

The Cross and the World

By Paris Reidhead*

This morning's text is found in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 14. We are in the midst of a series of messages on the Cross in the Christian Life. We have considered several aspects of the Cross. The Cross in the Old Testament, the Cross in the ministry of Christ; the Cross in the Life of Paul; the Cross and Satan. Today, the Cross and the World. Our text fits the theme perfectly and gives great latitude to the speaker. This is then, one of those messages when I have found that the least that I can do is to prepare a series of six sermons. And since it is impossible to do that, I just had to commit the matter to the Lord and have Him bring as much of the six sermons as He wants today. So it gives me great liberty and great latitude, and I trust it will be the means of great blessing to your heart.

Notice the text now – “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom or whereby the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.” (Gal. 6:14) Well, I have already given you the theme. You see it, you know the approach, and for me, therefore, to dwell entirely on this without giving some background as to the reason why Paul should take this attitude, would be to deprive you of the measure of blessing the hour should bring. You know, it's not always been so that Christian people have had a proper attitude towards the world. Now, God has been dealing with me greatly in the last 5 years. I find that I was well equipped and furnished with meaningless clichés. And there were a great many ideas which I had taken from teachers and their writings and had accepted without criticism or without investigation. Isn't it interesting in Colossians Paul is writing to that church and he makes a very strange statement - very strange indeed, in the 20th verse, and 21st and 22nd. “For if ye be dead in Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things, which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.” (Col. 20-23)

Paul has in this portion, taken an attitude, rightly understood, is almost diametrically opposed to some of the stereotyped that we hold in our minds regarding the world. And it behooves us ever to bring our thinking into line with the Word of God, regardless of whether it means that we have to make an adjustment. I'm not at all averse to making adjustments in my thinking, as long as the adjustments puts me more nearly in the center of the Word of God and the Truth of God. I am very flexible. I absolutely refuse to be pushed into a ditch if I know a ditch is there, but by the same token, I'm not going to permit myself to be held from the Truth of God because to some stereotypes that has been given to me by some well-meaning teacher. Ever since I discovered that there are antique maps, I've had a little bit of appreciation for some of the things which we have received as part of our heritage. These dear people that drew the maps said that the world is square or flat were well-meaning and sincere, but they weren't particularly accurate, and if you ever see any of the maps that were drawn by the early map makers, you are aware that they were right in general proportions, but wrong in many specific details. So consequently I do not feel particularly bound to some of the attitudes which have come down regarding the world. Now don't think I'm heretic, I'm not, but I do want you to think, and if I don't do something you're simply going to sit here and vegetate for the next few minutes, and you'll have lost a sterling opportunity to make some contribution to your life, and should it be no other contribution than to make you a bit angry, even that might be wholesome, for it might be necessary for you to think to find out exactly why you were. But I want you to see what Paul in this portion we read in Colossians is saying, “why are you finding it necessary to bring yourself under a lot of rules, and put yourself into bondage to a lot of teachers who say, now don't touch this, now don't taste that and don't handle the other. You don't need that. Something has happened to you that's so tremendous, so dynamic, so wonderful you do not need to go into bondage to these.”

Now to whom is he speaking, of whom is he speaking? In his day there were a company of people which had been known in other days by various terms, but we can use a general term and call it the Gnostics. Gnosticism was that teaching which says, “We have knowledge not available to the others. We are the illuminati. We have special revelations.” And they specialized in interpreting the Word of God, the Scripture, and especially the writings and sayings of Christ. They had the ‘secret meaning’, rather like those absurd ads you see in magazines - What Accounts For the Mysterious Power by Benjamin Franklin, and then

you see down below Rosicrucian or something else, as though “we have the inner knowledge or something that others can’t know. It’s secretly hidden from them and revealed to us.” Well, these were the Gnostics. They came and said to the Christians; “now look, you think the Bible says what it means and means what it says. No, it’s not that at all. We’re the people that have the answer. We know what it means.” And the consequence was that Paul had great trouble with these people. But the basic philosophical foundation of Gnosticism was this, that all matter was created by demi-urge. Demi-urge was a creature that God had made, and he made matter. God only created spirit. All spirit is good, and all matter is bad. Do you begin to have suspicion who invented this doctrine? He, *Satan*, wanted to camouflage himself, for he is spirit, wicked spirit, and so he got this idea that all spirit is good to counter all of the princes of darkness and all matter is bad. And then the theory went on that all human spirits had been captured in their pristine stage and forced into captivity into matter, and that matter was bad. This became a philosophical root of another system of thinking called Manicheism. Incidentally, Augustine was a Manicheist for nine years, systematically taught and instructed by them, and then he came into Christianity. There are some who are not particularly unfriendly to Augustine that suspect that in some of his writings he seems a feeling of Manicheism feeling that matter is bad. And so we’ve got to come back to that. That’s our first problem. Who made the world. Well, I have no difficulty with that. I accept the Scripture that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and then Genesis proceeds to give us the description as God wishes us to see it and understand it of how He prepared it to be a fit habitation for the creature made in His image and in His likeness. And I, therefore, am quite prepared to stand on that ground, that the world as we know it and as our forefathers have known it, came from the will of God and purpose of God and hand of God, and I am therefore going to conclude that the Scriptures absolutely right when it says, and when He looked at all the things that He had made, He said “It is good”.

That immediately, as far as I’m concerned, outlaws Gnosticism; this whole concept has to be disregarded and denied and refused. Matter is not essentially bad. God made it. He created it. He made it out of nothing, and when He had made it He said, “It is good”. The world as we know it, is inhabited, was prepared for us, and when you see the sun rise, you realize that God had no obligation to put the spectrum before you to refresh your day with that glimpse of beauty. It could have come up black, and then glaring yellow, but He wanted it to be a gradual means of blessing like the prelude to a great symphony. And when at night it leaves again and darkness comes, He wanted it to be with the promise and again the rays are broken up to give you that glimpse of heavenly beauty. He didn’t need to put the fragrance in the rose or the lily of the valley. There was no necessity on His part of giving you the tree with its out-stretched branches and shade; He did not need to put the beautiful gems in the earth and the birds in the sky. Yet all of this He did because of a heart of lavish love that wanted to provide everything that the creatures he was making in His image and likeness could enjoy. You see God made man to meet the need of His heart for a Beloved. God made man to be the object of His love; God made man so that as a Father He could have children, as Son He could have brethren and as Bridegroom He could have a Bride, and He thus wanted to provide everything that could possibly please the one that He was making. And with all that God created, He also gave to this man the faculties necessary to enjoy His creation.

They tell us that a dog cannot see colors. Now I do not quite know how they have arrived at this. They know, but I am prepared to accept it. I just don’t understand how they became so certain about that little fact, but I shant debate it, but they say dogs can’t see colors. But theoretically God could have made you so that you couldn’t see colors, and He didn’t do that. He gave you the ability to distinguish between a myriad of shades and tints of colors, and He gave to your nostrils the capacity to distinguish between a myriad of odors, and of course with your taste buds, He restricted it. There are only four things that you can taste; sweet and sour, bitter and salt, but that’s enough, so that coupled with your olfactory, nerves the you can enjoy the full scales of odors and tastes of the foods that He was giving the herbs that were to furnish fragrant spices, and all the foods that were necessary to satisfy the palates of His creatures. He gave it all to you. Then He gave the birds a song and your ear to distinguish between those sounds, and the waterfall should ripple in His harmony. All this was done so that you might be happy. He made a creature in His image and likeness, He put it in a body, He gave these bodies all the faculties we know; He gave to the person the urges that we assign to personality; He gave to us the appetites that we know, an appetite for food, because our bodies are temporal and need continuous replenishing, nourishment, and with the food He gave the ability to appreciate the color and texture of it and the taste of it and the odor of it, AND all this was given of God. He did it. Let’s not forget that. And then He gave to us the urge for knowledge, because God is infinite and we’re finite, and we learn in series and in sequence, and He

wanted us to come to know Him. He gave us a hunger for knowledge, an inner pressure to know. And He gave us an appetite for sex, because by this means He was to reproduce the race and complete the family. He gave an appetite for status, so that we would appreciate the distinctions that He has given us between us and our lower forms of life; a desire for security that we could appreciate His benevolence. He gave all these appetites. He put them into man, and when He finished with the outer creation and man, with all that's in Him. He said, "It is good".

Now you think I'm going to let someone come along and tell me that it's not bad. No. Not so at all. I'm going to stand right on the ground of Scripture. But where does the trouble come? Where did the trouble come? You'll find that He said, there's a tree right in the midst of the garden if they ate of the fruit of that tree they would die. Was it because He didn't want them to have this luscious fruit? No. Was it because the fruit was poisonous? Certainly not. Why? You see, in making man in His image, He had to give to man a certain moral capacity and abilities, and one of these was the freedom of choice; intellects by which we could weigh the alternative, and emotions by which we could feel the draw and pull, and volition by which we could choose the course of action. And thus we find that He had to do that or else man would be a mere moral automaton, and incapable of meeting His heart, His need as a beloved. And so He gave to man this ability to choose.

Now do you know and see the subtlety of Satan's approach, coming in and saying, God's trying to cheat you. That was the implication; God robbing you; God doesn't want you to be happy; God wants to deprive you of good and of blessing. That's what he was saying essentially. That was what he was saying. God isn't your friend. You thought God was your friend? God isn't your friend at all. Why, He's robbing you, cheating you. He's keeping you from being happy. Why He knows that the day you eat of that tree you'll experience an eating pleasure that you've never had before. And more than that, you'll be wiser than you've ever been before; in fact, you'll be like God. And so the appeal was to the intellect of Eve, presenting to her possibilities, options that she hadn't experienced; and then to her emotions, that it would please her and satisfy her; and then, and she exercised her will. Now, is there anything wrong with eating? No. Was there anything wrong with the fruit? No. What is the trouble? She had committed her will to a policy of self-pleasing without regard for the will of God and the rights of others. In other words, she had declared, dared to set up another government, and enemy government, there in God's little universe. She was going to be God. She was going to live to please herself.

You see, God governed the world, the universe by the law of benevolence, namely this, that He wants everyone to be happy, to know the highest good and greatest blessedness including Himself. That was the government that He established. But now the proposition is - forget about God's interest in everyone being happy; live to make yourself happy. You're the reason for your being, and your happiness is the grand objective and motive. Live to please YOU. And ego responds to it. Adam responded to it, and so did you, and so did I. And all of us did as the first have done, committed us to this policy of self-pleasing. Tempted and yielded.

You know what temptation is? It's the proposition to gratify a legal appetite in a forbidden or illegal manner. And sin is the decision to do it. Is the decision to gratify that appetite. And thus we find that the world that was in and of itself good, now had become the instrument of evil. Now you think that this, because this has happened, there should now be instituted by God a program of exterminating fruit trees. Is that going to be the answer to the problem? Let's suppose that there had not been any fruit trees in the midst of the garden. Could God have set up the same proposition on some other basis? Obviously. Therefore, we must conclude that the world itself is not bad. The world; these things which God has made. And when we speak of it, we're not speaking of the world, the things which are there, the experience. What is the world? Not certainly creation, not this that we've seen and to which we refer. What is the world? Well, we find in I John the description of the world as we're going to understand it. "All that is in the world, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life; but all of it flows from within out towards the world." (I John 2:16) It's not what the world is that is the problem, it's what your attitude towards the world is. It isn't the question of how much of the world you have; someone might say, well, abnegation of the flesh is the divine order; denying of self, persecuting of the body.

You remember history gives us these that followed the gnostic heresy; under the guise of Christianity they were called the flagellants. They were men that wore burlap, rough and coarse as they could. And then they would even take off the burlap and would take a cat 'o nine tails, a scourge, and because they wanted to know the fellowship of His sufferings, completely

misunderstood and misapplied; the flagellants would take the cat 'o nine tails with the bone, the steel and the stone that would be tied on it, and they would beat themselves, always of course when they had a crowd around to witness it, because they were gaining their spiritual satisfaction and pride from it, they were getting what they wanted out of it, knowing that the pleasure of pain, because it satisfied another deeper desire for aggrandizement and exhibitionism, etc., but here they would be, and they would beat their body, just whip themselves until the flesh was torn, and by so doing they were bringing the body under; and they were supposed to be performing a spiritual work. Well, what is your attitude towards that? I don't know how you feel about it, but I despise it, I deplore it, I think it's horrible, it's pagan. There's absolutely no place in Christian thinking; it's not the back, that's not the trouble. It's not the hand, it's not your eye. The body that you made. Some people have the idea that sin is resident in the corpuscles, that's in the nerves and the bones and the muscles; the eyes. No dear. I do not believe it. You may if you wish. I do not believe that sin is resident in this bit of watered mineral that comprises my body. The residence of sin, the location of sin is in that thing the psychologists call Ego, in I, what I am, that part of me that's invisible to the natural eye, that thinks and feels and wills, and will go someplace when I die. Sin is there, it's in this, it's in the committal of my will to the principle of pleasing myself, and it's my firm contention that the flagellants could have been just as sinful in beating his flesh as the epicure would be in giving himself over to eating and feeding his flesh. He was pleasing himself, gratifying himself, bruising his body to inflate his spirit. Just as much in the world as someone that would live in complete voluptuousness, gratifying every whim and appetite of the flesh. Where is it? It's this. When you come to the ideal relationship to the world, you'll be right back where Adam was before he got into trouble, because he was in an ideal relationship with the world. You'll come to that place where you're relationship to it will be balanced and proper and right in God's will for you. You must recognize that the ideal Christian state is not the monastery and it's not the convent and it's not on the_____.

These things were never intended in the will of your heavenly Father. They were not His plan or His purpose for you. What He intended was this - that that principle which was introduced into the heart of Eve and came to you, of pleasing yourself, of using the world to give you the satisfaction, the happiness, the status, the standing, the wholeness of being, that this was the thing against which God had declared war. Let me give you an illustration. I resort to it because I know no other way.

In Africa one day, the principal of our school said to a boy that had some beads around his neck, "Now you're going to have to take these beads off, and you're going to have to put them in this envelope, and when school term is over you can have them, but you can't wear your beads here." Now, he didn't have another stitch. They gave him an enlarged dish towel, but that's all he wore tied around one corner, but just as likely as not it was flying about 3 ft. in the wind behind him, and that's all he had and these beads. But when he had to loosen that bead and take it off, he stood there and tears ran down his cheeks, and he loved it, and it just about killed him to let go of that one bead. Do you know why? Because that was his glory, that was his pride, that was part of his marriage price; that was proof that his father was a big man in his village; that was proof that he was son of a big man in his village. He secured his place, his status. It was the symbol that he was who he was, and now when he takes it off, what is he going to do? He's just going to be like anyone else in the school, and it killed him to do it, because this is the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, and it's in a bead, and somebody else has to go to the most expensive dressmaker in Paris and if you were to take it away from the poor dear, she'd be killed. She'd feel the same way he did; a lot more yard goods has gone into it, but it has essentially the same function. It furnishes pride and place and security, that makes her a person. Now He said, if the things of the world become the source of your pleasure and your happiness, and your completeness and your wholeness, if you depend upon them, if you need them, if you find that you're incomplete without them, then He says you love the world, you love it, and if you love the world, the love of the Father isn't in you. It's not a question, again I say, of how much of the world you have, but how much it has you, and where it has you. I think perhaps I could even use this illustration. Our Brother McAfee, who will be joining us here as associate pastor in May, and I were having dinner two or three years ago in Chicago at the Conrad-Hilton Hotel; we'd gone into one of the dining rooms and were eating there, a good meal, well served, an attractive place, and Ray was enjoying it to the full. So was I, I'm trying to tell you, and he looked at me and said, "Isn't this fine", and I said, "It certainly is." "But" he said, "you know, I have one word that describes my attitude towards it. Well, I didn't know that I had such a word and I wanted to find out what it was," and I said, "What is it Ray?" "Well," he said, "the word that seems to describe my attitude towards this and towards so many of the blessings God has given me is the word - Detached." He said, "As long as it's here and the will of God for me to be here, I'm glad I have the capacity to enjoy and appreciate it." He said, "If I were embarrassed here, uncomfortable here, couldn't appreciate it, I think

there would be something sadly lacking in me.” “But” he said, “I can enjoy it, but the wonderful part of it is, I don’t have to have it; I’m not dependent upon it; I feel a detachment in my spirit; I don’t need it to be happy, I don’t need it to be complete, I don’t need it to be whole, or to put it in other words, I can take it or leave it. It doesn’t mean anything to me as a person.”

There are some people who find it much easier to be abased than it is to abound. There are some people that, I am sure, that if God ever puts them in a circumstance where they had to abound, they would feel terribly wicked; they wouldn’t quite know what to do because they somehow become to attach being abased was spiritual superiority, and I submit to you that their very abasement itself is spiritual pride and a source of sin. When Paul said, I know how to be abased, he wasn’t finding any particular in it or joy in it, he simply was taking it with thanksgiving from his heavenly Father, and he wasn’t saying “see how humble I am, and see how poor I am, and see how proud I am of my humility.” That wasn’t in Paul’s heart. He said, I know how to be abased. I’ve learned how to live down in the desert with the Arabs and make my quilts and my tents, and I’m just as happy there as I’d be in a king’s palace, but also when I get to a king’s palace I know how to abound. He said, I know how to use it and not love it, not abuse it, not hang to it, not hold it. Why? Well, because he said, “Thanks be unto God that giveth me the victory” and part of that victory was victory over the world. It had no hold on him, he wasn’t dependent upon it; it didn’t grip him, it didn’t hold him. He could use it, he could enjoy it, he could appreciate it, but he didn’t desire it for itself and he didn’t love it and there wasn’t a single sacrifice that he’d make for it.

Now, my dear, the relationship that you have to the world is entirely determined by what you would do to get it. You know that, don’t you...If you’re willing to compromise one moral principle to secure the physical good that you enjoy, there’s something radically wrong with your relationship to the world. If there’s one eternal principle that you’re prepared to abandon, then there’s something wrong with your relationship to the world. If there’s some hold, if you’re willing to compromise your convictions, your spiritual convictions for physical good - I remember 5 years ago when I was in the midst of considerable turmoil, a young friend came to me and he said, “Now Brother Paris, you know after all, your family’s got to eat.” And I thought about that for a minute, and the only answer I could say was, “no sir, my family doesn’t have to eat. There are a lot of families that aren’t eating.” He said, “Well, what will happen if they don’t?” I said, “They’ll die, but that’s not the worst thing that’s happened to folks. It’s going to happen to everyone sooner or later, and we don’t have to eat.” He said, “But you’ve got to live” I said, after a moment’s cogitation, “no, I don’t have to live.” He said, “Well, maybe they’ve been saying you’re crazy, maybe you really are. You know, it just isn’t natural a person that doesn’t have to eat and doesn’t have to live.” He said, “Well, how do you explain it?” “Well,” I said, “look, I don’t have to live and I don’t have to eat, but I must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. I must do that, I have to do that, and therefore, if eating and living is going to be at the expense of grieving Him, so that when I stand before Him I’ll be ashamed, then I’m not willing to eat, I’m not willing to live. I’d rather die.”

This I believe is not something unique with me. I think it’s the attitude of every true child of God. You may not have been pressed into that place. You don’t know what you’ll do until you are. But the fact still remains and it’s patently clear that if I am prepared to sacrifice any moral principles for the sake of the world, then I have given proof by it that there’s some measure, at least, that I love the world more than I love God. No man can serve two masters. I must serve Him, I must please Him, I must obey Him.

Now Paul was writing here to this church at Galatia, and they were coming in saying, you’ve got to do this and do that, and dishes and all of the Pharisaical laws are being forced on these people by these Judaizes. And Paul says, “God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.” What do you mean? Well, this world system, this world that’s governed by Satan; Satan is the god of this world, the prince of the world, the prince that now works in the children of disobedience, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, and what is it.

Do you know how Satan leads people to destruction? He doesn’t take and throw them over the Pit, he does it the way we used to do it as a boy on the farm when we trapped pheasants in a trap. You know what we’d do. We’d take an ear of corn and we’d just drop a kernel and six inches along and all along the path and then we’d get them about 3 inches apart and a little closer and they’d go right under the box and then we’d put the ear there on the trigger and the pheasant would come along and someone would come up and say, “Mr. Pheasant you’re being trapped.” Oh no, I’ve never had it so good. I’m not being trapped, I’m just having the best meal I’ve had for months. I’m eating, I’m not being trapped. Why, I’ve never had it so good.

You're being trapped, you're being trapped, Mr. Pheasant would be the reply, and he would look at you with complete disdain. Look here, I'm not being trapped. See there's another kernel there, there's another kernel there, and he'd pick it up and he'd say, look, I've found the source of it all right here, and he'd hit the cob with the kernels in aiming, and the trap would spring.

And that's what the Scripture says about the unsaved. They're walking according to the course of this world, the prince of the power of this world, the same spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, and there is some of you that have been going a kernel at a time, but you have been going in the wrong direction, just a little here a little there, a bit here a bit there, and my dear, you're on dangerous ground. You don't realize what's happening, but your adversary the Devil is seeking to make you Castaway, put you on the shelf, squander your life, ruin your ministry. That's what he's doing, and it's just a kernel at a time. And the first time that you discover that you are sacrificing principle for good, that is your Rubicon. You dare not cross it! You must stop right there. Makes no difference what it is. There must come that experience in your life, when you in union with Jesus Christ discover that you can reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto self and unto the world. In Romans 6:4 you read, "Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death". The proper attitude that you should have towards the world is the same attitude that the folk in the cemeteries have towards 1959 model new cars. If you need a new car God wants you to have it and probably will provide it, but if you find that your status is inflated and you are aggrandized and satisfied by it, brother, you had better learn how to pedal a bicycle, because the car isn't going to be good for you, but if you can take it as from the Lord and use it for His glory for a tool that's another thing, that's another thing. It's not a question of how much you have, it's what it does to you and there can come that place where you can take that place by faith, crucified with Christ and buried with Christ, and between you and the world is a great gulf fixed, and they can come and offer their dainties and offer their goodies and try to entice you and appeal to you, and you're going to say, "I can feel for you but I can't reach you! I can't touch you, I can't get to you." Why? I am crucified with Christ. I glory in the cross by which I am crucified to the world. I'm detached! Has the cross done its work in your life, has it released you from the world? I'm not saying, go home and have an auction and dispose of every attractive thing you have in your home. You know, I'm saying something better than that. I'm saying, write out a quit claim deed to Jesus Christ and say, "It's all yours Lord, to have and to hold. If you want it, you take it, it's yours, and if you don't want me to have it, I'll love you just as much."

Ray McAfee looked at me in the dining room and said, "You know, Paris, I'd rather be out on a jungle path in Africa, sitting on a plywood box with a tin plate and a spoon, eating my supper and be there in the will of God, than to own this hotel outside of His will." You see, the world has its place, it's there, but it hasn't taken His place. You're rightly related to it. And then you don't need to have people say, now you shall not do this, you shant do that, you can't go here and you can't go there, because the cross has done its work and the living Christ has filled your heart, and you can walk out into the world knowing that you have been crucified unto the world, and the world unto you. Oh, the liberty of the children of God; the glorious freedom of the child of God; to be in the world and not of it, to have it and not hold it, to use it and not love it, this is the privilege of the child of God, and when the cross has done its work in your life, friend, they can turn you loose in New York City and you're not going to grieve the Holy Ghost, and the world isn't going to spare you because the cross has done its work in your heart. Has it? Has it? Be honest; be honest as you're going to be honest when you see Him face to face. Has it done that? Do you sense that liberty? If you have it - if you haven't you can, today. Let us bow in prayer.

* Reference such as: Delivered at the Gospel Tabernacle New York City, NY Sunday Morning, December 7, 1958 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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