole trouble with the world is wrapped up in man's blindness. Those of this worldly wisdom are wise in their own conceits yet totally blind to the existence of a wisdom that points the way to a selfless way of life. God's wisdom is a mystery to the self-serving mind of man. It makes no sense to him. He would not formulate concepts based on its premise because this way of proceeding is alien to him. He cannot see it, and if confronted with it by others, will consider it "foolishness". Man may be able to write a movie script about a selfless act, but when he is faced with a crisis in his own life, he will always revert to self-preservation. The mystery of it thwarts self-serving mankind from ever entering in onto holy ground.

Blind men hurry along their paths, depending upon the wisdom of this age to help them get by, but God views it all as futile. *"Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool'..."* What is God's definition of a fool? It is one who no longer goes by the wisdom of this age. Now let us see His definition of one who is wise. *"...so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight"* (I Cor. 3:18-19 - NIV). For God to consider one wise will involve that person learning a completely new viewpoint based on the cross. That is the wisdom of God!

Founded Upon the Apostles and Prophets

When anyone presents the cross in a manner such as Paul did in Galatians 6:14, there is usually some resistance. Those who resist usually do all within their power to prove that their point of view is correct. They may also seek to discredit the speaker and the message of the cross. Part of the tactic involves attempting to make the issue that of the differences of opinion between two people of opposing views.

But to preach the cross as the central message of Christianity is not to say that we are right. It was the central reality before we ever believed it. It has been God's primary focus for two thousand years and beyond. Our only part in this is that we simply chose to follow what the Lord put forth through His apostles and prophets. Our church and message are built upon the apostle's teaching in accord with Ephesians 2:20-22. Notice in this reference that the specific teaching Paul refers to is that of our becoming the habitation of God's life within us. He further shows in verse 16 that this is brought about by the cross.

From the very beginning this teaching was the foundation upon which the founding fathers built the church. Now, at this time, we are the founders of the Christian church for our generation. Are we founding Jesus' Church on something different than our fathers in the Bible did?

It is clearly understood by all Bible scholars that Paul was one of those founding fathers. Almost no one denies that fact. As such, he did not start with laying a foundation as to how to live for God; instead, he started with how to die. Any instruction on living for God without first dying to self would be inadequate. From our scripture in Galatians, as well as the whole book of Galatians, it is clear from the reaction of some of the people in that local fellowship that they disagreed with Paul over what was important. Though it was not popular, the cross being presented as the end of our lives is what the founding fathers continued to emphasize. The preaching of the cross was attacked back then, and so it will be in our time. Every true son of God and every minister of the Lord should stand up for what the Lord has presented as central. To do so is to stand with all the founding fathers in their obedience to spread the message of Christ and Him crucified.

To take the view and be on the same page as the apostle Paul is not a bad thing at all. He was God's chosen man with His chosen message. He was handpicked by the Lord to give us the RIGHT MESSAGE. Neither in the first century nor in our time is it a situation where one could choose to accept Paul's message or reject it for someone else's view and message. Can you imagine hearing the Galatians speak as some do today? You might hear them say, "This presentation of the cross is not the teaching we want". However, you cannot dismiss your responsibility to God's Word by saying, "That is what Paul believed, but I do not". God wanted not just the early church but the True Church for all time to be built upon this view of the cross. Will we suffer persecution for our stand? Probably. But it is better to suffer for what is according to God's heart rather than to avoid persecution simply because we do not want to suffer.

Persecution Arises Over the Message of the Cross

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."

Matthew 16: 18-21

Jesus enjoyed years of love and unity between Himself and Peter, His disciple. The first sign of a real rift between them is described in Matthew 16:13-18, where Jesus introduces him to the concept of the cross. It is AT THAT POINT that Peter reacts. Verse 22 goes on to say, "*THEN Peter took Jesus and began to rebuke Him*". Notice how, in the case of Jesus, persecution did not come until the cross was preached. This disciple might have sounded somewhat like modern Christians who ask, "Why do you always talk about death and the cross?" You must consider that if His own disciples are attacking the Son of God over His message, what will happen to you? On what other point do you see Peter rebuking Jesus as if the Lord's viewpoint were incorrect? Even today, many of the Lord's disciples will walk with Him through various trials and situations, but the cross tends to eventually trip them up.

Why does this seem to be the case? The cross has been the dividing point throughout the ages. Among some people who might have ordinarily gotten along, the cross may divide them. The preaching of THIS CROSS has always been persecuted. On the other hand, very seldom do you see men who only preach the cross as a tool for salvation being persecuted for what they believe. Today's preachers are honored and become rich as a result of it. That is in grave contrast to the founding fathers, who continued preaching the cross until eventually dying for what they preached.

Addressing Contradictory Views

Having searched out the deep commitment with which Paul was attached to the cross, let us now examine his reasons for specifically declaring such things at that particular time. In Galatians 6:14, what precipitated Paul's act of boldly declaring his view of a cross that crucifies us? The verses that contain his comments concerning his view of the cross were actually a letter to other believers who lived in an area called Galatia. He was writing these things because there were people presenting other and contrary views of the truth of the cross as he knew it. The believers in that region were being fed a view that was not consistent with what had Paul originally preached to them. He was contrasting his understanding with the view of these other preachers of the cross. So he says to them, "I do not know about others, but God forbid that I preach any other explanation of the cross" (cf. Gal. 6:14).

From these words, we can see that he was standing in defense of a specific view of the cross that was not popular with many who claimed to be believers. Apparently, some other presentations of the cross were gaining acceptance, so he felt the need to defend what he believed to be the Lord's view. God's apostle was saying in this epistle, "We are not the contrary voices here, but they are." Notice the confidence and boldness with which he addressed the Galatian believers as he declared how he understood the cross. Even though preaching a cross on which we were crucified cuts against the grain of human nature, Paul was not afraid to do so. In his address to these churches, Paul did not make room for the opposition's view but only validated the cross of our own death.

The preaching of the cross is not something we should be ashamed of or shy away from lest we suffer persecution for it. Instead, we should bring it to the forefront and give it the place of central focus. This cross should be lifted above all other subjects in the Bible. Paul was not ashamed to do so even though others had usurped the churches he had established and made him to look as if he was the outsider instead of themselves. Just as Paul's message of the cross was made to seem out of place, in this day also we may seem contrary to what is commonly preached as the cross. Nevertheless, I would rather appear contrary to the majority of the view of Christianity than to be contrary to the Word of God.

God Forbid...

It is the cross of Galatians 6:14, the one Paul glories in, that he is referring to when speaking of persecution for the cross. Because of fear of persecution, some avoid preaching a cross that involves our own crucifixion. However, I would think that our first concern should be that of not offending God Himself. Facing wicked men who persecute us is one thing, but having to face an angry God because of self-protection is something different altogether. In the heart of every Christian should arise an admiration of and commitment to the things the Lord Jesus tells us to honor, regardless of the personal cost.

Paul seemed to breathe forth that kind of reverence when he said, *“God forbid that I glory except in the cross...”* What significance do we find when we place the emphasis upon the simple words “God forbid”? In the Old Testament the Bible said, *“Thou shalt not steal”*. There is trembling before God at the command of it as it reverberates down through the centuries and comes to us. But there are commands in the New Testament that carry even more weight with God than this one, though the language may be slightly different. What I mean is, we are well familiar with the phrases “Thou shalt...” and “Thou shalt not...”. Anything prefaced with one of these phrases gains immediate respect from us. Yet it is not the use of certain phrases that should bring us to attention before God but rather the recognition that God expects us to hold something as significant and important. For example, Paul said, *“But God forbid that I glory except...”*. What if the wording was slightly different and read, “Thou shalt not glory except in the cross of your own death.” Would you honor it?

I think to many in this day and age the phrase “God forbid” has more of a colloquial significance instead of being received as a command from God. “God forbid” became a colloquial phrase after his use of it here, but Paul did not mean it colloquially. When the apostle said, “God forbid”, he meant that it was unthinkable that he would glory in anything else or any other kind of presentation of the cross. He did not take this stance because he decided to make the preaching of a cross that crucifies us as his pet emphasis but because he felt that God forbade him to take any other stance except this one.

God Forbid THAT “I”

Having just placed the emphasis upon the words “God forbid”, we next see that the apostle took that personally by his use of the word “I”. *“God forbid that I...”* Like Paul, each of us should apply the scriptures personally to our lives. Let us take a look as to how he chose to apply this concept to himself based on the scripture we have been considering.

There are three uses of the word “I” in this verse. The first two are stated, and the third is understood by the context. Perhaps the manner in which I share next may be confusing to some, but at the risk of not being understood, I will proceed because I feel the benefit to those who grasp this is worth the effort.

The first use of “I” is when Paul says, “God forbid that I”. He is referring to the “I” of his ‘being’ that glories in the cross of his own death. So we see that there is that part of Paul that glories, and it does so in the cross.

The next “I” mentioned is not different than the first one. There is only one “I” seen here but it is seen in several aspects. This second mention is the “I” that is crucified. “I” crucified unto the world. The “I” of our ‘being’ cannot glory in a cross that crucifies us unless that same “I” is already dead with Christ. Again, to joyfully embrace a concept of the destruction of self will take more than a good teacher or a good presentation of the material. It requires a death.

If we have not entered into the death that the apostle speaks of, then the “I” Paul refers to that glories will not be the same “I” Paul was referring to. When he states these things, he has no hidden agendas, secret plans, or pet desires since for Paul the same “I” that glories in that particular cross had already been slain by it.

If the “I” of that statement is premised on a “self” that has yet to be crucified, then the verse should read like this: “God forbid that I should glory (period)”. Why? It should be stated in that manner because self has absolutely nothing in which to glory – at least, not before God (cf. Rom. 4:2). If the “I” of our being is not crucified, then it will be put in charge of the mind, the choices, and the direction in which the physical body will take. Even if this person heads in a Christian direction, his life will still be devoid of the cross and devoid of Christ as the life-source.

It is just a fact that some people do not want to accept their death with Christ on the cross, nor do they want Christ as life. They just want to be Christians. In an attempt to maintain their own lives, some will quote II Corinthians 5:20, which speaks of our being reconciled to God and now we are all His ambassadors of reconciliation. *“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God”*. While that verse speaks forth the truth, we must remember that it is premised upon a previous verse. Verse 14 must be established first! *“For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead”*. These verses together prove that we are not just reconciled but also dead with Christ. What I mean by that is two things. First, we should never leave out the cross! The second thing is that we should never try to reconcile something that God has put away at the cross. Too many among God’s people have set out as His ambassadors, but being ignorant of the cross of OUR CRUCIFIXION, they have preached the reconciliation of something that Jesus rejected and took to the cross. Could there be any greater violation of that truth?

In Conclusion

In closing, I acknowledge that many who read this will be among those who have already embraced the message of the cross. The concept of being crucified with Christ is not foreign to them. To you I would say, do not become complacent! Keep your heart ever hungry and diligent to know the Lord Jesus with more clarity. Never rest in what you already know, but continue to pursue Him beyond the bounds of your present comprehension.

And for those with whom this teaching is new, I would say, do not immediately reject this reality, nor should you blindly accept it all as true. Search the scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the things pertaining to this message that He wants you to receive. We who have embraced Christ and Him crucified well remember our initial aversion to the message of OUR OWN DEATH on Calvary.

It is to be expected that there will be those who look upon the cross as a negative thing or as their enemy. But let us take one final look at our verse to discover something that we may have yet to notice. *“But God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, **by whom** the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”* Take note of the words “by whom”. Those words refer to Jesus Himself. HE is the one who took you to the cross. Do not think you can reject the cross yet still embrace Jesus, as if to divide them. He is pro-cross and is all for your death at the cross. *“By whom I am crucified...”*. Let those words sink in! Are you among those who pursue Jesus in His death FOR YOU but reject the same Jesus when He attempts to TAKE YOU to the cross with Him?

A certain degree of skepticism can be healthy, but it is quite another thing for people to rise up in arms against the message of the cross. While certain of their arguments may seem quite reasonable, the motive behind some who are in resistance is simply to save their flesh from crucifixion by resorting to twisting the truth of the cross. They claim to love the cross of Christ, but they hate the cross THAT CRUCIFIES THEM. They seek only to embrace a cross that saves them from death.

In I Corinthians 1:23 Paul said, *“But we preach Christ crucified... a stumbling block, and... foolishness”*. It is foolishness and a stumbling block to those who are not open. Others may preach Christ who is risen just to bless us. That is fine, but be assured that such preaching is not a stumbling block or foolishness to most people.

In setting forth these verses, God is declaring to all men that there are only two alternatives: either you glory in the cross of your own crucifixion, or you look upon that reality as foolishness and it therefore becomes a stumbling block to you. Let it become what you glory in and not your stumbling block.***