

We Must Boast In the Cross

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[0 : 00] Well, later this afternoon, there is a bit of a competition. The Green Bay Packers will square off against the San Francisco 49ers. And if the Green Bay Packers should win, the state of Wisconsin will be boasting.

Yes, the NFC title is on the line and rights to the Super Bowl. So if the Packers should win, Packer fans everywhere will have boasting rights to boast in their team, to boast that Aaron Rodgers is not a wash-up, to boast in their new coach, to boast in the win, to boast in the program, to boast. Here's what you need about boasting. When you boast in something, you're putting your present trust in that. When you boast in something, you're putting your future hope in that. When you boast in something, it's what defines you. When you boast in something, it's that in which you celebrate. What I'm getting at is your ultimate boast.

Now, we've reached the end of the book of Galatians. And this is not the last sermon, though it's the last section I'll be expositing. We've got one more sermon next week, which is going to be a retro view of the book of Galatians.

[1 : 36] It's kind of like what we walk away with. But all throughout the book of Galatians, it's been about the one true gospel of Jesus Christ. And how the cross of Christ alone frees us from slavery to the flesh to live by the Spirit for the glory of God.

So this morning's passage, which just read, Galatians 6, 11 through 18. What you need to understand here is that Paul is drawing this letter to a conclusion. And it culminates in a comparison.

A comparison of boasts. Boasting in the flesh. Boasting in the cross. And this comparison between boasting is intended to call all of us to boast not in the flesh, but in the cross of Jesus Christ alone. So I can summarize this passage in seven words. We must boast in the cross alone. We must boast in the cross alone.

And here's how we're going to move forward in walking through this passage. I want to answer a general question first. What is this boasting that the Apostle Paul is talking about? And then I want to help us understand what is this boasting in the flesh that he's talking about?

[2 : 59] And then I want to land us in what is this boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ? And why we must boast in the cross alone.

So what does Paul mean by boasting? Well, let me frame it for you. Because the verses 13 and 14 in which he actually talks about boasting, that's framed by what he says in verse 11 and verse 17. So let me help you show you where this boasting stuff comes in the context stuff. Notice in verse 11, Paul says, see with what large letters I'm writing to you with my own hand.

There's some speculation on what these large letters are. Maybe it's because Paul, his eyesight wasn't the best. Maybe the ailment of Galatians 4.13.

It could be the equivalent of us writing an email and putting something in bold italicized print to emphasize something. What the big clue is when he says, I write to you these things with my own hand.

[4 : 03] You know, each of us has our own handwriting. It's like our own fingerprint, right? It's unique to us. And so what Paul is saying here is saying, hey, this is me that's writing you. This letter's from me.

The apostle Paul, the one called by God. Galatians 1 and 2. The apostle to the Gentiles, given the authority from the risen Christ.

So it's an authenticator of who's writing this letter. And then in 6.17, we read this. From now on, let no one cause me trouble.

He's writing this letter. It's going to be distributed to the churches in Galatia. And in these churches, this letter would have been read publicly. And so all those people who are giving him trouble, and what I mean by that is they're teaching a different gospel.

They're saying that you can believe in Jesus just as long as if you're a guy, you're circumcised, and make sure you're observing the Jewish kosher dietary laws, making sure you're hitting all the Jewish holidays.

[5 : 09] So if you believe in Jesus and do all that stuff, you do those works, you're good with God. It's adding to the gospel. And it's not the gospel. And so Paul knows that, so he's writing this letter, and he's aiming at those people at this point.

He says, from now on, let no one cause me trouble. It's like a cease and desist letter. Stop it. And then he gives the reason.

For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. Literally, the stigmata of Jesus. Those who boasted in the flesh, they did so to avoid persecution.

Verse 12. Paul boasted in the cross alone, and he suffered for it. You know, these marks are actually referenced to scars.

Scars. If you look at 2 Corinthians 11, you get a sense of what Paul suffered for proclaiming the cross of Jesus Christ alone.

[6 : 18] Scars tell stories. I've got scars on my body. When someone asks me about them, I'm like, oh yeah, I've got a story behind that one. The scars on Paul's body are the marks of Jesus.

The cost he endured to proclaim the cross of Christ alone. It's another way of authenticating his ministry.

Of legitimizing his apostleship. So in between these authenticating comments of the apostle Paul at the end of the book of Galatians, he then starts talking about boasting.

A contrast of boasting. I tend to think about this as this. Paul's wrapping up the book. It's kind of like Joshua 24, where Joshua says, okay, Israel, the old Israel, Israel, choose this day whom you're going to serve.

Either the gods of the land or Yahweh. As for me and my house, we'll serve the Lord. Paul is saying, choose this day whom you will boast.

[7 : 33] You're going to boast in the flesh. You're going to boast in the cross of Christ. And Paul says, as for me and God's new people, the Israel of God, we will boast in the cross. So what does Paul mean by boasting?

Well, on the most basic sense, boasting is a kind of speaking about something, right? But it's a particular kind of speaking about something. Boasting is verbally expressing your confidence in someone or something's ability to win.

Or to be the best. Or to do what nothing or no one else can do. My team's the best. It's kind of boasting. My neighborhood's the best.

My school's the best. My political party's the best. My race is the best. My gender's the best. My religious practices are the best.

Boasting is a complex thing. Here's why. When you boast in something, you're actually putting your present trust in that something.

[8 : 46] It's the governing reality of your life. As far as that thing goes, so goes your happiness. But your boasting is not simply just your present trusting in something.

Your boasting is always a future trusting. A future faith. It's what we call hope. You're boasting in something with a hope that it's going to deliver down the line.

Have you heard people say, I have no problems with science. I believe God has used science for great good in humanity.

But when people say things like, hey, science will eventually figure everything out. People are actually putting their hope in human reason and ingenuity.

It's future faith. And it's not just boasting as a future faith, a hope.

[9 : 50] When you boast in something, it defines you. Okay, if you are rooting for the Packers tonight, you're like, go Pack, go!

You are a Packers fan! It defines you! What you boast in defines you. It shapes your identity. It's how you think about yourself.

When you are driving in your car and you're looking at bumper stickers, maybe you should think of them more as boasting stickers. It's what people are putting their trust in, their hope in, their identity

in.

It's what they even celebrate. So boasting is present trust, future hope, who you are, identity, and it's what you celebrate.

It's what you want to yell about. It's what you get worked up over. It's what you sing about. It's what you've got to tell other people about.

[10:59] Do you remember Jesus' words in Matthew 12? Jesus is explaining to his disciples how to discern the difference between an evil person and a good person.

Jesus uses a tree illustration. A tree is known by its fruit, either good fruit or evil fruit. And Jesus says, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Words are fruit of a heart at its root in what you trust. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth boasts.

What you trust in, what you hope in, what defines you, what you celebrate. That's what Paul is getting at with this word boasting. It's big.

It's complex. It's not just words. It's worship. You boast in what you worship. So, when it comes to boasting, we've got to be asking the right question.

[12:11] To boast or not to boast is not the right question. Because everybody is boasting in something. Everyone is trusting in something. Everyone is hoping in something.

Everyone is being defined by the words of something. Everyone wants to celebrate something.

We're all boasters because we're all worshipers. So, the question is not whether you should boast or not.

The question is, what are you presently boasting in? And is it worth it? And what we're going to see in this passage is that Paul says all of humanity basically has two options to boast in.

You're either going to boast in the flesh or you're going to boast in the cross. What is your ultimate boast? It's not an either or.

It's not a both and. It is an either or. We must boast in the cross alone. So, what is this boasting in the flesh then? Well, that's where 12 verses 12 and 13 helps.

[13:21] And as I unpack this, I want to help you see the motive and the method and the manner of this boasting. But before we get there, I just want to remind you what Paul means by the flesh.

Because in the book of Galatians, he uses that word flesh in at least two ways. Remember in Galatians 5, 16 and 17, Matt preached this a few weeks ago. What the flesh is there is this internal self-oriented power that seeks to express itself in desires like strife.

In envy, jealousy, fits of rage. We see all the works of the flesh spelled out in verses 19 through 21 of chapter 5.

And basically, if there's a banner that you raise over the flesh, it would be this. It's not love your neighbor. It's use your neighbor. Use your neighbor for selfish gain.

The flesh is in opposition to the Holy Spirit who's seeking to work in us to love our neighbor unto loving God.

[14:31] So, the first use of flesh is this internal power that is self-oriented that is seeking to use our neighbors. But then there's the second use.

And the second use of the word flesh shows up in our passage. Galatians chapter 6, verses 12 and 14. We read, it is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised.

Verse 14, but far be it for me to boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ. I just got lost there. In verse 13, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

In this passage, flesh is tied to circumcision. It's literally referencing the foreskin of a male's sexual organ.

In Galatians, the false preachers were saying, teaching that in order to be saved, male Gentiles who believed in Jesus needed to have their foreskins removed.

[15:37] They needed to become Jews before they could become Christians. And regardless if you were a man or woman, you needed to observe Jewish dietary laws and the Jewish holy day calendar.

And it also sounds like these false teachers were downplaying the cross of Christ and emphasizing obedience to circumcision and eating kosher and observing a calendar so that they wouldn't be persecuted for the cross.

Here's what I want to help you to see. This emphasis on the external flesh of circumcision is just an outworking of that internal power of the flesh within.

They go hand in hand. And that's where we see it played out in motive, method, and manner. This boasting in the flesh, what motivates that?

Well, we see it in verse 12. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised. A good showing. Who do you think they want to make a good showing to?

[16:54] They want to be man pleasers. They want to impress those who are observing of Jewish descent. And they want to impress those people.

It's the very thing that Paul himself was accused of in chapter 1, verse 10, ironically. Those who are boasting in the flesh were seeking to impress others, not God.

That's the good showing. The motive of these boasters in the flesh was to impress man. When people's opinion is more important than God's opinion.

But not just motives of the flesh. We see method in verse 12. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would force you to be circumcised.

Force. If you flip back to Galatians chapter 2. In verses 2 and 3 we read this.

[18:03] I went up because of a revelation and set before them, though privately before those who seemed influential, the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles in order to make sure I was not running or had run in vain. Verse 3, but even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

Look at chapter 2, verse 14. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas, Peter, before them all, If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?

One of the classic symptoms of the flesh is human manipulation. Human forcing things to happen. It's not loving your neighbor.

It's using your neighbor in order to impress other people. This motives and method, they go hand in hand, it turns out.

This method is kind of summarized, might makes right. Verse 13, we see the manner.

[19:21] We read this. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

For even those who are circumcised, speaking of those who are the false teachers, who have bought into this false teaching, they do not themselves keep the law. Do you see what Paul is saying?

They're hypocrites. They're not in it for God. They're in it for themselves. They're forcing things to happen. And they themselves are not seeking to keep the law.

And what we read earlier is to love your neighbor as yourself. They're saying, hey, do as I say, not as I do. Let's just make people look like they belong to us.

So these people who are boasting in the flesh, literally the foreskins, were operating out of the flesh.

[20:28] They were seeking to impress man by using methods of force that were kind of done out of hypocrisy. Their boasting in the flesh is a trusting in the flesh, a hoping in the flesh, a being defined by the flesh, a celebration of the flesh.

And so let me just ask you this question. What does circumcision accomplish? In God's economy of things.

What does eating kosher accomplish in God's economy of things? What does observing the right Jewish holidays accomplish in God's economy?

Do they save? No, they do not. No, none of these has any saving merit in God's eyes. So boasting in the flesh are just these outworkings of the flesh.

And it's not by might, not by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord. And boasting in the flesh continues today.

[21:39] It's not a first century Jewish religious context kind of a thing. Motives to seek approval of people, methods of manipulation and force, manner of hypocrisy.

We see it played out on the political scene in our country. We see it played out with social issues.

We say it played out in educational frameworks. We even say it played out in our parenting.

We're more concerned with what people think about us than doing things for the praise of God. It's like requiring foreskins, or requiring to eat kosher, or observing Jewish holy days.

None of these things can save anyone. None of them gets you right with a hold of God. Do you know what all this boasting in the flesh has in common?

It's man-centered. It's trusting in human agency. Trusting in man. Not God. Hoping in man. Not God.

[22 : 47] Being defined by what man says. Not what God says. It's celebrating man. Apart from celebrating God. Boasting in the flesh reflects a man-centered approach to life.

It's worldliness. A form of godliness, but denying its power. That's why boasting in the flesh is completely incompatible with boasting in the cross.

It's not both and. It is either or. Who you ultimately trust. We must not be boasting in the flesh, brothers and sisters.

We must boast in the cross alone. And it's to that end I want to aim us and start wrapping up this sermon in verses 14 through 16.

In this passage, in these verses, Paul essentially gives us three reasons why we must boast in the cross of Jesus Christ alone.

[23 : 57] I want to help you understand what it means to boast in the cross. Why we boast in the cross. And we boast in the cross because of what the cross has accomplished.

Now, before I get there, I just want to help you understand something. We don't realize how crazy that sounds. In verse 14, Paul says, but far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're so used to hearing cross talk. We forget how scandalous it is. And so let me try to help you kind of get a sense of how scandalous this sounds in the first century.

In the first century, a cross was the instrument of Roman capital punishment. So in the modern era, it would have been the equivalent of a firing squad or the hangman's noose or the electric chair.

All different forms of capital punishment. So, could you imagine someone coming up to you wearing a silver chain with an electric chair pendant around their neck saying, man, I got to tell you about this guy that died in the electric chair for me.

[25 : 17] Have you heard the song When I Survey? When I Survey the Wondrous Cross? When I Survey the Electric Chair.

See how crazy that sounds? How scandalous that is? It's like Paul saying, but far be it for me to boast except in the electric chair of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The cross, like the electric chair, was a shameful way to die. Cursed is anyone who's hanged on a tree. But we must boast in the cross because of the one who died on the cross.

Did you see the pile up of titles? But far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus the Christ. God in the flesh.

He died on the cross bearing God's curse for our sinfulness.

[26 : 23] All of our living out of our flesh opposed to God. He died for it all. His death and resurrection accomplished what no human or group of humans could ever do.

And that's why we boast in it. And that's why Paul gives us three reasons from this text of why we should be boasting in the cross alone. So let me help you see that.

In verse 14 we read this. But far be it for 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. The first reason why we boast in the cross is that the world has been crucified to us and us to the world.

Do you remember Galatians 2.20? It's one of my all-time favorite verses. Paul says, I've been crucified with Christ. It's 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 up for me. He died on the cross because he loved me and gave himself up for me. Paul fully believed.

[27 : 34] He was completely convinced convinced that he himself was co-crucified with Christ on the cross. That's what that's getting at. He was united with Christ in Christ's cross work.

And the same is true with us who believe in Christ alone for our salvation. The very moment you first believed in what Christ had done for you, God united you to Christ in his death and resurrection.

And one of the results we've already looked at in 524 and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its desires.

Now why am I telling you this? Because we're talking about the world, right? Here's why. The world in this context is describing a community of human beings.

a community of human beings who have not been united to Christ. And because they haven't been united to Christ their passions and desires of their flesh has not been crucified either.

[28 : 46] So they are ruled by their passions and desires of their flesh. So the passions and desires of the flesh of every person of the world controls their being.

And they boast in the flesh. The flesh the internal power of selfishness that exerts itself cannot put to death the flesh.

So you need to think of the world as all of humanity being ruled by the passions and desires of the flesh. It's like Galatians 5 19-21 all those 15 works of the flesh multiplied and spread out across billions of people on this planet transcending race transcending culture religion and gender.

That's the world and it creates a current of ungodliness. The world exerts a fleshly influence not towards God but away from Him.

the world way of doing things normalizes a use your neighbor approach to life.

[30 : 05] Only being united to Christ in His crucifixion will put to death the world's fleshly hold on you. I hope you're starting to understand that the cross of Christ has set us free from living for the world from worldliness a culture characterized by what we read in Galatians 5 19-21 the cross has freed us from the world's hold on us and our allure to the world.

Now if you struggle with worldliness and I know I do you need to remember and believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ and that you have been co-crucified with Christ and when you do that you start to realize the world no longer owns you.

Being crucified to the world does not mean removing ourselves from the world that's the whole point of Jesus praying for His disciples in John 17 that God would not take them out of the world but He would set them apart in the world by sanctifying them with God's word the truth and so think about it this way here's what happened the cross called us out of the world so the cross has made it possible for us to be in the world but not of the world to proclaim to the world that Jesus is the Savior of the world that's the first reason why we boast in the cross why we trust in it why it defines our hope it defines us we celebrate the cross because the cross has made it possible for us to be in the world but not of the world to proclaim Christ to the world only the cross can do that we must boast in the cross alone the second reason why we must boast in the cross alone you see in verse 15 for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation it's only through the cross that we can be new creatures of a new creation

Galatians 5 25 says if we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit according to God's word when you believe in Jesus for the first time you are united to Christ in his death and resurrection and all of his resurrection power and life given it to you so you are considered in God's eyes a new creation the old is gone the new has come all of your sin paid for now you are right with God forever

2 Corinthians 5 17 says therefore if anyone is in Christ united to Christ belonging to Christ he's a new creation the old way use your neighbor is gone the new way love your neighbor for the glory of God has come in Christ the old flesh ruled Mike Salvati that boasts in the flesh has been crucified and the new creation Mike Salvati has come with a new heart a new boast new motives new method new manner the cross of Christ of Jesus it not only just makes individuals new at the cross a whole new creation began what God is doing now is this he is making new creatures out of old sinners on the old earth but what the cross inaugurated will one day come complete full culminate when Jesus comes back and he recreates everything behold

Revelation 21 5 I am making all things new it's all by God's powerful grace circumcision doesn't do that so if you think that having your foreskin removed or eating right foods or observing the right days or doing the right Christian things don't yell at your kids don't swear read your Bible pray before meals give regularly if you think any of these works can make you new in God's eyes you are terribly mistaken it's only through the cross that does that gives you new life only the cross can make a dead sinner into a new living creature of the new creation that's the second reason why we boast in the cross the cross alone is the source of life the third reason why we must boast in the cross alone is an outworking of the new creation of what the cross has inaugurated we read it in verse 16 and so for all who walk in this rule by this rule the new creation rule what's most important is the new creation for all who walk by this new creation mindset peace and mercy upon them and upon the

[35 : 45] Israel of God here's what Paul's saying if the world is the community of those ruled by the flesh who boast in the flesh then the Israel of God 616 is the new creation community of those co-crucified in the cross walking by the spirit who boast in the cross it's the church in verse 16 Paul calls the Israel of God all who walk by this rule for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation that's what matters most being a new creation it's only an act of God neither circumcision counts for anything or uncircumcision so those who are of the new creation are the

Israel of God and that's been Paul's argument all throughout the book of Galatians those who put their faith in the finished work of Christ anyone who puts their faith in the finished work of Christ are justified those Jews and Gentiles who trust in the finished work of Christ they are the offspring of Abraham and recipients of God's promised blessing Galatians 3 pointing back to Genesis 12 they're the Israel of God those who trust in Christ's cross work alone they are the righteous who shall live by faith Hebrews 2 quote in Galatians 3 Habakkuk 2 quote in Galatians 3 those who trust in Christ's cross work alone are the true children of promise the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem above Galatians 4 they're the

Israel of God God Paul's been arguing all throughout the book of Galatians that anyone who trusts in Christ's finished cross work they are part of the new creation they're new creatures of the new creation they are the new Israel of God the church it's not about ethnicity it's not about obedience it's not if you're male or female it's about whether or not you believe solely by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross that's why in Galatians 3 28-29 we read writing to both Jews and Gentiles there's neither Jew nor Greek there's neither slave nor free there's no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus and if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring heirs according to the promise and here in Galatians he wraps it all up by saying you are the new Israel of God God's new treasured possession at the heart of the gospel is the cross of Jesus Christ it's only through the cross that God calls a people out of the world making them new creatures of a new creation and a whole new cross crucified community the Israel of God the church of Jesus Christ it takes the cross to do that this new Israel of God the church we walk by the new creation rule it's not about circumcision or uncircumcision it's about being born again a new creation and we boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ what that means is we trust in the cross what Christ has done for us period it never changes anymore we're his period we hope in the cross the cross the cross has inaugurated a whole new creation that will one day culminate when Jesus comes back that's what we hope in we find our identity in the cross

I have been crucified with Christ we celebrate the cross it never gets old because it's true it results in a new motive we're not in it for man's approval but that man would praise the living God who would do such a thing we have new methods we're not by force but by grace that's where Paul closes this letter grace to you and we have a new manner we're not hypocrites who don't seek to fulfill the law no we walk by the spirit of God in order to love our neighbors as ourselves Christ the king church choose this day in whom you will boast we must not boast in the flesh we must boast in the cross alone because of what

[41 : 34] God has accomplished through it now you may be asking well should I watch the Packers game tonight yeah watch it but just realize this if the Packers win does that accomplish our salvation the cross gives perspective let's pray God in heaven thank you so much for the book of Galatians God thank you so much for the cross that has called us out of the world by crucifying us to the world for giving us a very a new identity because we're new creatures of a new creation and a new community we are part of the Israel of God and it's all by your grace oh God would you do a work in us and through us by your spirit that brings worshipers boasters of the cross it's your name we pray

Jesus amen those what how how how can it's your word .

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