

“The Weight of the Cross”

Prepared by Patrick J. Griffiths © 2009 - pastorpat@waukeshabile.org
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Read Galatians 5:11; 6:12, 14, 17



The weight of the cross is its stigmata and glory. Paul’s language in Galatians is militant and fierce. It is without deviation or compromise. He speaks of the cross as a stumbling block, of producing persecution, of causing a branding. This is its weight. **Those who bear it are identified by it.** The cross alters everything it touches. Paul uses the word “brand-marks.” It is the English word **Stigmata**. “*Stigmata* is the plural of the Greek word *stigma*, a mark or brand such as might have been used for identification of an animal or slave. An individual bearing stigmata is referred to as a **stigmatic**.” It is the only time this word is used in the New Testament. It means, “A mark incised or punched (for recognition of ownership), i.e. (figuratively) scar of service.”

What are Paul’s stigmata? His marks are those left by persecution. “The stigmata of which the apostle speaks here, may be understood as implying the scars of the wounds which he had received in the work of the ministry; and that he had such scars, we may well conceive, when we know that he had been scourged, stoned, and maltreated in a variety of ways. The writer could show such scars himself, received in the same way.”¹

Listen carefully to Paul’s listing of his stigmata.

²³ “Are they servants of Christ? --I speak as if insane--I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶ I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; ²⁷ I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

This same truth is noted for us in Hebrews 11.

³² “And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; ³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ³⁸ (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground” (Heb. 11:32-38).

All bore the marks of His cross. Such marks are the testimony of those who stand for God and resist the conforming power of the world, the flesh, and devil. All who bear such marks chose to identify themselves with who God is and what God does rather than the usurping action of the rebellion. Why is the cross foolishness to those who perish and a stumbling block to others? Remember, the cross speaks the truth about God’s priority, man’s inability, and Christ’s sufficiency. The cross tells us the truth about who He is and what He has done and why it was done. The natural man hates the light (John 3:19). God came unto His own and His own did not receive Him (John 1:10, 11). The church will be persecuted by the world, the flesh, and the devil because it hates God and all who are His (John 15:18).

The cross marks all who follow Jesus. There is offense in the cross. The cross broadly states, “You cannot; only Jesus can.” The cross accents humanity’s inability and celebrates God’s sufficiency. The cross says, “You are

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wrong and only God is right." The cross puts an end to humanity's boasting, arrogance, autonomy, and damning façade. The cross makes everyone naked, transparent, and vulnerable. The cross strips us of any residue of self-sufficiency and makes us depend only on God. This is the stigmata of the cross.

The idea that the believer can live peaceably in a hostile environment is always tentative. Yet, with this stigmata comes glory. Paul notes how the only boasting he has is sourced solely in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the stripping away of all things but the cross, life becomes singular and simple. The New Testament writers knew that glory followed suffering. The supreme example is that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the object of our affection and energy. Listen carefully to the following passages and see if you cannot hear their voice.

¹⁰ "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, ¹¹ seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as **He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow**" (1 Pet. 1:10, 11).

¹⁷ ". . . and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.** ¹⁸ For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us**" (Rom. 8:17, 18).

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and **a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed**" (1 Pet. 5:1).

⁷ ". . . but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, **even death on a cross.** ⁹ For this reason also, **God highly exalted Him**, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:7-11).

As a Christian, suffering is inevitable (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:12). Yet there is glory. It is in the death that life is brought forth. What is this glory? It is, "Not only the glory of his resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and the effusion of his Spirit; but that grand manifestation of God's infinite love to the world in causing the Gospel of his Son to be everywhere preached."² The glory of the cross is the consequences of the finished work (Isa. 53:10, 11; Heb. 12:2).

"But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, **He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.** **As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied;** By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:10, 11).

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross,** despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

1 Peter 1:11 uses the plural of glory (i.e., glories). The magnitude of His work is truly awe-inspiring. It is impossible for us to significantly understand the scale of the glories. We can no more fathom the unplumbed depths of His cross-work as we could possibly comprehend the bottomless quality of the resultant glories. But with the stigmata comes the glory. The two are inseparably linked.

What sin ruins, the cross restores. This is the glory of the cross. The cross delivers us from our self-effort and gives us His effort. The believing life, the Christian life, is coming to understand who God is as a Trinity, what God has done, and who His people are because of it. May God the Holy Spirit continue to open our eyes and ears to both see His face and hear His voice in our unfolding life.

¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on Galatians 6:17

² Adam Clarke's Commentary on 1 Peter 1:11.