

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Glory of the Cross

Scripture: Galatians 6:11-16

Code: 80-125

Tonight it's really a joy for me to lead you into a study in Galatians chapter 6. This is one of those marvelous passages that at first reading appears not to be nearly as rich as it really is. It's one of those surprise texts that on the surface reading doesn't seem to yield anything too profound, but underneath is really thrilling.

Let's begin in Galatians chapter 6 and let me read starting at verse 11 and down to verse 16. Galatians 6 beginning at verse 11 down to verse 16. And this, of course, is in the series we're doing on "Knowing Christ," the believer's coming to a deep knowledge of Christ and all the resource available in Him. Paul writes, "See with what large letters I'm writing to you with my own hand. Those who desire to make a good show in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For those who are circumcised do not even keep the law themselves but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But may it never be that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God."

It has always been true and it was certainly true in the Apostle Paul's ministry that there was a conflict between the two religions in the world. And there are only two. There is the religion of human achievement and there is the religion of divine accomplishment. There is salvation by works and there is salvation without works. That's all. There is salvation by human effort and salvation by divine grace. One is earned and the other is a gift. One depends on what man does, the other depends on what God does.

And clearly, most of the world is banking their time and eternity on the religion of human achievement. I can make it to heaven by being good or by doing some religious deeds. Now this religion of human achievement comes in many, many names but it is really all the same religion because the conflict between God and Satan is the same conflict. God provides salvation by grace through faith and Satan offers the counterfeit of salvation by works. Satan has proliferated his single system of salvation by works and self-glory. He's proliferated it under a myriad of names. It has been called the "I am Movement." It is called Mormonism, Islam, Eurantia(?), the One World Family, Jehovah's Witnesses, Spiritualism, Spiritism, The Association for Research and Enlightenment. It is called sometimes The Divine Light Mission. It has been called Oaspi(??). It has been called Great

White Brotherhood. It has been called Astera(?), The Unification Church, Christian Science, The Way International, Scientology, Roman Catholicism, New Age Society. But it's really all the same thing.

And all of those religious groups that I mentioned to you claim to have supernatural revelation. In analyzing all of those and the others, they all claim to have a word from God via angels, spirits or extraterrestrials. The mighty I Am was dictated by a spirit. Mormonism was brought by Maroni, an angel who delivered golden plates to Joseph Smith. Islam was dictated by Gabriel. Eurantia is 23 extraterrestrials who dictated a 2100-page book through automatic writing. The One World Family was dictated by extraterrestrials. Jehovah's Witnesses received their information through angels of a different rank who controlled certain witnesses. The Association for Research and Enlightenment received theirs by psychic forces from supernatural entities working through automatic writing. The Divine Light Mission came from a spirit voice. The Great White Brotherhood was...was spirit-given through Osareal(?) who is an angelic being who transmitted his message through some medium. Oaspi came from many spirits through automatic writing. Even the World Wide Church of God originally came to Mrs. Armstrong through angelic revelation. Astera is a great source spirit who sent his message by telephonic inspiration. The Unification Church had its information dictated by spirits. Christian Science was a special revelation by supernatural beings to Mary Baker Eddy. And on and on it goes.

Scientology was some supernatural information delivered angelically to L. Ron Hubbard. And even the Roman Catholic Church has received extrabiblical revelation, visions and appearances of the saints and of Mary. The New Age is the recipient of extraterrestrial beings who deposit certain information. It all comes from spirit beings because it is all from the same source. And it is not God. It is Satan and his demons. And all of it contradicts salvation by grace through faith. All of it is really the same human religion, the religion of human achievement. All of it is that.

The Apostle Paul says that those idols, those gods that the Gentiles worship are demons and indeed they are. No matter what the name of the religion is, anything other than biblical Christianity which is from God is from Satan. And it's all the same system. A pack of deceptions and lies packaging salvation by human effort, human achievement, human understanding, human wisdom, religious ceremony, something man does. And the whole intent of Scripture is to present clearly that which is the religion of divine accomplishment.

Now that particular battle is behind the scenes in the book of Galatians. The Apostle Paul has run into a form of this religion of human achievement. And would you believe the name of it is Judaism...Judaism. It is the Jews who have developed their Old Testament revelation into a religion of human achievement. Salvation by works. And those who would teach that prompted by Satan and his demonic force, of course, dog the steps of Paul everywhere he goes because he is preaching the gospel of grace and faith. And they come along right behind him preaching salvation by circumcision,

salvation by law, by works, by effort. And Paul is always battling this.

And particularly was this an issue in Galatia. Paul confronts it here. Certainly germane to us today because there exists even in the name of Christianity in our country and in our world all kinds of forms of this religion of human achievement. It is everywhere. Christians today are even being urged to take biblical Christianity back into partnership with some of these forms of the religion of human achievement which is from hell, from Satan. It is nothing less than doctrines of demons propagated by seducing spirits through hypocritical liars intending to lead people to damnation and destroy the purposes of God.

It has always been around. It always will be around. And that's where the battle lies. And here Paul was facing it. And he was dealing with the...with the Galatians because they had been swamped by these people coming in and teaching this salvation by human achievement. Even those who had genuinely been saved were getting sucked into it. It was one thing to believe you were saved by divine accomplishment, but then to abandon that and start to move into a sanctification by human effort was precisely what some of the Galatians were doing. That's why he says to them in chapter 3, "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh?" I mean, you started so well in the power of God through divine accomplishment, do you now think you can take over? And yet so many Christians have done just that. Having begun in the Spirit in a true salvation they now look for their sanctification through human means rather than through pursuing the deep knowledge of Christ in the Word. This was what the Apostle Paul was battling...the ever-encroaching system of human achievement that wants to confuse and deceive.

Now in drawing this epistle to a conclusion, he approaches this...this issue, I think, in a very brilliant way. There are only two choices, two religions in the whole world, just two, the religion of works and the religion of faith. And he's going to address them. Works glories in the flesh. And he looks at that in verses 11 to 13. Faith glories in God and His grace.

Now let's look, first of all, at works. Let's look at the religion of human achievement. Verse 11, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." Now what in the world does that have to do with the issue? A lot. Paul calls attention to the large letters that he's writing. He doesn't mean that the letter is long, it isn't, just six chapters. He's not talking about the length of it. He's talking about the size of the letters. That seems to be an issue with him.

Paul, you'll remember, was generally in the habit of dictating his epistles to a secretary. And that secretary would take the dictation and write down what the Spirit of God prompted Paul to say, writing it down accurately. And also typically, after the secretary had written it down as the inspired writer gave it, at the very end of the letter Paul would pick up the pen in order to authenticate the letter just as you do a letter that is typed that cannot be discerned as having been written by you, you pick up the pen and you sign your own name. And that authenticates what is in the letter.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 16 we read in verse 21 that very reference where it says, "The salutation of me, Paul, with my own hand." And no doubt somebody else had penned this as he the inspired writer dictated it. And then at the end he picked up the pen and wrote it.

In 2 Thessalonians we are reminded in chapter 2 that somebody was circulating a forgery supposedly written by Paul which was teaching heresy about the coming day of the Lord...that they were already in it and the Rapture had passed. So Paul was very conscious about the necessity to authenticate his letters and to sign them with his own name so that people would know indeed they represented the truth of God had been revealed to him.

But in this case, the verse that we just read may indicate that the Apostle Paul had written the whole epistle with his own hand because of the nature of the situation and his sorrow and his zeal over his churches. It may have been that he himself wrote it. Apparently in rather big untidy scrawling letters that some suggest could have indicated that he had some kind of an eye sight problem and thus he wrote rather large. That's not too hard to imagine. You know how many people have eyesight problems today, just imagine life without your glasses. Paul may have had that kind of problem and, of course, in ancient times, those kinds of diseases that effect the eyes were perhaps more common. Also he was no professional scribe. Also his heart was impassioned. And I have myself in a fit of passion wrote absolutely unintelligible words on a page...not to be read by anyone, very often including myself. He certainly wasn't trying to give some pretense of his penmanship, he was trying to give some pretense of his scholarship. And maybe...maybe as he looked at those large letters they became a kind of parable for him from which he drew the thoughts that follow because it's so clearly linked. That parable that to some people the display is everything, the penmanship is everything, the articulation is everything, the flesh is everything...but not to him.

It is as if he says, "I am not concerned about the big scrawly untidy letters, please I'm concerned about the spirit." Many times I receive letters that are somewhat hard to read and genuinely someone is pouring out their heart and at the end, very commonly, they will say, "Please excuse my writing," or "Please excuse my typing, I wasn't near my office or I didn't have a place to dictate this," or whatever it is. And they want to excuse the untidy character of their letter, lest someone might conclude that it's reflective of an untidy mind.

But Paul is not concerned about that and he goes on to address from that little parable those who care only for what something looks like. Look at verse 12, "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised." Now he launches off of that little sort of parable about the large letters into a further discussion of these people who are insisting that the Galatians follow the religion of human achievement, the religion of the flesh. He's already attacked and destroyed their doctrine in chapter 4 and chapter 5 and having destroyed their doctrine in chapter 4 and 5, he now takes on their motive. And their motive is pride. In a word, it is pride that is at the

heart of their teaching. They desire, it says in verse 12, to make a good showing in the flesh. All they ever think about is what they look like, externals, outward appearance.

And he suggests there are three reasons why they do this. Reason number one, to show off spiritually...to show off spiritually. Verse 12, "They desire to make a good showing," a fine outward impression. That, by the way, is a way of life for people in false religion...absolute way of life. They want to put on a good outward show. They want to mask their sin, they want to mask their corruption. They want to mask their unrighteousness. They want to put on some religious front. Any religion which is unwilling to accept Jesus Christ as the only and all-sufficient Savior is an indulgence of the flesh built on pride. It's as if man wants to achieve virtue on his own in order that he might gain a reputation, gain respect. That's how it was for the legalists. He wanted to show off. Legalists always do. Self-righteous people always do. They want to flaunt their religion. They want someone to commend them, pat them on the back because of the level of religion they have achieved. And so, he says these people who are all into the show do it to show off and the motive is pride.

Secondly, there's another reason they do this in verse 12, simply, he says, "That they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ." They don't want to get persecuted. That's the second reason. First of all, they want to show off spiritually so everybody will think they're wonderful people...pride being their sin. Secondly, they don't want pain. Nobody in a false religion wants pain that's why...that's why persecution always destroys false religion because nobody is going to join a false religion if you have to pay for it with your life. They don't want to be persecuted. Literally what he's talking about here is they do not want to be identified with the cross of Christ. That was an offense to the Jews, that cross where Jesus died. The idea that their Messiah died on a cross was offensive to them. The idea that their Messiah was crucified by Roman soldiers, that is utterly and absolutely unthinkable to them. The cross was very offensive. That's why Paul said to the Jews, "It was a stumbling block and an offense." The doctrine of saving grace in the cross created resentment, hostility and persecution.

So to keep from being persecuted, these Jews advocated salvation by works. And they didn't really want to be identified with the cross of Christ, the price was frankly too high. The cross always causes hostility from the legalists, from the false religionists. And that was a price they didn't want to pay.

So spiritual pride and the fear of persecution were the reasons for glorying in the flesh. They weren't about to pay the price of identifying with the cross of Jesus Christ. That's how it is with false religionists, they don't want anything that's going to cause them to be persecuted. They want something that's going to cause them to be exalted.

Thirdly, they glory in the flesh. They follow works systems to cover up their sin. They do it out of spiritual pride and the fear of persecution and frankly to cover up their sin. Religion is the great cover up...it really is. Verse 13, "Those who are circumcised do not even keep the law themselves, but they

desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh." What does that mean? Well they don't even keep the law. They're religious as a cover up. And when they can convert you, they can sort of add convert statistics to validate their religion...you know, 50,000 Frenchmen can't be wrong. It's got to be right, it's big. It's sort of a...it's sort of a self-encouragement. If I can get somebody else to believe in this, maybe I'll feel better about it even though down deep in my heart I know I'm not transformed, I know I'm not forgiven, I know I'm not redeemed, I know I'm not righteous, I know I'm not holy, I know I don't know God. And they know they don't because they don't.

Misery wants company and the more company the more likely it feels it can relieve its misery. But the truth is, verse 13 says, they don't keep the law at all. They are circumcised but they don't keep the law. They're super-zealous and very busy making converts and fighting for their religion of works, otherwise somebody would suspect their real wretchedness. And they would have to face it. In order to cover up their wretchedness, they are outwardly good and aggressive in their effort to make converts. They keep the pretense up and they scour land and sea, Jesus said of the Jews, to make one proselyte. They glory in their converts.

You see, the cross is just the opposite of all of this. The cross tells the truth about us. The cross devastates pride and the very essence of the cross is that we are hopelessly lost and fallen and damned and doomed to eternal hell and the fact is we can't do anything about it, we can't do anything to save ourselves, we can't achieve anything that will ultimately cause God to change His mind about destroying us. The cross is devastatingly humbling. The cross inevitably brings persecution because as soon as identify with the cross, we immediately condemn all the religions of works, whatever their name might be, all over the world. And they can't tolerate that and since Satan runs that world system, he sets out to persecute those who know the truth. Furthermore, it is really a terrible thing to try to face the reality that somebody could actually be holy when you're a fake and you're a pretender. That is very convicting. That is devastating. Nothing cuts across man and chops him down at the very root like the cross. Nothing boosts...bursts rather the inflated balloon of his own ego like the cross. Nothing shrinks him to his true shriveled size like the cross.

So Paul looks at these big untidy large scrawly letters that he's writing and they remind him of those people who care only for the letters and not the spirit, only for the show and not the reality. He faced that in Corinth when people condemned him not for what he said but the way he said it. The religion of human achievement is always concerned about how you look on the outside, can't do anything for the inside. And the world is full of these self-righteous people who are self-righteous out of pride, self-righteous because they will not pay the cost involved in confronting their own sin and feeling the persecution of an evil system. Self-righteous because they want to cover up the reality of what they really are. Such is the religion of human achievement.

And he reminds them of it in those three brief verses. And then he turns to the religion of divine accomplishment and here's where we get in to the heart of this great text in verse 14, 15 and 16.

Verse 14 says, "But may it never be," or God forbid, or no, no, no, no...very strong negative, me genneta(?) in the Greek. May it never be that I should boast. And that's precisely what the people in the religions of human achievement do. "May it never be that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I will never glory in the flesh, he says, I will never glory in anything I have achieved, anything I have accomplished. And that takes you again right back to Philippians 3 which has kind of been the heartland text of this whole series where Paul says, "You know, I had it all, circumcised the eighth day, born of the nation Israel, a member of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to zeal, a Pharisee, touching the law found blameless, I achieved all of that and found it all to be dung compared to Christ. I will never glory in the flesh. I count all those things loss for the sake of Christ," he said in Philippians 3. And here he's essentially saying the same thing. If I'm going to boast, I'm not going to boast in my list of religious achievements, but I'm going to boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the insignia of the Christian faith. Just to follow that up a little bit. The insignia of the Christian faith is not two tables of stone, for example. It's not two carved tables of stone replicating the Ten Commandments. It's not a sword. It's not an angel. It's not a lamb. It's the cross. That is the insignia of the Christian faith because that is the heart and soul of the Christian faith. That's what sets it apart from everything else because it's on the cross, you see, that man is faced with the reality that he can't come to God by human achievement. And so, God's Son has to die to reconcile man.

The cross says that. The cross is a torture instrument. There aren't too many of you here tonight that generally speaking wear torture instruments around your neck except for the cross which is an instrument of torture. And why is it the symbol of Christianity? Why? Because it is the most important thing that ever happened in redemptive history because it's the only way that men can be right with God. You cannot come to God through human achievement. You cannot come to God through works righteousness. You cannot come to God through religious ceremony. The only way is to have your sin atoned for on the cross, to have Christ pay the penalty for your sin...that and that alone opens a way to God. We glory in the cross then because it is the act of divine accomplishment that brings salvation. The cross is the crux of the religion of divine accomplishment. On the cross the purpose of God was summed up. On the cross the purpose of God was worked out. On the cross the purpose of God was finished.

And, of course, we all know that God is God and God set the standards. He is holy. And no one comes to Him to live in His presence and receive eternal life unless he's holy also. And we can't be holy no matter how we try and how we try and how we try, we can't ever make it. We can't be holy. And so we are left, cut off from God in our sins. And God's justice demands that those sins be paid for. Christ comes, pays for our sins and if we put our trust in Christ, that payment is put to our account. God, first of all, then is a judge, there is no way to change God's standard because God's

character is unchangeable. God must punish sin and so God has to punish our sin.

How did He do it in Christ? He took our sin and laid it on Christ in some supernatural miracle. And then Christ bore our sin in His own body on the cross.

Now Satan wants to lie about this and that's why there are so many religions under so many names but they're all the same. It's the cross that is the unique reality of Christianity. And the cross really does reveal God's love, doesn't it? We know that God loved us because He gave Himself for us. The love of God was manifest in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Greater love hath no man than this, then a man lay down his life for his friends. It is a death for sin.

Some people think the death of Jesus was some kind of example, showing us the courage and the dedication of a man who would die for something He believed in. No. I mean, it would be stupid to think of it that way. I mean, imagine sitting on a pier just gazing at the ocean before you and the sun is shining and somebody comes along and says to you, "Because I love you I'm going to jump in the water and drown?" And he does. You wouldn't say, "Oh what a wonderful sacrifice, what exemplary devotion." You'd say, "The guy is nuts. I'm sitting on the pier, what is he doing? This is irrelevant. This has nothing to do with me."

But if I'm drowning in the surf and I'm about to go under for the last time, and he jumps off and rescues me, that's a revelation of love. The other is a revelation of stupidity. If God loves us and if Jesus loved us and we are in no danger of judgment and no danger of hell but we can make it on our own, then His dying was stupid, irrelevant, pointless, meaningless theatrics. But if we are in danger of judgment and hell and His death rescues us, then it is not a death of stupidity, it is a death of love. And anything less than a death that rescues us from sin is pointless and doesn't reveal great devotion, it reveals great stupidity. Christ didn't just die. He died for sinners, to rescue us. He took our place, He bore in His body our sins. He died the death that we should have died. And so, Christianity then can simply be summed up in what Paul said when he said, "We preach Christ crucified."

I remember reading years ago about a church in England and when it was built that was their motto and they had it across the front of their church...We preach Christ crucified. And some of those old churches are ivy-colored and they ivy grew. And as it grew it started covering the sign and pretty soon it said, "We preach Christ." A few more years went by and it said, "We preach." What a metaphor that is of what's happened in the church. We preach Christ crucified.

Paul had reached a determination he says in 1 Corinthians 2:2 not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That's...that's my message, I glory in the cross. I think I told you a couple of months ago that when people ask me what I do and some gentleman asked me recently that when we were seated at a dinner table with he and his wife for a number of occasions.

And they didn't know the Lord. And he asked me what I did. I hesitated to be at all vague and speak in generalities and found the simplest way for him to understand was just to say, "I preach Christ. I preach the gospel of Jesus Christ." I said, "Do you understand what the gospel of Jesus Christ is?" And we had a conversation about that.

It was one of Paul's fundamental convictions that apart from Christ nothing would come out right. Man left to himself is doomed and damned. This is a moral universe and God has made it so that sinful man will reap the reward of his sin. And the only hope is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is no other salvation. So Paul says if I'm going to boast, it's going to be only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then he goes on to give several reasons why. Now follow these, they're really wonderful. Number one, the cross freed him from the world's bondage. Now remember, those who were involved in the work systems had their reasons too. Those who come to Christ have their reasons. And here's reason number one. The cross freed him from the world's bondage. Verse 14, "Through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." The relationship that I formerly had with the evil world system is over, death has severed it. The world is kosmos, the system, Satan's prevailing dominating system, that false religion that demands of men loyalty and submission and impossible achievement, that satanic

system that produces the wrong goals and aims and ends and desires, that which every man is born into as it says in 1 John 5:19, "Everybody lies in the lap of the evil one," that satanic system. Paul says I don't have anything to do with it anymore, I'm out of it. It's dead. The world has been crucified means it's dead to me and I'm dead to it. I'm in another dimension, I died, I live in another place. To borrow Ephesians 1, "I'm in the heavenlies now." I am transformed. The death of Christ has changed my relation to the world. I don't see it the way I used to see it. I don't feel it the way I used to feel it. I'm not dominated by it the way I used to be dominated by it. In Philippians 3:20 he says, "Our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." I'm not a part of that anymore.

Frankly, you can define the world to Paul even more narrowly, Judaism. That was the particular angle of Satan's system that he was on. That was the particular defined element of the satanic religion of human achievement that he was in, he was trapped in Satan's system called Judaism, legalism, salvation by works. And the cross killed that relationship. In Galatians 2:20 he says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me." I have died and I'm new. Romans 6, He died to the law, He died to sin, and here he says He died to the world. And Romans 6 says, "He rose to walk in a newness of life in God's realm." I have been separated from the world by my union in the death of Christ and I have only distaste for its values and its vanities. I don't love the world anymore. John said, "If the love of the world is dominating your life then the love of the Father is not in you."

So he said I...I responded to grace and faith because it severed me from the satanic world system. And, beloved, I just want to remind you, that happened when you were saved. And for whatever issues of life you have to face, don't be foolish enough to go back into that system to try to find your answer. The world by wisdom knows not God. There's nothing there. The wisdom that is earthly is demonic, James said. They have nothing to offer you. Your sufficiency is in Christ. You've been cut off from that. Why would we go back to that? So he said I embrace the religion of divine accomplishment because it severed my dominating and damning relationship with the world, the satanic system.

Secondly, I came to the cross because the cross did what the flesh couldn't do. Look at verse 15, "Neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision but a new creation." You say, "What's the point?" Well, I...I put my trust in surgery, circumcision, ceremony and the trappings and I found out it doesn't mean anything. It...spiritually it doesn't accomplish anything, it doesn't mean anything. Salvation by circumcision and religious ritual and ceremony is inconsequential, it accomplishes absolutely nothing, it frees nobody from sin, frees nobody from guilt, frees nobody from judgment. It is meaningless, absolutely meaningless.

When I was a little kid I used to watch these guys box and every once in a while a guy would cross himself before he boxes. And I asked my father one day, I said, "Does that help?" His response was, "Not if you can't punch." It doesn't mean anything.

Following the religion of human achievement is like crossing yourself before you go into battle with hell. Lots of luck. It doesn't help. And so he says I turn to the cross because in the cross I became a new creation. Frustration of the self-effort system is that it is completely incapacitated by the self who is making the effort. But the cross makes new creations. The cross brings about new birth. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation." Cross makes people created unto God's...unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. The cross really transforms. It does what the flesh couldn't do.

So Paul says I glory in the cross. Some people glory in their own works, they do it for pride's sake, they do it to avoid hostility and persecution that comes to those who follow the truth. They do it as a cloak over their sin. But I glory in the cross because it changed my bondage to the world into freedom and changed my frustrated sinful flesh into a new creation.

And then lastly, he says because it brought me all the benefits of salvation, verse 16, "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God." I love the fact that he throws that little statement "the Israel of God" on the end because somebody might accuse him here of being a little anti-Semitic. I mean, he's really strong against the existing Judaizers but here you see his heart...the Israel of God would simply mean true Jews, those who were Jews inwardly,

those who had embraced Christ from within the Jewish people. And he says peace and mercy is available for all who walk according to the rule of the cross, even those who are Jews.

As many as walk according to this kanon, this principle. What principle? The principle of glorying in the cross not the flesh. As many as walk in this way, even those who are Jews, peace and mercy be upon them. Peace with God, peace of God. What does mercy mean? Well, care, provision, help in the midst of our distress and want and desperate need. Anybody who steps into the path of obedience to the cross, be he Jew or Gentile, will find the marvelous blessings of peace and mercy. Peace with God, mercy for our sin and misery.

Beloved, this sums up everything. Peace is in the cross. Mercy is in the cross. That's all we need. Peace means that the relationship with God is right and the resources are available. Mercy means that God will deliver whatever is needed to cover the misery that sin continues to bring even upon one who belongs to God.

As Christians we are of the cross, severed from the world. And we find in the cross and the Christ of the cross all the sufficiency for every issue of life. He adds in verse 18, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen." Peace, grace, mercy.

Everybody has a choice. As for me, by God's mercy and by His grace He has called me to live glorying in the cross and not in my flesh. And I came into the kingdom glorying in the cross and that's the way I want to live. When I need peace and when I need mercy and when I need grace, I find it in the Christ of the cross. I find it in the sufficient Savior. I don't go back to the system from which I have been forever severed. Why will we look for what we need where it does not exist and not where it does?

Lily Douglas wrote in her writing Christos Futuris(?) these words, "Reason cries, 'If God were good He could not look upon the sin and misery of man and live. His heart would break.' And the Christian points to the cross and says, 'And God's heart did break.'" She writes, "Reason cries, 'Born and reared in sin and pain as we are, how can we keep from sin? It is the creator who is responsible, it is God who deserves to be punished, He did this.' The Christian kneels at the foot of the cross and whispers, 'God took the responsibility. And He bore the punishment.' Reason cries, 'Who is God? What is God? The name stands for the unknown, it is blasphemy to say we know God.' The Christian kneels and kisses the feet of the dying Christ and says, 'We worship the majesty we see.'"

True reason then glories in the cross. I remember years ago getting a copy of an article from a Melbourne daily paper that somebody sent me. And in that was a letter to the editors in response to a meeting that Billy Graham had in Melbourne. This is what the letter said. "After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on television and reading reports and letters concerning him and his mission, I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists that my soul and everyone else's needs

saving. Whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin although repetitive preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children of goodness and not sin." And then he closed with this paragraph. "If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned. Yours truly."

And the sad reality is that's precisely what will happen or what has happened. There are only two choices in life, you either believe you're going to make it into God's presence by some virtue of your own or some religious accomplishment. Or you come to the foot of the cross. You will not make it on your own, the religion of human achievement only damns. If you come to the cross and you find in there the power of God to save, you will find there from that point on the rest of your love the sustaining and sanctifying power as well. And I submit to you that the same Christ whose death could save you now lives to sanctify you. And as Romans 5 so majestically says, "If we could be saved by His death, we can certainly be kept by His life." If in death He can redeem, imagine what He could do in life. And that's precisely what He is doing.

So, beloved, find your resource in Christ. In His cross is all that we need...our sins covered...mercy, grace and peace abounding. Whatever the issue of life, pursue Him.

Father, we again come to the end of a wonderful day together. And we rejoice that this day has exalted You. We've talked about You, we've endeavored to sing to You, and to worship You. We've tried to lift up Your Son in the messages and exalt Him. We've tried to recapture the focus of our Christian life by looking for everything we need in the one who gave His life for us. Our treasure is all in the crucified Christ, may we pursue Him daily, His likeness and His fellowship, His truth. It is beyond our comprehension of what it will be like some day to be made in His image. It is inconceivable and yes unthinkable, it almost seems like a blasphemy and yet it is our destiny. The cross has made it so. Some day we'll be like Him. While still being who we are we'll be like Him. Until that day we pursue that likeness and ask that Your Spirit would grant us evermore the image of Christ. May we realize that we've been severed from the world and all our benefits are in Him. And may we pursue Him in everything. We pray in His glorious name. Amen.

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