

**A FINAL GOSPEL APPEAL**  
PART 2

April 22, 2012

TEXT: GALATIANS 6:11-18

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

In 6:11-18, Paul concludes with one final gospel appeal. In his appeal, he reiterates five main themes that he wishes to impress on the minds of the Galatians so that the gospel remains central and sufficient in their lives and churches.

I. PAUL REITERATES HIS AUTHENTICITY AND AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE. vv. 11, 17

The reason Paul reiterates his authenticity and authority as an apostle is because the Judaizers had raised questions about it in order to undermine the truth of the gospel. Therefore, Paul defends his apostleship in order to uphold the truth of the gospel (1:11-2:21). Now in his closing appeal, Paul reiterates this central theme. As he asserts his authenticity and authority as an Apostle, Paul confirms in v. 17 that he has the cross in view (cf. "bear" cf. Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17). So, as Paul brings his letter to a close it is clear that he still has one thing in mind: the centrality and sufficiency of the gospel.

This leads us to vv. 12-14, where

II. PAUL REITERATES THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CROSS FOR SALVATION. vv. 12-14

In setting circumcision over against the cross, Paul is calling on the Galatians one final time to make a choice between two antithetical principles of how one is counted righteous and becomes a member of Abraham's family (3:6-9). One operates on the principle, "Do this and live," (old covenant/Mosaic Law/works) while the other operates on the principle, "Live. Therefore, do this" (Abrahamic/new covenant/promise). The principle of works results in a curse (i.e., judgment, Gal. 3:10) and the principle of promise results in blessing (i.e., justification and the reception of the Holy Spirit, Gal. 3:14).

By desiring to live under the Mosaic Covenant, the Judaizers placed themselves and their Gentile converts under a conditional, do this and live covenantal relationship with God. Paul then not only has in mind the progress from the old to the new covenant but he also has in mind the difference between the Mosaic and Abrahamic/new covenant (cf. Michael Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 60). Even though the Ten Commandments begin with the indicative announcement of God's saving acts (Ex. 20:2), the Mosaic Covenant is basically a law covenant (cf. Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 100). Michael Horton writes, "It is purely a suzerainty treaty, it does not obligate God to do anything but instead simply commands, with sanctions for

obedience and disobedience” (Ibid, pp. 100-101). God didn't obligate Himself in the old covenant. There is no “For the sake of your fathers...” clause that God appeals to based on the Mosaic Covenant. Again, Horton notes, “The covenant does not work in reverse. God never remains faithful to unfaithful national Israel on the basis of the Sinaitic covenant itself—for on that basis, as he repeatedly says, he would have scattered them long ago” (Ibid, p. 99). In the old covenant—which must be distinguished from the Old Testament—Yahweh simply commanded, “Do this and you shall live” (cf. Lk. 10:28).

But, the new covenant isn't like the old covenant. The New Testament describes the old covenant as “temporary and subservient” (Gal. 3), a “copy and shadow” (Heb. 8:5; Col. 2:17). It describes the new covenant as “much more excellent and better since it is enacted on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). In contrast, the old covenant is described as “inferior” (Hebrews 8:7), “obsolete,” “growing old” (8:13) and its glory “fading” (2 Cor. 3:7). The old covenant (Mosaic Law) was only a “shadow” of the fulfillment, which came with Christ. Horton writes, “Carriers of the legalistic virus in Galatia and elsewhere were not faulted for having a positive view of the law, but for failing to recognize that its purpose was to lead God's people to Christ” (Ibid, p. 75).

Concerning the old and new covenants, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied,

“<sup>31</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> *not like the covenant that I made with their fathers* on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD” (Jer. 31:31-32; emphasis mine).

The glory of the new covenant is based on the fact that God obligates Himself by promise. The new covenant includes justification and regeneration, forgiveness of sins and a new heart that desires to obey (sanctification; cf. Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:26-27). Jeremiah continues,

“<sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

What God demands in the old covenant, He, Himself, graciously gives in the new covenant. Horton writes,

“One of the truly remarkable things about this understanding of Christ’s person and work in the light of covenant is that the covenant *Lord* is also the covenant *Servant*. The Son is God, the same God who spoke the creation into existence. In fact, Jesus Christ is the Word by whom all things were made (John 1:3). He is also the divine speaker to humanity in the giving of the command in the Garden of Eden and then again at Mount Sinai. His were the words that shook the mountain and filled the hearers with dread. Yet this same God who spoke the command assumed human flesh and came down the mountain to take the place of the hearers below. While Adam and Eve, as well as Israel, answered back, “All this we will do,” yet failed miserably, Jesus became not only the faithful speaker, but the faithful hearer and doer of the Word of God. He not only commanded as the Lord of the covenant, but answered back faithfully as the Servant of the covenant—in our place. No wonder Christ is everything in this new covenant relationship (Ibid, pp. 61-62)!

So, instead of being a covenant based on law (“Do this and live”) the new covenant is based on promise (“Live! Therefore, do this.”). In the new covenant, God, by grace, fulfills what He promises to do. It is precisely this contrast that Paul argues for in Galatians and occupies his focus as he concludes this letter. The question then becomes: What does it look like for God to obligate Himself? The answer is: the cross of Christ! Thus, in vv. 12-14, Paul sets forth the centrality and sufficiency of Christ crucified for salvation.

In vv. 12-13, Paul emphasizes the sufficiency of the cross negatively.

A. CIRCUMCISION, vv. 12-13

The Judaizers placed their confidence in works of the law (i.e., circumcision), which had no saving significance! They boasted in their circumcision and their success of circumcising Gentile converts all so that they might avoid being persecuted for preaching a circumcision-less gospel. In contrast to the Judaizers, Paul declares that he will boast only in the cross of Christ, which has infinite saving significance! In v. 14, Paul emphasizes the sufficiency of the cross positively.

B. CROSS, v. 14

Paul writes, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Paul declares in the strongest possible terms that he will only boast in the cross of Christ. Here, Paul sets forth the essence of the Christian faith and gospel, namely the cross of Christ. Sinclair Ferguson writes,

If you want to judge how well a person understands the gospel, ask him what he makes of the death of Christ, and what the message of the cross is. The

real Christian answers that while the message of the cross is foolishness to some and a stumbling block to others, to Christians it is the saving wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 18-24). The confession of the real Christian is, 'Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world' (Gal. 6:14)" (in the Forward to Jerry Bridges, *The Great Exchange*, p. 12).

The Cross of Christ is essential to Christianity and it has been central in Paul's thinking and teaching throughout this letter (cf. 1:4; 2:20; 3:1, 13; 6:12, 14; cf. also 1 Cor. 1:17-18, 23; 2:2; 5:7; 8:11; 11:24-26). In fact, Paul's preaching of the gospel was so vivid and clear that it was as if the Galatians had been eyewitnesses of Jesus' crucifixion (3:1)! Concerning Paul's use of the full name of Jesus in 6:14—"Lord Jesus Christ"—James Boice writes, "The full name of the Savior speaks of the significance of His person and the role He played, meaning literally, "God who saves, the Messiah" (*Galatians*, p. 507). Paul repeatedly shows that the cross is of paramount importance in the gospel (cf. 2:21; 3:1, 13; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3). Thus, to add to—or take away from—the cross means you no longer have a gospel or Christianity but something altogether totally different (cf. 1:6).

For Paul, then, the cross of Christ was his "boast." The word "boast"—which has no exact English equivalent (καυχῆσθωνται)--means, "to boast in, glory in, trust in, rejoice in, revel in, live for. The object of our boast or 'glory' fills our horizons, engrosses our attention, and absorbs our time and energy. In a word, our 'glory' is our obsession" (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 349). Such boasting in the cross, as we learned, would have been extraordinarily strange to both a Gentile and a Jew. Why then would Paul boast in such a repugnant, horror-filled, foolish symbol? In Galatians, we find at least eight reasons why Paul boasted only in the cross of Christ.

#### **LESSON:**

1. PAUL BOASTED ONLY IN THE CROSS BECAUSE JESUS GAVE HIMSELF FOR OUR SINS (1:14).

In 1:4, Paul writes that Jesus, "...gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father..."

Galatians is the only letter in which Paul opens with a statement regarding the significance of Christ's death. Why did Jesus come to die on the cross? The answer Paul gives is that Jesus came in order to give Himself for our sins.

The gospel proclaims Christ crucified for our sins—the One who gave Himself for our sins. That Christ died for our sins is of first importance—paramount—in the message of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul writes "For I delivered to you as of first importance (paramount-J.F) what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures..."

At the heart of the gospel lies the substitutionary death of Christ—Jesus died the death that we deserved. The eternal Son took upon Himself human nature and died a horror-filled death on our behalf. He made atonement for our sins by dying on the cross in our place as our substitute. R.C. Sproul states, “If you take away the cross as an atoning act, you take away Christianity” (*The Truth of the Cross*, p. 15). That Jesus gave Himself to suffer the punishment, curse and sentence of death we deserved is the very heart of the gospel and the essence of the Christian faith.

This is the good news! The death of Christ on the cross is the solution for our sin. He did for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves. In the cross of Christ, we see the Lord of the covenant answering back faithfully as the Servant of the covenant—in our place. What remarkable, unspeakable grace!

Our sin prevents us from being able to perfectly fulfill the law. In contrast to the Judaizers, Paul knew he had nothing to boast about. The cross tells us that we cannot boast in our external religious acts and moral duties—as good as they may be. Sin, according to the Scriptures, is our fundamental problem. All sin is first and foremost sin against God before it is an offense against other people. In Psalm 51:4, David confesses, “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment*” (emphasis mine). Sin must first be measured in relation to God and His holiness and authority.

Like Adam, we have all transgressed God’s covenant (Hosea 6:7). Everyone has failed to give perfect obedience to what God’s law demands (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26; cf. Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5). Therefore, we are all under God’s judgment (i.e., curse of the law).

Moreover, sin is not only an action but also a condition. We are not only guilty of actual sins but we are all born sinners. Sin is first a condition, which brings forth sinful actions (e.g., works of the flesh, Gal. 5:19-21). We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. You don’t have to teach your 2 year-old toddler to throw temper tantrums in Target! In Psalm 51:5, David writes, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” It is not that we simply commit acts of sin—which only adds to our problem before God—but that our entire being is totally corrupt—every aspect of our nature is infected with sin. This doesn’t mean that everyone has committed every possible sin or that everyone is as bad they could possibly be. Rather, it means that every person is equally guilty and condemned and that every aspect of a person—body, mind, heart, desire, will—is fallen.

Thus, there is no hope of us being able to save ourselves because we are not capable of fulfilling the law—and in fact have no desire to do so (Rom. 8:7-8). In Ephesians 2:3 Paul says that we are born as objects of God’s wrath (i.e., His justice in action rendering to every person his just due, which is judgment). In John 3:36, John writes, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son

shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” Everyone is born into this world under the judgment of God. Moreover believers—even the most “holy,” cf. HC, Q. 114—continue to sin in thought, word, deed, desire and motive (cf. Rom. 7:14-20; Gal. 5:17). Thus, Paul cries out in both confession and faith, “<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Rom. 7:24-25). So, whether you are a Christian or non-Christian, the solution for your sin is the same: *Christ gave Himself for our sins!*

It is only in the context of seeing your sin that you will begin to boast in the cross of Christ. The stark appraisal of sin is the prelude to the gospel (cf. Michael Horton, *For Calvinism*, p. 48). Michael Horton writes, “Wherever the realism of the biblical account of the human condition is taken seriously, the gospel is seen more clearly and embraced more deeply” (Ibid, p. 50). You will never boast in the cross like Paul until you begin to understand the magnitude of your sin. Paul consciously remembered his former life of sin (cf. Gal. 1:13-14) and was also acutely aware of his present failures and sin (cf. Rom. 7:14-24). It is only in view of our sin that the truth of “Christ gave Himself for our sins” begins to become the object of our boast and trust.

Notice that forgiveness of sins is not the ultimate purpose of Christ’s substitutionary death. Paul says the purpose of Christ’s death is to deliver us from the present evil age, which includes enslavement under the crushing curse of the law (4:3-5). The cross of Christ inaugurates the new age (cf. 6:14-15) though it is not yet consummated in resurrection. Because of Christ’s death a righteous and holy God can forgive sin, justify the ungodly, adopt them as his beloved sons and grant them a future inheritance in which they will be raised from the dead and enjoy the physical new heavens and new earth (cf. 2:16; 4:1-7; 6:14-15; cf. 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; see also Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

The important point to note here in 1:4 is that entrance into this new age is possible because Christ gave Himself for our sins. Lastly, Paul reveals that all of this good news originates, in the will and purpose of God the Father (“...according to the will of our God and Father...”).

This is why Paul boasted in the cross of Christ! Jerry Bridges asks,

‘Why the cross?’ we must say God’s holiness demanded it as punishment for our sins, and God’s love provided it to save us from our sins. We cannot begin to understand the true significance of the cross unless we understand something of the holiness of God and the depth of our sin. And it is a continuing sense of the imperfection of our obedience, arising from the constant presence and remaining power of indwelling sin, that drives us more and more as believers to an absolute dependence on the grace of God given to us through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ...For it is only against the dark backdrop of our sinfulness that we can see the glory of the cross shining forth in all its brilliance and splendor” (*The Gospel for Real Life*, p. 30).

II. PAUL BOASTED ONLY IN THE CROSS BECAUSE IT GRANTED HIM A RIGHT STANDING WITH GOD (2:21).

In 2:21, Paul writes, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” There is a direct correlation between the cross and justification. In 2:21, Paul says if justification were by our good works (i.e., circumcision/works of the law) then Christ died needlessly (Gal. 2:21). This is simply a negative way of saying that justifying righteousness comes only through the death of Jesus on the cross.

The Judaizers were confident of their standing before God because of their circumcision by which they thought they had fully satisfied the demands of God’s law. In contrast, Paul found his sole confidence before God in the cross of Christ.

The justifying righteousness that comes from God is the perfect righteousness of Jesus. The cross solves the dilemma of how a just God can declare a sinner righteous and still be just. The answer is found in the cross of Christ, in which Jesus perfectly reconciled both justice and mercy. In His sinless, obedient life Jesus totally fulfilled the law’s precepts (Gal. 4:4). And in His substitutionary, obedient death, Jesus perfectly satisfied the Law’s penalties (Gal. 3:13).

Here we see that the glory of the new covenant over the old covenant consists in the fact that God, in grace, provides the righteousness that He requires of us! Here again we see the Lord of the covenant answering back faithfully as the Servant of the covenant in His keeping of the Law’s precepts and in His satisfying of the Law’s penalties—in our place! Because Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law’s requirements and satisfied the curse of the law, God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). And so justification—a right standing with God; “Just as if I have never sinned and just as if I have always obeyed”—comes only through faith in Christ crucified as Paul writes in Romans 3:24-25, “<sup>24</sup> are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”

III. PAUL BOASTED ONLY IN THE CROSS BECAUSE IT ASSURED HIM OF HIS RIGHT STANDING WITH GOD (2:20).

Jerry Bridges makes this third point clear in his book, *The Gospel for Real Life* (see pp. 108-113). He explains that for Paul, justification wasn’t just a point-in-time event that occurred in the past. Rather, justification was a point-in-time event that has present and eternal, ongoing benefit. The moment God justifies us we are forever justified—declared righteous in God’s sight.

Through faith we receive the imputed righteousness of Christ and God the Father now sees us as being as righteous as Jesus Himself! Bridges asks, “Has it yet gripped you that when God looks at you today He sees you clothed in the perfect, sinless obedience of His son?” (*The Gospel for Real Life*, p. 39).

Regrettably, many believers do not live with the assurance that they are as righteous in God's sight as Christ is due to their lack of understanding of the gospel. Instead of depending solely on Christ alone for their right standing with God, they draw their sense of acceptance from their most recent performance of Christian duties or their avoidance of certain sins (Bridges, p. 110). Paul, however, lived his daily life in a "continuous state of conscious justification" (Ibid, p. 110).

He writes in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who 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 for me*" (emphasis mine). It is important to note that the context of Paul's confession is justification not sanctification. The phrase "the life I now live" refers to his daily Christian life. Paul lived self-consciously aware of Christ's love for him attested through Christ's substitutionary death on the cross.

So then, justification wasn't simply something that occurred in the past but had no relevant application to his daily life. Rather, Christ's substitutionary death assured Paul of Christ's love as well as his justification. These blessings were a present reality in which Paul trusted and boasted in every day. Jerry Bridges writes, "Paul did what we should do. He renounced any confidence in his own performance or, for that matter, any dismay over his lack of performance. Instead, by faith he looked to Jesus Christ and His righteousness for his sense (assurance-J.F.) of being in right standing with God today and tomorrow, and throughout eternity" (*The Gospel for Real Life*, p. 111).

IV. Paul boasted only in the cross because Jesus' death on the cross redeemed us from the curse of the law (3:13).

Galatians 3:13 is one of the clearest expressions of Christ's death as being substitutionary and penal (punishment). Christ didn't make it possible for us to be redeemed from the curse of the law. As the Servant of the covenant, Jesus actually bore the covenant curses on our behalf. Jesus suffered the Law's penalty due to us for our covenant breaking.

Moreover, Galatians 3:10-13 answers the question, which proved to be a stumbling block for a Jew, "How could Jesus, the sinless Messiah, be cursed by God?" The answer Paul gives is that Jesus bore the curse of the law that was due to us for our law breaking, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." In Galatians 3:10, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 to show that anyone who relies on works of the law (e.g., circumcision) to achieve a right standing with God will experience God's judgment (curse). The reason is because no one by his good works and performance can fulfill God's law because the standard is perfection. Then Paul in 3:13 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 and announces the amazing good news, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'."



This is the great exchange! On the cross, Jesus bore all the sanctions of the covenant and fulfilled them all on our behalf. He received, on our behalf, God the Father's full, unmitigated punishment for our sin. Jesus saw the Judge Himself, armed with all the terrors of His incomprehensible vengeance for us! Jesus received justice in all its unbending demands and made full satisfaction on our behalf. As the perfect covenant keeper, Jesus received the covenant's curses so that He might dispense and we might receive the covenant's blessings! This is something to boast in—to say the least!

V. PAUL BOASTED ONLY IN THE CROSS BECAUSE JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS BRINGS FREEDOM FROM LEGALISTIC, DEMONIC FALSE RELIGION (4:3, 8).

Before their conversion, the Galatians were enslaved to false gods (idols). Behind all false, legalistic religion (idolatry) are demonic powers (cf. 1 Cor. 10:19-20). We often fail to realize this fact. But, all who are enslaved to a "do this and live" false religion are enslaved to demons. And, even though believers cannot be "possessed" by demons they can be "oppressed" when seeking to live by a functional legalism. Christ's death breaks the enslaving power of demonic possession and oppression. Paul writes in Colossians 2:15, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him." Paul boasted in the cross because "the cross—which normally stood for a hideous form of execution—had become for Paul a symbol of triumph" (Homer Kent, Jr. *Galatians*, p. 182).

VI. PAUL BOASTED ONLY IN THE CROSS BECAUSE JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS IS THE MEANS OF ADOPTION (4:5).

Paul says that the eternal Son was sent by the Father in order to "redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

As we have already seen, we were born into this world as children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). J.I. Packer says that if he were asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, he would propose, "adoption through propitiation" (*Knowing God*, p. 214). He then adds, "I do not ever expect to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that" (Ibid, p. 214).

Perhaps we would take Galatians 4:5 and add to Packer's proposal, "adoption through redemption." Paul says we were redeemed so that we might be adopted. Not only were we born into this world as children of wrath but we were also born into this world as slaves under the curse of the law.

As a propitiation, Jesus totally exhausted the Father's wrath and lavished upon us the Father's favor. We who were children of wrath are now welcomed and received as children of God. As a redemption, Jesus paid the price that none of us could pay. Adoption is expensive. And in this case, adoption by God is infinitely costly and only Jesus could pay it by His death. By His death on the cross, Jesus redeemed us by paying an infinite price to free us from our enslavement under the crushing weight

and curse of the law so that we could be brought into the freedom of the sons of God! Consequently, Paul writes, “you are no longer a slave, but a son” (4:7).

VII. PAUL BOASTED ONLY IN THE CROSS BECAUSE JESUS’ DEATH ON THE CROSS SERVES AS THE BELIEVER’S CRUCIFIXION OF HIS FLESH. 5:24

Paul writes, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

The crucifixion of our flesh occurred at conversion, when we were united to Christ. Through our union with Christ, we have been delivered from sin’s penalty, since Christ bore it all. Our deliverance from sin’s penalty also brings deliverance from sin’s dominion. Because of Christ’s death, the passions and desires of the flesh no longer rule and reign and dominate over us. Because we are united to Christ, we can say that when Jesus lived a perfect life, we lived a perfect life. When Jesus died on the cross to suffer the penalty of sin, we also died on the cross. All who are united to Christ have been judged by God the Father on Good Friday!

Even though we may continue to struggle with sins in our daily lives, we no longer live under its reign and rule. Because we are united to Christ’s death, a once-for-all definitive break with sin has occurred. Consequently, we are no longer held captive to sin and driven to live in it as a settled course of life. We are free from the penalty and power of sin and now delight in God’s law (Rom. 7:12). And even though we struggle to obey God’s law, our sin is no longer held against—there is no more condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

VIII. PAUL BOASTED ONLY IN THE CROSS BECAUSE JESUS’ DEATH ON THE CROSS BRINGS FREEDOM FROM THE ENSLAVEMENT TO THE WORLD (6:14).

Paul writes, “...by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

When Paul, by the gracious call of God (1:15), came to understand the centrality and sufficiency of the cross of Christ for acceptance before God, his former life in Judaism (1:13-14) lost all appeal. The “world” and its “elementary principles” (“Do this and live,” 4:3) no longer attracted him. The centrality and sufficiency of the cross severed his love affair with the world’s beliefs and value systems (i.e., self-justification).

I agree with Jerry Bridges when he states, “I believe the human morality, rather than flagrant sin, is the greatest obstacle to the gospel today” (*The Gospel For Real Life*, p. 121). In one respect, our morality is our greatest sin! It is tragic that so many people expect God to accept them because they have been a “good person” or done “good things.” Bridges notes that the one common problem the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-20), the prodigal son’s older brother (Lk. 15:28-30) and the Pharisee praying in the temple (Lk. 18:9-12) all shared was confidence of their own goodness (Ibid, p. 121)! He then concludes with this observation, “...the more religious a person is, the

more difficult it is for that person to realize his or her need for the righteousness of Jesus Christ” (Ibid, p. 121).

Instead of Paul basing his confidence in his ethnic prerogative as a Jew or in his works of the law (i.e., circumcision) Paul now based his confidence in a crucified Messiah as the sole sufficient basis for his acceptance by God. Dunn writes, “...the very thing which was so disturbing for those who sought to maintain distinctive Jewish identity, was the very thing in which Paul boasted” (*Galatians*, p. 340).

Prior to his conversion, Paul was confident of his acceptance with God on the basis of his religious attainments. Now, he could no longer share in the Jewish attitude he described in v. 13. All of his advancements as a zealous Pharisee lost their appeal (Gal. 1:14). Rather confidence in his own religious attainments was replaced by boasting in a cursed and crucified Messiah, which was a shocking thought given the horror and disgust with which crucifixion was regarded in Paul’s day by both Jew and Gentile (cf. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 340).

Instead of trusting in his works, he trusted in Christ’s works (i.e., Christ’s death), which alone satisfied the righteous requirements of God’s law. By identifying with Christ in His death, Paul had come to renounce all that the world takes pride in (i.e., self-righteousness, self-justification, confidence in one’s own goodness).

Paul’s statement here in Galatians 6:14 agrees with his statement in Philippians 3:3-9,

“<sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...”

Jerry Bridges writes,

Like his fellow Jews, he had sought to establish his own righteousness through keeping the Law...But there came a time, possibly during his three days of blindness and fasting in Damascus (Acts 9:7-9), when he realized that his efforts to become righteous through law-keeping were going nowhere. They keep him from the only means of salvation God has provided. As he realized more clearly the perfect righteousness that God has provided

through His Son, Jesus Christ, he saw his own efforts to be righteous as no more than garbage to be dumped overboard" (*The Gospel for Real Life*, p. 119).

**REFLECTION:**

As we reflect on these eight reasons why Paul boasted only in the cross, we get a glimpse of the scope and magnitude of the centrality and sufficiency of the cross. Moreover, it is at the cross of Christ where we are most humbled. Here, we have to admit that there is nothing we can do to merit our salvation. All that we bring to salvation is our sin, which made the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ necessary. John Stott writes,

Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to say to us, 'I am here because of you. It is your sin I am paying, your death I am dying.' Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size (*Galatians*, p. 179).

Paul's boasting in the cross acknowledges that salvation is solely of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is both Lord and Servant of the covenant. Salvation equals Jesus + nothing as opposed to Jesus + circumcision. Like Paul, we must always keep in mind the centrality of the gospel because the threat of legalism (and license!) is always present. Even as justified believers, we are still practicing sinners (*simul iustus et peccator*) every day and so we need the gospel every day.

We are constantly prone to derive a sense of God's acceptance by what we do or abstain from doing rather than what Christ has done. But, there will never come a time when we will be able to relate to God directly apart from a crucified Christ, who gave Himself for our sins. Our access and standing with God will never be based on anything we do. Rather, it is only and always based upon what Christ has done for us.

Everyday we face our sin. And every day we must take our sin to the cross, give it to Christ and leave it there and come away with His righteousness. This was a lesson the Galatian believers had forgotten and were in danger of leaving behind—and one that we also easily forget!

Therefore, in concluding his letter, Paul calls on us—as he did the Galatians—to renounce all confidence and boasting in our accomplishments. He exhorts us one final time to find our confidence and boast only in the perfect, finished work of Christ. And so with Paul may our confession ever be, "far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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