

WHY SEARCH FOR THE CROSS?¹

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If you have a new car, you want to keep it polished like new. You may not say a word, but you are proud of your possession. Your incessant polishing says you “glory” in it.

Others show off fine clothes, a house or ranch, or revel in a brilliant career. Their music, art, science, or other hobbies and achievements are all they can talk about.

The apostle Paul had an obsession. According to one version, he says, “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

That strange word “glory” eludes us, for we have no word in modern English that fully covers what it means. Combine all the will to attain, the pride of possession, the passion to know and appreciate, the charm of beauty, the yearning for thrills that we moderns know in our endless quest for life’s pleasures, then you can begin to sense what Paul meant when he said, “I . . . glory. . . in the cross.” “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

Was this man a fanatic? What did he see in the cross of Christ that inspired in him a life-long passion such as Michael Jordan had for basketball, Picasso for painting, or Yo Yo Ma for Bach? Is there

something vital and compelling in the Bible that we are missing?

Scientists tell us that there are vast untapped resources of energy in ocean water, enough to meet mankind’s needs for power for generations to come. There are also vast untapped resources of spiritual energy in the cross that Paul tells us about so enthusiastically. Most of us make our faith into a toilsome and agonizing ordeal. We are simply ignorant of the gospel’s largely untapped capacity for changing people—a power that Paul plugged into.

His very conversion came as the result of a vision of Christ as the *crucified* One. He had been deeply immersed in hateful prejudice, but in one brief hour he saw that the cross where Jesus died proved His claims to be the long-awaited Messiah. That flash of insight on his way to Damascus invested the cross with an irresistible charm that never dimmed for him. Henceforth the cross was the sun shining in his sky, the gem itself of gospel truth—not a mere facet of it. It was the center and heart of Paul’s message from then on.

Our modern world knows little or nothing about that cross. To the ancient world it was a focal point of attention, “foolishness” to many, or a “stumbling block,” and always an “offense” (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). But to the world today it is blah, a boring puzzle. “The offense of the cross” has not ceased, but the cross cannot be an offense if it is not understood.

It’s no wonder that the world today is apathetic. Rather than fighting it as Paul’s world did, the

¹ 303 “Beneath the Cross of Jesus.”

modern world is steeped in lifeless ignorance of it. Yet one sees crosses almost everywhere—on churches, around people’s necks, in stained glass windows. Why such ignorance of its meaning?

This darkness has been brought about by the cunning plans of the enemy of all good. Satan knew that the cross assured his utter defeat and exposed his complete depravity. It rang his death knell. All the universe of God watched Jesus die, like spectators in the grandstands watching a fight in the arena. Satan’s hatred of Christ displayed in the crucifixion uprooted him forever from any tiny root of sympathy or affection in that vast audience. In this sense “the ruler of this world” was “cast out” when Jesus died on His cross (John 12:31-33).

His mask torn off once and for all, Satan retained no sympathy from heavenly angels. No one who knew God’s true character ever again would waste a thought of pity on Satan. So far as the great hosts of unfallen angels were concerned, Satan knew he had lost his case. All he could do now would be to hope to get this newly created planet on his side, and with that advantage wage “war” against Christ.

There really is the behind-the-scenes conspiracy! Thus he formed his malignant design to blot the knowledge of the cross from the understanding of mankind. In setting up the “abomination of desolation” (Dan. 12:11), he forged a counterfeit of true Christianity. Its basic principle was to make a detour around the cross so that mankind should not get so much as a glimpse of its *meaning*. To fasten us in his deception, Satan was to exalt *the sign of*

the cross to be worshipped, to the exclusion of *the truth of the cross*.

From the days of Constantine the sign of the cross became the emblem of professed Christianity, while a subtle counterfeit of the gospel wrought a “transgression of desolation” in the human heart. (Dan. 8:11-13). Christendom’s history for over 1,600 years offers a pathetic comment on Satan’s “great wrath” against the gospel, “Because he knows that he has a short time” (Rev. 12:12). He has offered men a shadow in place of the substance. Those crosses worn about the neck or erected on church steeples or glazed in church windows are a familiar talisman, a charm or amulet, an adornment. Crosses of wood or metal are even worshipped, while the genuine, the *principle* of the cross, is unknown.

So confident is Satan of his plans that he freely permits talking about the cross, praying about it, singing about it, wearing it, using it as an architectural emblem, even worshipping it, just so long as he can thwart any attempt toward *understanding what happened there*. What more clever trick can a defeated enemy perfect than to take the sign of his defeat and transform it into an emblem of his victory?

The sun has truly been blotted from the sky of such “Christianity.” Although the truth of the cross may not be consciously disbelieved or rejected, yet the failure to grasp its meaning results in a tragic loss, just as much as the rejection of the cross meant to the Jewish leaders of Christ’s day. The

mind accepts the symbol while the heart fails to realize the experience.

But we need not be misled by the meaningless symbol of an empty word. The forging of the counterfeit was meant only to forestall a search for the genuine. But the very existence of the counterfeit suggests that somewhere we shall find the genuine! The clouds and mist that Satan has sought to throw about the cross will be lifted for us, and we will come to see in breathtaking reality the same glorious revelation that Paul saw. What Satan hoped would be his *coup d'état* turned out for him to be a self-inflicted total defeat.

Our personal victory over Satan is assured in these words: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11). When and where was that blood shed? At the cross. John the Baptist's words still make sense: "*Behold!* The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "*Look to Me, and be saved,*" is what God asks us to do. Isaiah 45:22.

Looking is people's favorite pastime. News magazines capitalize on this desire to "look" at something new. Millions spend their idle hours just watching the parade of humanity passing by their doors or their TV screens, or poring through picture magazines. If there is an accident on the freeway or anything unusual, we have an urge to "behold." All have this built-in yearning to feast our eyes on some sight *yet unseen*. There is an unsatisfied longing to see something ultimate.

The faith of Jesus is the only one under heaven that promises eternal salvation to anyone who will

simply I-o-o-k to Him. It sounds fantastic, but here it is:

"Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22).

When in the desert after being led out of Egypt, the Israelites murmured against God's care and against His leading, poisonous snakes bit them. The poor people imagined that God had sent those poisonous snakes (Num. 21:5-7). What did He do to save them?

He had Moses make a snake out of the metal they had and put it on a pole and hold it up; then anybody who would simply I-o-o-k could be saved (Num. 21:8ff).

It took a repentant, humble heart for anyone with a murmuring, unbelieving heart to decide to look; Jesus told the story to Nicodemus on his night visit, and applied the lesson to Himself so we can have it:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15). He equated "believing" in Himself with their looking.

It's a Bible truth: Hebrews 12:3 urges us, "Consider Him . . ." Same idea; harness your thought processes and fix them on the story of Jesus. "Think of Him" says the NEB. Unlock the door of your soul and admit the thought of Jesus; ponder Him; meditate on Him; stay on your knees quiet—put from your mind that thought of hitting the button on your remote: leave it, and stay there in the darkness alone with the Son of God, your eyes

closed. That's what Jesus means when He invites us, "enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret" (Matt. 6:6).

If you can't think what to say, keep quiet, but stay there. If all you can say is, "Father! Father . . . !" Just stay there. Stay. You desperately need this moment of looking to Him alone.

You are not worried now about getting to heaven at last; you are beginning to remember that time when you will be alone in the personal presence of Jesus.

You are tasting a bit of what heaven will be like: thank Him.

Upon that cross of Jesus my eye at times
can see

The very dying form of One who suffered
there for me.

And from my smitten heart, with tears two
wonders I confess:

The wonders of redeeming love, and my
unworthiness.

I take O cross your shadow for my abiding
place!

I ask no other sunshine, than the sunshine of
His face.

Content to let the world go by, to know no
gain nor loss

My sinful self my only shame, my glory all
the cross.

Elizabeth

Clephane.

What we long to see is that cross of Jesus. No other sight can satisfy.

And once we have seen it, like Paul, we will "glory" in nothing else. It will become our passion. If we "behold the Lamb of God," we will see a sight that has power to dissolve all idolatry into the nothingness that it is. Money, possessions, careers, fame, sensual pleasure, all lose their charm for the person who has *seen* what Calvary means. Life begins.

Let us look.