

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

Galatians 6:12-15

Intro: When I will have finished my message tonight, we will have had four different ways in which the Apostle Paul has referred to the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in this epistle. Paul was combating a most serious error which had found its way into the Galatian churches – an error which sought to turn the minds of people from what Christ had done to what they needed to do for themselves. It was an attack upon salvation by grace and a proclamation of salvation by works, the works of the Law.

In chapter 1, as we considered Paul's introduction and greetings in this epistle, we saw that Paul emphasized the voluntary nature of our Lord's sacrifice, which at the same time was "according to the will of God and our Father." The Lord had not undertaken to do what He did "on His own," but He had been sent by His Father. And in 1:4 we see that our Lord came on *a rescue mission. He came to deliver us from the defilements which the world always causes, and from the judgment which was upon the world because of sin.* The Apostle Paul attributed our rescue from *this present evil age* to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ when He "gave Himself for our sins." And that *giving* was done on the Cross.

In chapter 2 we saw that our justification before God was due to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we were united to Christ and with Christ in His death. *But as we must always remember the Lord's death was not the end of His work. He was raised from the dead, and now, while He is seated at the Father's right hand, yet He lives, He lives in us, and we live by faith in Him.*

These are glorious truths, and they must not be forgotten.

This morning we examined the Apostle's words in chapter 3, the first fourteen verses, but especially in verses 13 and 14. And there we saw the shame of our Lord's death where He became a curse for us that we might have the blessing of the salvation that had been promised to Abraham, and also the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Judaizing teachers had nothing to offer that could in any way approach what Christ had done for us.

Tonight I would like to direct your attention to chapter 6, verses 12 through 15, with special emphasis upon verse 14. And Paul again focused his attack upon the Judaizers, to expose what they were, and what their real objective was. Let us examine what he said about them.

I. PAUL'S ATTACK ON THE JUDAIZERS (Gal. 6:12-13).

They were trying “to make a fair show in the flesh.” This means that they were out to prove that “the flesh,” human nature, was not as bad as the Christians were saying that it was. They wanted to show man in a good light. They wanted to show that if man is given an opportunity, he will seek after God, and that he is actually capable of saving himself!

You see, one thing that makes the Gospel so offensive to people is because it utterly condemns all that man is, and all that man can do, and it leaves him helpless and hopeless unless God has mercy upon him. All man-made ways of salvation are out to prove that man is not so bad after all. Those who teach a salvation by works are usually willing to admit that man is sick, but they refuse to say that he is spiritually dead in his trespasses and his sins. And so these particular false teachers were encouraging circumcision! But Paul said that there were three things wrong that all of the Galatian believers needed to understand:

A. They emphasized circumcision to avoid persecution (v. 12b).

These teachers of the Law, false teachers of the Law, were seeking to avoid the persecution that the cross of Christ brings. Man hates to be put in a position where he is totally dependent upon God. He hates to be told that he deserved to die, and to die in shame because of his sins. The cross was not a symbol that people wore on their lapels, or around their necks. It was a mark of shame! Families who had one of their members crucified were held in disgrace for generations afterward. The message of the Cross is one which pictures man as so totally defiled by sin that his only hope is in the grace of God. This is the first point that Paul made. The Judaizers knew what it would mean to them to turn to Christ, and they were going to avoid that with all of their might.

In the Jewish community they would be praised for being circumcised, but to turn to Christ in faith would mean persecution.

B. The teachers of the Law did not practice what they were preaching (v. 13a).

They were asking people to do what they were not doing. Circumcision was only a small part of Law-keeping. When our Lord faced the scribes and Pharisees, He said that “they say, and do not” (Luke 23:3).

The dangerous thing about some error is that there can be a mixture of truth and error. And people are inclined to excuse the error in favor of the truth. That is because the heart is deceitful above all things, as Jeremiah had told us in Jer. 17:9. And besides being “deceitful,” it is “desperately wicked.”

So, when Paul said what he did here, he was saying the same thing that the Lord said, and this would mean that the false teachers, by their own definition of what salvation is, were not saved themselves. You can't keep just part of the Law; you have to keep it all. Cf. Jas. 2:10:

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

Obedience to the Word of God always follows salvation, but it does not lead up to salvation, nor does it secure salvation. Remember what the Apostle John said on this point:

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5)..

So we don't get salvation by our obedience, but we show that we are saved by our obedience to the Word of God.

But there was another problem with the legalistic teachers.

C. They wanted to be able to boast that they had made another convert (v. 13b).

Have you ever noticed how false teaching always excludes rather than includes? Circumcision says nothing about the salvation of women. In fact, you would have to come to the conclusion that if that is the way of salvation, then now woman can be saved.

The same is true about keeping the Law. There is no point in talking to people about keeping the Law when they have already broken it by their disobedience.

It is not possible for some people to do work because of the physical limitations or disabilities. And if salvation were only by purchase with money, who could afford it. Even faith is impossible because sinners are spiritually dead. Faith is a gift of God only after we have life. Believing in Christ is the first evidence that a person has eternal life.

False teachers love to “count noses.” *Their object is really not what they can do for us, but what we can do for them.*

Illus: M.L., my mother, and a friend who attended a special meeting where everyone in the congregation had gone forward except for them. And the preacher came and asked them to go forward “to make it unanimous.”

So remember these points by which the Apostle Paul was exposing those enemies of the Gospel of Christ.

But what is the truth? Where did Paul stand with regard to the Gospel?

In His closing words of this epistle, written by himself in large letters (see 6:11), Paul reaffirmed his faith in:

II. THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST (Gal. 6:14-15).

To glory is *to boast*. And this is one activity that all of us are inclined to engage in. However, boasting can simply become an expression of our pride. We glory in our accomplishments. We glory in our strength. We glory in our relationships, the people we know and who know us. We glory in the money we make (until tax time comes around). We glory in what we have done, or in what we have not done. Listen to your thoughts, and listen to what you and others talk about, and you will see that this is a favorite occupation that we are all good at. If we don't have much to boast about in ourselves, we boast in the accomplishments of our children or grandchildren. Have you noticed the sticker on many cars, “My child is an honor student at “ (such and such a school).

Paul looked on boasting as a sin. We saw in our lesson this morning in Romans 11 that Paul solemnly warned the Gentiles not to boast about themselves against the Jews.

Paul did a lot of boasting before he became a Christian. Listen to what he wrote to the Philippians in Phil. 3:1-11. (Read.)

However, after saying all of that, there is one legitimate way in which we can boast, and that is what Paul tells us in verses 14 and 15 of Gal. 6. Boasting is “out” for us as the people of God, except for boasting about “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Isaac Watts was speaking about the truth of this verse when he wrote the

second verse of his great hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”
Let me read the verse I am referring to:

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.

James Grigg also, in his hymn, “Jesus, and shall it ever be,” emphasized what the Apostle Paul told the Galatians. Listen to what he wrote:

Jesus, and shall it ever be,
A mortal man ashamed of Thee?
Ashamed of Thee whom angels praise,
Whose glories shine through endless days!

Ashamed of Jesus! Yes, I may
When I’ve no guilt to wash away,
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,
No fears to quell, not soul to save.

Till then – nor is my boasting vain –
Till then I boast a Savior slain;
And O may this my glory be,
That Christ is not ashamed of me.

In Gal. 6:14 Paul said three things about the Cross.

A. It was the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“The Cross” and that holy Name of our Savior, given here in its fulness, certainly do not belong together! But here they are, in the very Word of God. He of all persons would never deserve the Cross with all of its shame and reproach. And yet it was the Lord Jesus Christ, the very sinless, spotless Son of God, Who laid His life down on that Cross. He died as a criminal. But why? You know the answer very well. Because He died in the place of His people who were all criminals in the court of heaven, sinners against a holy God, condemned to eternal judgment with no hope of escaping the penalty of sin.

But He did it because God loved us, sinners though we were, and still are. And He did it because He loved us, loved us with an everlasting love, and with a love from which nothing can separate us. He is the only hope for

lost sinners. Paul said that it perfectly acceptable to boast in such a Savior if it is our intention to glorify God, not ourselves, by our boasting. As Paul told the Corinthians,

1 Cor 1:26-31

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

There on the Cross the Lord purchased our redemption. He rescued us from the penalty of our sins. And they are gone! They will be remembered against no more. What a Savior, and what a salvation!

But something else happened on the Cross of Christ.

B. The world was crucified unto us.

Before we were saved, the world was what we lived for – this world under the dominion of Satan, a place of corruption, a world that has rejected God and His Son, a world that promises so much and yet all that it produces is empty and only vexes our Spirit. This is what Solomon had to say about it many, many years ago in the book of Ecclesiastes.

People who live for what this world can give them, are living for nothing. The world always demands our conformity to its standards which are just the opposite of what is pleasing to God. But by the death of Christ the hold that the world had on us, is gone. We are rescued, set free, not to do what we want to do – that is what has gotten us into so much trouble –but free to live lives that are pleasing to God.

But that is not all.

C. We are crucified to the world.

Not only are we through with the world, but the world is through with us. The world has lost us, but it can still give us trouble. This is where our persecution comes from.

This is what the Lord was speaking about when He said to His disciples as they walked from the Upper Room to Gethsemane:

John 15:18-21

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

(KJV)

So knowing Christ brings us into a new relationship with the world. We are free from it, but often the object of the world's ridicule, or worse!

But this did not discourage Paul. Instead he gloried in it all. Why?

Verse 15 in Gal. 6 gives us his answer. (Read.)

What is important to God is not whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or not circumcised. What avails with God is that we are a new creation in Christ. This is where old things, vain things, are passed away, and we have an entirely new life in Christ.

Concl: Is it any wonder that Paul was so greatly concerned about the believers in the churches throughout Galatia? The Christ of the Cross is the only hope the world has. What would the Apostle Paul say today if he could see the way the world has come into our churches, turning us away from the simple teaching of the Word of God, placing the emphasis on attracting the world by the world's means, instead of by the preaching of the Gospel of God's grace. May it be our prayer and our purpose, that we, too, like Paul, will glory only in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.