

Study Two Forbid it Lord that I should boast

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying Crimson, like a Robe,
Spreads o'er his Body on the Tree;
Then am I dead to all the Globe
And all the Globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all

Getting the perspective right

Romans 14:7-8

For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Paul was in some ways a complicated character – certainly an object of suspicion after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Unlike the simple fishermen who followed Jesus here was someone with a more complex and interesting background. At some stage he became an enthusiastic member of the Pharisees and trained in Jerusalem when he was around 13 under a well known teacher called Gamaliel.

Paul did not meet Jesus but learned enough about him and his followers to regard the Christian movement as a threat to the Pharisaic Judaism that he had embraced so eagerly.

Serious persecution of Christians first arose in connection with converts among the Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem. They had not only proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, but they also claimed that the temple and its sacrifices were superseded by the sacrificial death of Jesus. Paul therefore appears on the scene as a persecutor of the newly founded church – he was there when Stephen was stoned to death and the murderers ‘laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul’ (Acts 7:58).

Paul had every reason to boast at his achievements, both before and after his conversion, a zealous Pharisee and now a zealous Christian with a powerful and successful ministry. But Paul knew, as did Isaac Watts that it is not really possible to examine at our lives in isolation from the rest of humankind. We also cannot isolate ourselves from our past, our present or of course from Jesus.

What I am today has been influenced by the family I grew up in, the friends I made, the places I have lived, the teaching I received and the traditions of my culture and religion. To all these I have added my own mark, but I cannot distance myself totally from all that has gone before, just as Paul’s background steeped in the Scriptures and Rabbinic tradition influenced his teaching and authority.

What I am today also influences others, and sometimes we forget this. As we interact in our daily lives with those among whom we work, live or move then we can affect others by our actions and words. We can bring joy or sorrow, influence for good or bad, be generous or selfish, kind or cruel. Everything that we say or do has consequences, some greater than others, but essentially this means that we cannot isolate ourselves from the world in which we live – we are a part of it and must share our responsibility for it.

And as for the future, William Barclay comments that ‘As a man receives life so he hands life on’ and Paul reminds us that ‘none of us lives to himself alone.’ Whether we might consider it a good thing or not we do influence the future because of our interactions with others – something of us lives on in others, and the sins which we commit or hold onto can regrettably be our gift to the future.

‘Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!’

Isaac Watts brings our thoughts back to the importance of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial offering of love on the Cross, as indeed does the Apostle Paul as he says ‘If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord’

If we think we can live in isolation from people, then the reality is that it is impossible to live as Christians outside of the presence of Christ. The Cross is as central to our faith as our heart is to our life, and the resurrected Christ is our hope for the future.

‘All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.’

The Apostle Paul was a successful man by whatever measure you might care to use, both before and after his conversion. His missionary journeys ranged far and wide and his powerful ministry set the Christian Church on the path that we now follow, such was his influence – but the glory belonged to God. Within the church it is quite possible to have a cult of personality, be it a powerful teacher, worship leader or evangelist, where the message can almost take second place to the personality.

Keeping our feet on the ground is important as Christians, remembering where our salvation has its source and in whom we have our hope for eternity. When we consider the Cross all our vanity and pride is exposed for what it is, and our response should be to bring those things to his feet as a sacrificial offering. Only by doing so can we be effective as Christians, only by doing so can we become the people God would have us be.

Our only boast should be that we have known and benefited from the saving Grace of Jesus Christ.

Thought for meditation:

It's the picture of violence
Yet the key to peace
A picture of suffering
Yet the key to healing
A picture of death
Yet the key to life
A picture of utter weakness
Yet the key to power
A picture of capital punishment
Yet the key to mercy and forgiveness
A picture of vicious hatred
Yet the key of love
A picture of supreme shame
Yet the Christian's supreme boast

David Watson

Questions for discussion:

- 1) How does pride affect our relationships with each other?

- 2) How important is acknowledgement of success in our lives. Do we sometimes do people a disservice by not recognising their achievements, or giving them a pat on the back and saying 'Well done'?

- 3) How might pride affect our relationship with God?

SAMPLE PAGES

- 4) How easy is it to see the cruelty of the Cross as something that we can actually boast about, and how would you put that 'boast' into words that maybe a work colleague might be able to relate to?

- 5) What are 'those vain things that charm us most'?

- 6) Paul's view as a Christian is that 'whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. How is this 'sense of belonging' encouraged in our church, and could more be done to promote this truth within the fellowship?