

“Christ, Our Only Boast”

Galatians 6:11-18

September 17, 2023

For the past 5 months we have been working our way through the book of Galatians and today we come to the final portion of our study.

What we have discovered is that Galatians is Paul’s hallmark defense of justification by faith. Justification by faith means that we gain right standing with God by faith in what Christ has done rather than trusting in what we do. In other words, the death of Jesus on our behalf is fully sufficient to give us a new legal standing before God whereby we no longer bear the guilt of our sin, but now bear the favor of God to whom we’ve been reconciled by faith.

This means that we are free, not only from the condemnation of sin, but also free from any attempt to earn God’s favor by our own works or religious performance. In fact, we have discovered that any attempt from our human flesh to add to what Christ has done, actually forfeits the grace of the cross because it demonstrates unbelief—not believing that the work of Christ is sufficient without our good works, morality, obedience to God’s law, etc. Saving grace is only appropriated in our lives through faith.

In these final verses of Galatians, Paul takes up his pen and writes with large letters (all caps!) for a final emphasis on our need to boast in the cross of Christ alone. There are a lot of cringe-worthy things that people ‘boast’ in or make much of today. Not only things that are perverse but also things that are strangely morbid and dark. For example, Halloween is approaching. Why do people want to make much of morbid things like skulls, skeletons, mummies, vampires, witches—I just don’t see what’s attractive about such things. And yet even these things are not as shocking as it would have been to boast in a Roman cross in the first century. A cross was a tool of torture and execution so gruesome that the very word was considered inappropriate for polite conversation. If you’d ever seen a Roman crucifixion,

its very memory would make you grimace. It was grotesque, inhumane, and sickening.

Yet what took place when Jesus died on a Roman cross was so significant for every believer for all eternity, that it becomes the sole boast of every true Christian. Paul’s final message in Galatians is that...

We must abandon any boasting that results in self-exaltation to boast in the cross of Jesus alone by which we are made new.

Today’s passage will help us consider the value of a cross-centered life from six angles:¹

1. **A cross-centered life is *not* marked by self-exaltation or self-preservation (Gal 6:12-13).**

[vs. 12-13] Why are we talking about a cross-centered life from vs. 12-13? Because Paul is drawing a contrast. The cross-centered life appears later in vs. 14: “May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” But this is precisely *not* what the false teachers who had disrupted the Galatian church are doing. They are doing quite the opposite.

Their boasting was human-boasting, not cross-boasting. Notice that Paul speaks of their desire at the beginning of vs. 12 and at the end of vs. 13:

- Vs. 12: “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh...”
- Vs. 13: “they *desire* to have you circumcised *so that they may boast in your flesh*”

Their objective was to convince Gentile believers that they could not truly be a child of God without first becoming a Jew by being circumcised (the sign of belonging to the covenant people of God). But why? In vs. 13 Paul says their reason was to escape persecution for the cross of Christ.

We typically think of the early church being persecuted by the Romans. But the church was first persecuted by Jews who rejected Christ. They failed to

¹ This outline adapted from Danny Akin. See David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Christ-Centered Exposition), pg 138-144.

see that the law of Moses pointed to Christ rather than being an end in itself. And so they persecuted those who followed Christ but no longer promoted circumcision, treating them as lawbreakers.

Others attempted to hang on to the gospel, that the death and resurrection of Jesus cleared our sin, but insisted that a person must not only believe in Jesus *but also* be circumcised. So they pressured others to be circumcised to avoid being persecuted by the Jews. They were using others (boasting in their flesh—that they convinced them to be circumcised) in order to boast in their own flesh (demonstrating that they still revere the law of Moses) to avoid being persecuted.

But they were not only driven by self-exaltation and willing to compromise the gospel for self-preservation, they were also proving themselves to be hypocrites because they insist that others follow the law that they themselves cannot uphold perfectly. The problem is not with the law. The problem is sin. If a high jumper has a broken leg, the problem is not with the bar being too high but with his own inability to jump over the bar.

You may not be trusting in external rituals like circumcision to please God, but you must ask yourself, “*Am I more concerned about what I have done to please God or what Christ has done to purchase me?*” Is the gospel simply a means to self-preservation—not going to hell? Or is it about living a new life under God’s governance and grace? Is your faith about what Christ has done or about what you are attempting to do? A cross-centered life is not marked by self-exaltation or self-preservation. One the contrary...

2. A cross-centered life boasts in Christ alone, not self (Gal 6:14a).

Vs. 14: “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” In other words, may my only boast be in the cross of Jesus. That is, my only boast before God, my only confidence is the blood of Jesus that covered my sin. By the way, when Paul says, “may it never be,” he

² Philp Ryken, *Galatians* (Reformed Expository Commentary), pg. 274.

³ David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Christ-Centered Exposition), pg. 140.

is using the strongest possible Greek negative that he can (*me genoito*). He is being emphatic that there will never be any other grounds for boasting before God other than the cross.

So what does it mean to boast in the cross? Boasting is an act of confidence. To boast in the cross is to put all of our confidence in what Christ accomplished through His death. To boast in the cross is to trust in the cross, rejoice in the cross, live for the cross,² to make much of the cross, be consumed by the cross, even mastered by the cross³ so that all of life is response to the one “who loved us and gave Himself up for us” (Gal 2:20).

We have good reasons for boasting in the cross of Christ. Because of the cross, the wrath of God will not be poured out on me! Because of the cross, I am redeemed from this present evil age of sin (1:4). Because of the cross, I am forgiven, reconciled to God, made one with Christ, adopted into the family of God, and I am “dead to this world with all its claims on my life.”⁴ Because of the cross, I am an heir of every spiritual blessing, of eternal life under God’s favor, and of the assurance of God’s care in the present. Because of the cross, I have the Spirit’s enabling power to live a God-pleasing life and receive His transforming work to make me more like Jesus.

All of the benefits of the cross are mine by faith in Jesus alone, not dependent and any human striving in my flesh. A cross-centered life boasts in Christ alone, not self.

3. A cross-centered life dies to the world (Gal 6:14b).

Vs. 14: “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, *through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*”

It’s important for us to understand that receiving Christ, trusting in His cross-work and following Him results in a major change of allegiance in our lives.

⁴ David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Christ-Centered Exposition), pg. 140.

coming under the Lordship of Jesus Christ means that we now belong to the kingdom of God and no longer to the kingdom of this world. 1Jn 5:19 says that “the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.” The kingdom of this world is hostile to the kingdom of God. Therefore, boasting in the cross of Christ demonstrates that my loyalties to this world are dead. The cross releases me from the bondage of this world along with its “meaninglessness, hopelessness, futility, warped values, and despair.”⁵

Of course we still live in the world, so the world still has an influence on us and often appeals to our sinful flesh. But we are no longer obligated to live for this world or align with its values. We must remind ourselves daily that we live in allegiance to Christ with His values—we are dead to the world. Galatians 2:20 needs to be tucked in our hearts: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

We live by faith! One commentator put it this way,

“On account of the cross, the cares of this world do not have to crush us because we have a different perspective than the world. You know that if God will give you Christ, He will give you all you need ultimately. The enticements of the world do not have to persuade us like they do the rest of society because we have new affections. [we have new values. For example] greed can be replaced by generosity; lust with purity; anxiety with truth; envy with love.”⁶

We are free to live as though this world has nothing for us and Christ is everything to us.⁷ A cross-centered life dies to the world because Christ is our exceeding treasure.

4. A cross-centered life is the result of spiritual rebirth, not religious rituals (Gal 6:15).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Christ-Centered Exposition), pg. 141.

[vs. 15] Circumcision was the sign of the old covenant between God and His people. But Christ has inaugurated a new covenant making circumcision irrelevant. It doesn't help you and it doesn't hurt you as long as you don't trust in it. Circumcision (or any other religious exercise) cannot add to or improve on the work of Christ which supersedes the Old covenant. The underlying principle of vs. 15 is that nothing done by human effort can add to what Christ has done to purchase our salvation. Even baptism, which Jesus Himself commanded as a public mark of faith in Jesus, cannot add to what Christ has done.

Our salvation rests not on anything we do, but trusting solely in what Christ has done for us (2:16). According to vs. 15, what *really* matters is that we become a “new creation” in Christ, and this is the result of the Spirit's work, not our human effort. We become a new creation by faith, not by works. Jesus said, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven” (Jn 3:3). And rebirth is a matter of faith—“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever *believes in Him* should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

This is why we boast in the cross! Because through the cross we are made new—cleansed, forgiven, transformed, given new life in the Spirit! If you are still striving to please God by how you perform in this life, cease striving. Look to the cross and believe that the sacrifice of the Son of God is sufficient to pay for your sin and that you cannot add to it. In fact, anything we try to add only takes away because it demonstrates that we do not truly believe Christ is enough. So when those thoughts come that say, “I just have to show God that I am sincere, yet I can't every seem to do enough or be good enough,” stop and tell yourself, “Christ has done enough for me. He is good enough for me! So I can rest in the grace of God that Jesus has lavished on me.”

5. A cross-centered life yields the blessing of peace and mercy to those who walk according to the gospel (Gal 6:16).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

[vs. 16] What is “this rule” that Paul is talking about? He’s talking about the essential need to be a “new creation” which can only come about through faith in Christ and His cross. This rule is the gospel. And those who walk in the hope of what Christ has done rather than trusting in what they themselves may do, will experience God’s peace and mercy. That’s because peace with God and mercy from God come ultimately through the cross.

Notice also that Paul uses the term “Israel of God” in vs. 16. What this signifies is that the true people of God under the new covenant are those who believe the gospel, those who are in Christ by faith.

6. The cross-centered life sees more value in suffering for Christ than having the approval of man (Gal 6:17-18).

[vs. 17] This is the difference the cross made in Paul’s life. When it was costly to follow Jesus, Paul was not deterred by persecution. He saw ultimate value in Jesus and therefore he endured the suffering of persecution rather than seeking the approval of men who despised Jesus. Unlike the false teachers in vs. 12-13 who bowed to the approval of men to escape persecution for the cross, Paul understood that there is no gain in this life (including self-preservation) that is worth more than having Jesus. Because having Jesus is having everything in the end. This is why Paul would boast in the cross.

Philippians 3 is a great sampling of Paul’s boasting in the cross:

“Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes

from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul was willing to give up status, prestige, trust in his own religious works, personal safety, everything for one thing: Jesus. Why? Because Paul came to realize that what he needed most was God’s grace that saves eternally. So that nothing in this life was worth forfeiting the eternal grace that can only come through Jesus.

So it’s not surprising that Paul concludes his letter with a blessing of *grace* for those who cherish the good news of the cross. **[vs. 18]** This is where Paul began his letter in 1:3: “*Grace* to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” *GRACE*. This one word alone captures the heart of Galatians and the gospel. Grace refers to something *unearned* and *undeserved*. You can’t get it through circumcision or keeping the law or good works or religious piety. Grace cannot be earned because grace by its very nature is a gift. Grace is what we need most because God’s grace alone is what saves.

“For by *grace* you have been saved through *faith*; and that *not of yourselves*, it is the *gift* of God; *not as a result of works* so that *no one may boast*” (Eph 2:8-9)...except in one thing: “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” from whence grace comes (Gal 6:14).

To live a cross-centered life is to cherish and treasure Jesus above anything else in this world offers. More than family, friends, the approval of man, wealth, success, status, reputation, hobbies, entertainment. To boast in the cross is to die to the allure of this world and to find that in Christ alone is your satisfaction, confidence, joy, and hope. To boast in the cross is to say, “Christ is my life!”

Do you have Jesus? If He is peripheral in your life, you don’t have Jesus. If you are trying to add to Jesus your own effort to earn God’s favor, you don’t have Jesus. If you don’t have Jesus, what do you actually have? “*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul*” (Mt 8:36)?

Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and *take up his cross*, and follow Me." Taking up your cross means dying to this world, abandoning trust in your own works of flesh, and making the cross of Christ you only boast—your confidence, your hope, your life.

You sit down to study for the exam and to your dismay you realize that there is way too much information for you to master. You study all night and then the next morning you walk into the classroom having lost confidence in your ability to perform on this exam. When the professor comes in, he announces that there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that the exam is comprehensive—nothing has been left off. Furthermore, it will be a pass-fail exam and you can only pass with a 100%. The good news is that he has taken the exam for you and if you are willing to trust him, he will transfer his score to your grade. Will you trust him? Or will you rather trust in what you think you know and what you think you can do?

This is the gospel. The Son of God who has perfect righteousness offers Himself on behalf of all who trust in Him. The grade of His perfect life and the worth of His sacrificial death turns our grade from fail to perfect.

Prayer:

- What truly has a hold on your heart?
- Do you still believe that what the world offers will satisfy?
- Have you given up trusting in your own effort and pride?
- Is there an overwhelming gratitude and love in your heart for the cross that boasts in having only one thing: *"All I have and all I need is Christ. He alone is what I cling to. The world may pass. Success and possessions may fade. People may betray. But I have Jesus and having Him, I am infinitely rich."*