

# Glory Versus the Cross

by ***Gene Edward Veith*** (</learn/teachers/gene-veith/>)

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Mother Teresa was a living saint, according to the popular mind, compassionately caring for the sick and dying and projecting a love that brought cynical secularists to their knees. After her death, the Vatican put her on a fast track to sainthood. But then a book on her life published some of her personal writings that showed Mother Teresa was wracked with spiritual depression and a sense that God had abandoned her.

The atheist Christopher Hitchens, who had earlier written a book attacking Mother Teresa for her pro-life views, crowed at the news. See, he wrote in *Newsweek*, she didn't believe in this Christianity stuff at all. But even many who admired her were flabbergasted that this saintly woman who talked so much about serving Christ had such trouble feeling his presence. Maybe she wasn't a saint after all.

For me, though, the news of Mother Teresa's dark night of the soul made me think that maybe she really was a saint. Not in the Roman Catholic sense of a spiritual superhero. But in the biblical sense of a sinner whose hope is in Christ and not in herself. She did not follow her feelings, trust in her good works, or enjoy mystical experiences. Rather, she walked by faith and not by sight ([2 Cor. 5:7 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%205.7\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor.%205.7)).

Luther was like that. He was subject to titanic glooms, as the poet Francis Thompson called them, times of spiritual struggle, terror, and despair. But Luther said that these inner trials drove him to trust the Word of God, not his feelings, and to cling not to his experiences but to the objective cross of Jesus Christ.

In writing about these matters, Luther identified what would become our contemporary culture's blind spot when it comes to spiritual matters. He distinguished between what he called a "theology of glory" and "the theology of the cross."

A theology of glory expects total success, finding all the answers, winning all the battles, and living happily ever after. The theology of glory is all about my strength, my power, and my works. A theologian of glory expects his church to be perfect and always to grow. If a theologian of glory gets sick, he expects God to heal him.

And if he experiences failure and weakness, if his church has problems and if he is not healed, then he is often utterly confused, questioning the sufficiency of his faith and sometimes questioning the very existence of God.

But, Luther pointed out, when God chose to save us, He did not follow the way of glory. He did not come as a great hero-king, defeating his enemies and establishing a mighty kingdom on earth. Rather, He came as a baby laid in an animal trough, a man of sorrows with no place to lay His head. And He saved us by the weakness and shame of dying on a cross. Those who follow Him will have crosses of their own: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" ([Matt. 16:24 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%2016.24\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%2016.24)).

Not that we have to suffer for our own sins. But faith in the Gospel, putting our trust in what Christ accomplished for us on His cross, entails acknowledging our own weakness, the failure of our own works, the complete

abnegation of our glory.

And as we find ourselves in the cross of Jesus, we can find Him in the far lesser crosses that we have to bear. When Christians suffer, according to Luther, Christ is with us in our suffering. Spiritual depression can drive us closer to Him, who knows better than anyone what it feels like to be wracked with physical pain, to be abandoned and rejected by those He loved, to be forsaken by His Father.

In Luther's terms, Christ is "hidden" in our sufferings. If a child is hiding in the room, we do not see him, but he is nevertheless there. Similarly, in our sufferings, we do not perceive the hidden Christ, but He is nevertheless truly present, to be apprehended by faith.

To be sure, after the cross, Christ was glorified. God raised Him from the dead, and He ascended to God's right hand. And Christ will come again "in glory" to judge the living and the dead. And we too are raised to new life. We too will be glorified in the eternal life to come, where we really will experience victory, have all of our problems washed away, and enjoy complete understanding.

But our access to that glory is through the cross. "To God alone be glory," we say. Notice how the critical word in those Reformation slogans is "alone" (*sola*). God does have glory in Himself. But we do not.

Even in the secular spheres, contemporary Americans are mad after the theology of glory, expecting success on the job, perfect families, and either self-help remedies or government action to solve all our problems. But Americans today cannot handle suffering. We would rather die than suffer. We would rather be killed than suffer. Send for Dr. Kevorkian!

But the truth of Christianity is evident in that everyone does, in fact, have problems, struggles, and sufferings. And this can be their point of contact for Christ, who on the cross not only "was wounded for our transgressions" but also "has borne our griefs" and "carried our sorrows" ([Isa. 53:4-5](http://bible.com/bible/esv/Isa.%2053.4%E2%80%935) (<http://bible.com/bible/esv/Isa.%2053.4%E2%80%935>)).

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Job's friends stayed because they had every reason to be near him. The kind of anguish this man's going through, he may have died at any moment, for all they knew. So they stayed by his side with their lips sealed. It was what happened *after* those seven days that fouled things up. The longer they stayed the worse things became.

The moment we find ourselves in trouble of any kind—sick in the hospital, bereaved by a friend's death, dismissed from a job or relationship, depressed or bewildered—people start showing up telling us exactly what is wrong with us and what we must do to get better. Sufferers attract fixers the way road kills attract vultures. At first we are impressed that they bother with us and amazed at their facility with answers. They know so much! How did they get to be such experts in living?

More often than not, these people use the Word of God frequently and loosely. They are full of spiritual diagnosis and prescription. It all sounds so hopeful. But then we begin to wonder, "Why is it that for all their apparent compassion we feel worse instead of better after they've said their piece?"

The Book of Job is not only a witness to the dignity of suffering and God's presence in our suffering but is also our primary biblical protest against religion that has been reduced to explanations or "answers." Many of the answers that Job's so-called friends give him are technically true. But it is the "technical" part that ruins them. They are answers without personal relationship, intellect without intimacy. The answers are slapped onto Job's ravaged life like labels on a specimen bottle. Job rages against this secularized wisdom that has lost touch with the living realities of God.<sup>9</sup>

The late (and I might add great) Joe Bayly and his wife, Mary Lou, lost three of their children. They lost one son following surgery when he was

only eighteen days old. They also lost the second boy at age five because of leukemia. They then lost a third son at eighteen years after a sledding accident, because of complications related to his hemophilia.

Joe writes in a wonderful book, *The View from a Hearse*, (which has been changed in title to *The Last Thing We Talk About*):

I was sitting, torn by grief. Someone came and talked to me of God's dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly, he said things I knew were true.

I was unmoved, except I wished he'd go away. He finally did.

Another came and sat beside me. He didn't talk. He didn't ask leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour and more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, left.

I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go.<sup>10</sup>

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Friends have done it right when those in the crucible <sup>of life</sup> hate to see you go.

We must leave Job in his misery for now. We're mere onlookers. Had we lived in his day, there is no way we could say, "I know how you feel." You don't. I don't. We can't even imagine. But we do care. Our presence and our tears say much more than our words.

Words have a hollow ring in a crucible.

**From Chuck Swindoll,  
Great Lives: Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance (Great Lives  
from God's Word Series), 2009**

Job 2:11–7:21 (NIV)

<sup>11</sup> When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. <sup>12</sup> When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. <sup>13</sup> Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

### Job Speaks

**3** After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. <sup>2</sup> He said:

<sup>3</sup> "May the day of my birth perish,  
and the night that said, 'A boy is conceived!'

<sup>4</sup> That day—may it turn to darkness;  
may God above not care about it;  
may no light shine on it.

<sup>5</sup> May gloom and utter darkness claim it once more;  
may a cloud settle over it;  
may blackness overwhelm it.

<sup>6</sup> That night—may thick darkness seize it;  
may it not be included among the days of the year  
nor be entered in any of the months.

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<sup>16</sup> Or why was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child,  
like an infant who never saw the light of day?

<sup>17</sup> There the wicked cease from turmoil,

and there the weary are at rest.

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<sup>25</sup> What I feared has come upon me;  
what I dreaded has happened to me.

<sup>26</sup> I have no peace, no quietness;  
I have no rest, but only turmoil.”

## **Eliphaz**

**4** Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied:

<sup>2</sup> “If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?

But who can keep from speaking?

<sup>3</sup> Think how you have instructed many,  
how you have strengthened feeble hands.

<sup>4</sup> Your words have supported those who stumbled;  
you have strengthened faltering knees.

<sup>5</sup> But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;  
it strikes you, and you are dismayed.

<sup>6</sup> Should not your piety be your confidence  
and your blameless ways your hope?

<sup>7</sup> “Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?  
Where were the upright ever destroyed?

<sup>8</sup> As I have observed, those who plow evil  
and those who sow trouble reap it.

<sup>9</sup> At the breath of God they perish;

at the blast of his anger they are no more.

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<sup>12</sup> "A word was secretly brought to me,  
my ears caught a whisper of it.

<sup>13</sup> Amid disquieting dreams in the night,  
when deep sleep falls on people,

<sup>14</sup> fear and trembling seized me  
and made all my bones shake.

<sup>15</sup> A spirit glided past my face,  
and the hair on my body stood on end.

<sup>16</sup> It stopped,  
but I could not tell what it was.

A form stood before my eyes,  
and I heard a hushed voice:

<sup>17</sup> 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God?  
Can even a strong man be more pure than his Maker?

<sup>18</sup> If God places no trust in his servants,  
if he charges his angels with error,

<sup>19</sup> how much more those who live in houses of clay,  
whose foundations are in the dust,  
who are crushed more readily than a moth!

<sup>20</sup> Between dawn and dusk they are broken to pieces;  
unnoticed, they perish forever.

<sup>21</sup> Are not the cords of their tent pulled up,

so that they die without wisdom?’

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- <sup>3</sup> I myself have seen a fool taking root,  
but suddenly his house was cursed.
- <sup>4</sup> His children are far from safety,  
crushed in court without a defender.
- <sup>5</sup> The hungry consume his harvest,  
taking it even from among thorns,  
and the thirsty pant after his wealth.
- <sup>6</sup> For hardship does not spring from the soil,  
nor does trouble sprout from the ground.
- <sup>7</sup> Yet man is born to trouble  
as surely as sparks fly upward.
- <sup>8</sup> “But if I were you, I would appeal to God;  
I would lay my cause before him.
- <sup>9</sup> He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,  
miracles that cannot be counted.
- <sup>10</sup> He provides rain for the earth;  
he sends water on the countryside.
- <sup>11</sup> The lowly he sets on high,  
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.
- <sup>12</sup> He thwarts the plans of the crafty,  
so that their hands achieve no success.

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<sup>18</sup> For he wounds, but he also binds up;  
he injures, but his hands also heal.

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<sup>27</sup> “We have examined this, and it is true.  
So hear it and apply it to yourself.”

## **Job**

**6** Then Job replied:

<sup>2</sup> “If only my anguish could be weighed  
and all my misery be placed on the scales!

<sup>3</sup> It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas—  
no wonder my words have been impetuous.

<sup>4</sup> The arrows of the Almighty are in me,  
my spirit drinks in their poison;  
God’s terrors are marshaled against me.

<sup>5</sup> Does a wild donkey bray when it has grass,  
or an ox bellow when it has fodder?

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<sup>8</sup> “Oh, that I might have my request,  
that God would grant what I hope for,

<sup>9</sup> that God would be willing to crush me,  
to let loose his hand and cut off my life!

<sup>10</sup> Then I would still have this consolation—

my joy in unrelenting pain—  
that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.

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- <sup>13</sup> Do I have any power to help myself,  
now that success has been driven from me?
- <sup>14</sup> “Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend  
forsakes the fear of the Almighty.
- <sup>15</sup> But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams,  
as the streams that overflow  
<sup>16</sup> when darkened by thawing ice  
and swollen with melting snow,  
<sup>17</sup> but that stop flowing in the dry season,  
and in the heat vanish from their channels.

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- <sup>21</sup> Now you too have proved to be of no help;  
you see something dreadful and are afraid.
- <sup>22</sup> Have I ever said, ‘Give something on my behalf,  
pay a ransom for me from your wealth,  
<sup>23</sup> deliver me from the hand of the enemy,  
rescue me from the clutches of the ruthless’?
- <sup>24</sup> “Teach me, and I will be quiet;  
show me where I have been wrong.
- <sup>25</sup> How painful are honest words!  
But what do your arguments prove?

<sup>26</sup> Do you mean to correct what I say,  
and treat my desperate words as wind?

<sup>27</sup> You would even cast lots for the fatherless  
and barter away your friend.

<sup>28</sup> “But now be so kind as to look at me.  
Would I lie to your face?

<sup>29</sup> Relent, do not be unjust;  
reconsider, for my integrity is at stake.

<sup>30</sup> Is there any wickedness on my lips?  
Can my mouth not discern malice?

**7** “\_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>5</sup> My body is clothed with worms and scabs,  
my skin is broken and festering.

<sup>6</sup> “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,  
and they come to an end without hope.

<sup>7</sup> Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath;  
my eyes will never see happiness again.

<sup>8</sup> The eye that now sees me will see me no longer;  
you will look for me, but I will be no more.

<sup>9</sup> As a cloud vanishes and is gone,  
so one who goes down to the grave does not return.

<sup>10</sup> He will never come to his house again;  
his place will know him no more.

<sup>11</sup> “Therefore I will not keep silent;  
I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit,  
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

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<sup>19</sup> Will you never look away from me,  
or let me alone even for an instant?

<sup>20</sup> If I have sinned, what have I done to you,  
you who sees everything we do?

Why have you made me your target?

Have I become a burden to you?

<sup>21</sup> Why do you not pardon my offenses  
and forgive my sins?

For I will soon lie down in the dust;

you will search for me, but I will be no more.”