

Gospel Living: Boasting and Bearing

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Date: 30 April 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Galatians chapter 6, beginning in verse 11. Hear the word of the Lord. See what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For those who are circumcised do not even keep the law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.

But 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.

For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one cause me trouble. For I bear on my body the brand marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren.

[1 : 1 3] Amen. Father, thank you for your word. And I pray that you would help us understand it. And that I pray by your spirit you would help us to apply it. And may you get all the praise and all the glory.

In Christ's name. Amen. Michelle and I had not been married for very long. She grew up in St. Augustine, Texas.

It has the distinct privilege of fighting for the right of being the oldest town in Texas, next to Nacogdoches.

They have this rivalry going on. But that's where Michelle grew up. I grew up down in southeast Texas. And we met in Marshall, Texas. And we had been married for just a little bit. And there was a couple that was important in Michelle's life.

And they were good friends. They'd been Sunday school teachers for her throughout the time that she was in the church there in St. Augustine. And they'd been at our wedding. We had been out to their house a couple of times and had met them.

[2 : 1 5] And they gave us a phone call as we had been in Marshall and marriage student housing, or as they like to call it, the leper colony, for a little time. And we were excited to get to talk to them because it had been a pretty lonely summer, just the two of us there and none of our friends on campus still.

And so they came and they had dinner with us. And we were going through dinner. And it was a great conversation. And they were very interested in who we were, it seemed like, and what was going on.

And about three quarters of the way through the meal, all of a sudden, they began to share with us and present to us this thing called Amway. Amway. Now, you know, at the time, I had never heard of anything like this.

And I was fine. And we listened. And we had a good time talking about that. And as they left, we told them, yeah, we're probably not interested. And that was fine.

And conversation ended. They went back to St. Augustine. And all was good. But then over the course of the next couple of weeks, we were getting phone calls after phone calls asking us if we would change our minds.

[3 : 24] And this is the greatest thing. And this is a wonderful thing. On and on and on. They were boasting all about Amway. And you just began to feel as though that you were really not that important.

You were really just a notch. You were just one in the crew. Now, I'm not saying that that's really how they were, but that's just how we began to feel. And it's that kind of a thing that I think helps to lay out what's going on here in chapter 6, verse 11 through 18.

Because Paul is ending this letter by basically giving a summary of everything he has said and sort of pushing it into some different language so that we could understand how we ought to live.

And he does this by laying out what the problem is first and then what the solution is. And the solution involves both boasting in Christ and bearing the marks of Christ.

So I want us to look at this so that we don't become people who boast in just anything, but that we are so fixated upon the Lord Jesus Christ that when we call people, maybe they begin to wonder if the most important thing to us is Jesus rather than anything else.

[4 : 45] So we want to look at this on two sides then. Let's look at the problem first and then let's look at the solution. So the problem is from verse 11 through 13. And now verse 11 is just Paul's way of saying, I'm writing my ending here.

It was quite traditional for Paul to end his letters in his own hand. And he says large letters because people say that Paul was not, well, he was somewhat blind.

He just couldn't see very well. So he was writing big to be able to put that there. He's talking about these people and we've been calling them Judaizers.

We've been calling them Judaizers and that's who traditionally they're called. They were people who would preach the gospel of Jesus plus something.

In other words, they were saying, yes, what Jesus did on the cross is good. Yes, Jesus is the Messiah. Yes, Jesus is God. But faith alone in Jesus is not enough.

[5 : 47] You must be circumcised. As a matter of fact, in Acts chapter 15 verse 1, there was a dissension about these people in another town and they came together and here's, they lay out the problem.

In verse 1 it says, So what was happening is that this group of Judaizers were saying that something was essential for your salvation that God never said was essential.

It's one thing for you to say maybe it's a good idea. It's one thing for you to say, well, you know, I know someone who did something like this, but this is something they were counting as essential that God never counted as essential for salvation.

In chapter 1, you will remember that Paul called this a false gospel. As a matter of fact, he said not only is it a false gospel, but he goes on to say that anyone who preaches this way, let them be accursed, which means separated from God.

And the truth of the matter is, is that we still in this day and age have people who are preaching things. They sound like they're saying the same thing, but they're saying things that are essential for salvation that God never said was essential.

[7 : 18] What the question though that Paul gets to is the motivation. Why were they doing this? He shows us two motivations. In verse 12, you'll notice it says that they wanted to make a good showing in the flesh.

In other words, their motive was they wanted honor. They wanted for people to pat them on the back. They knew that the Jews, who were the largest majority religion in the Roman Empire, in that area, they wanted the Jews to be proud of them.

They didn't want to suffer persecution, but they also wanted this pat on the back. They wanted people to think well of them. You could almost hear them sending back word of their missionary journey that they had had so many converts as they went.

They wanted the praise of men. But verse 12 tells us why, and that's because they were afraid of people. Verse 12 says, Simply so, they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

They were afraid of the culture around them. They were afraid of the Jews. They were afraid because it was the Jews who persecuted the church first.

[8 : 39] And they did not want to be persecuted. The Jewish leaders hated Christianity because if Jesus was true, they would lose their power. So they wanted to persecute the Christians.

That's where Paul even started. But these Judaizers were afraid of persecution, so they would not preach the truth. They compromised the truth in order to be friends with the culture.

As a matter of fact, in verse 13, it states it this way, that they wanted to boast in the flesh of the Galatians. Look, you know, it's like a revival meeting that sends out the headlines.

You know, so many people converted. They're saying so many people circumcised. We've done a good job. They're boasting in that flesh. That word boast, it means to glory in. It means to take pride in.

But the Greek word that's there means more than that. It really means to be obsessed with. So to avoid persecution because of their fear, in order to get the praise of men, these Judaizers became obsessed with something that they thought would provide for them safety and security and significance.

[9 : 55] So this has become their God. This has become their religion because this boasting was an act of worship.

That's the problem that Paul gets to. And the question is, do we have the problem today? Think about it. What are you obsessed about?

What are you obsessed over? What drives your behavior? What is really and truthfully your God?

If this one thing were missing from your life, your life would fall apart. What would be that one thing? What brings you the greatest happiness?

What brings you the most comfort? Let me say it this way and draw a picture for you. You're standing at the gates of heaven. And anyone and everyone that you love who've gone on before you, they're standing there waiting for you.

[11 : 02] And as you enter into this place, you recognize this is heaven. There's no more pain. There's no more death. There's no more sorrow. There's no more sickness. There's no more crying. Nothing.

There's all of this beauty that is supposed to be of heaven. the only thing is that Jesus is not there. Would you want to go?

I believe that your knee-jerk reaction says something about where your boast is and what you're obsessed with. Because being a Christian means that we have to be someone, as Jesus says, who's willing to give up father, mother, and sister, and brother, even our own lives if we wish to be his disciples.

I would say to you that if you would rather have heaven without Jesus, then you're probably not a Christian, and today you need to repent of your sin and turn to him in faith.

But Christians, we need to think to ourselves as well about this idea of giving in to the culture around us and seeing that we're afraid.

[12 : 12] Are we afraid to preach the truth? You know, once the Jewish persecution stopped, the Roman persecution of Christians began.

And it began even under Nero. Nero would take Christians. He would impel them on stakes. He would light them on fire in his gardens to light up his parties. The persecution of Christians took place in the Roman Empire all the way up until the time of Constantine in 325 A.D.

Some 7 million Christians faced death at state-sponsored persecution. And what was it that they had done?

What was it that they refused to do? Here's what they were called to do. Christians all over the Roman Empire were called to, once a year, appear before a magistrate where there was an altar and there was incense.

And they, once a year, had to take a pinch of incense, throw it into the fire, and say, Kaiser Curios.

[13 : 15] Caesar is Lord. They didn't have to mean it. They didn't have to like it. They didn't have to enjoy it.

But they had to do it. And because Christians believed that Jesus is Lord and not Caesar, they refused to give a pinch of incense.

They were not afraid. Their boast was not in the things of this world. Christians, let me ask you, are you so afraid of men and of the culture that you're willing to offer a pinch of incense on the altar?

Or are you fully committed to Christ? That's the problem of the Galatian letter, is that people are not preaching the truth because they're afraid of the culture.

So what's the solution? What's the solution? Verse 14 through 16, we see that Paul begins this whole thing by saying, may it never be.

[14 : 23] I'm just going to boast in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. I've already told you what this boasting means, but I want you to think about this boasting. This boasting is this idea that he glories in the cross of Christ.

He takes pride in the cross of Christ. He's obsessed with the cross of Christ. You can read through his letters, and you see in Galatians chapter 2 that he's been crucified with Christ.

And in Galatians chapter 3, Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 1 Corinthians, he says, He has the message of the cross, the offense of the cross, the triumph of the cross.

Over and over again, Paul is a broken record about the cross of Christ. What does Christ mean to you?

What does the cross of Christ mean to you? Is the cross of Christ your boast? Your obsession? If we're Christians, we should.

[15 : 42] But why? Why should we boast of the cross of Christ? I want you to think about what the cross of Christ does. Verse 14, he says that the world has been crucified to me, and I've been crucified to the world.

That when we died upon the cross, when Christ was nailed to the cross, we died with him. We were united with him, and there we hung with him. And when that happened, we were crucified to the world.

The world was crucified to us. It means that there is no longer a relationship between us and this world. Now, what does he mean by world? He doesn't mean rocks and trees and grass.

He doesn't mean work. He doesn't mean breathing the air. He doesn't mean friends and family. What he means is the world is this evil system out there in which we were all part of.

It's this world of this mindset of being against God and living our own way and being the boss of our own lives. He's saying that the world was crucified to me.

[16 : 43] It was dead to me because of the cross of Christ. It's very similar to what Paul says in Philippians chapter 3, verses 4 through 8. And listen to verse 8 specifically. He says, More than that, I count all things to be lost 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 so that I may gain Christ.

Paul had much to boast about. Paul had his family of origin. Paul had his academic achievements. Paul had his religious moral superiority. And he looked at all of that and said, I count it all as trash.

It's garbage. So that I can know Christ. That the cross of Christ puts such a radical break between us and our old lives.

The cross of Christ puts such a distance between us and the world that we are to count the world as rubbish for the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

He boasts in the cross because it did this for him. But not only that, in verse 15, he goes on to say that circumcision is nothing.

[18 : 04] Uncircumcision is nothing. I think that's interesting that he says it that way. I think what he's talking about here is Jews and Gentiles. But I also think what he's talking about is that you've got some people, like the Judaizers, who'd be like, legalists, you've got to be circumcised.

Paul's already put them aside. But there are other people on the other side who are going to eventually begin to brag. Well, you know what? I never went down that path. I didn't do like those Judaizers.

I'm uncircumcised, so therefore God loves me more. No, neither one of those matter. Neither one of those matter. What matters is the new creation.

And that new creation comes about by the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. That we were once dead in our sins. That we once were God-haters among all people.

That we were like the rest of mankind. We were children of wrath. We once were a part of the kingdom of darkness. And now that Christ has come and saved us, we are now a part of the kingdom of light.

[19 : 06] The kingdom of Christ. We once were dead. We're now alive. We are now a new creation. That's why he's boasting in the cross of Christ.

Because he knew what he was. He knew what his sin was. He knew that he stood there and gave approval for the murder of Christians. He says, I boast in the cross because look how it has changed me.

He goes on in verse 16 to say that those who walk by this rule, what rule? The rule of boasting in the cross, peace and mercy be upon them, namely the Israel of God.

In other words, what he's saying is that everybody and anybody who's going to live in such a way as to boast in the cross of Christ, they're the ones who get peace and mercy.

You know, Jesus said something similar to this in John chapter 9. Because here's the whole issue. The whole issue is all about whether or not you have the humility to admit your sin.

[20 : 21] There's this man born blind. Jesus heals him. The Pharisees get all upset because Jesus has worked on the Sabbath by healing eyes. Really strange, but okay.

When Jesus meets back up with the guy, he tells him some things in front of the Pharisees. And he makes this astounding statement. He says, I have come so that those who see might become blind and those who are blind might see.

And the question you have to ask yourself, when it comes to who God is, when it comes to what God wants, when it comes to that relationship with God, do you consider yourself naturally just somebody who sees or somebody who's blind?

You see, that man who was born blind didn't know who Jesus was. So not only did Jesus open his physical eyes, but he opened his spiritual eyes. The Pharisees, they believed they knew who God was.

They believed that they knew what God was like. They believed that they knew what God wanted of them and they thought they could see. The question is, do you see?

[21 : 39] Or are you blind? Are you willing to sit there and say, you know what? I've been a Christian for so many years and I'm not even sure that I really understand the word of God like I need to because there's gaps in my life.

There's things. I don't understand. There's ways that I'm hearing God's word as it's being preached that really challenge me, but it's right there, black and white. You know, what am I going to do about that?

Are you going to sit there in pride and say, no, no, no, no. What I see, what I've been taught, what I know, everything, this is the truth. But this, no, no, no, no, no, no. That can't be. Or are you going to say, you know what? I'm willing to be taught.

I'm willing to learn. I'm willing to see that maybe I don't know everything. Christians, the question is, what are you boasting in?

What are you obsessed about? There's a hymn. The hymn writer, he writes this verse that I think is just so great.

[22 : 35] Wealth and honor I disdain. Earthly comforts, Lord, are vain. These can never satisfy.

Give me Christ or else I die. How can we boast in the cross of Christ? We boast in the cross of Christ because the cross of Christ totally saves us.

There's really not much you can do on your own except to recognize the greatness of who he is and the greatness of what he's done and to be truly saved.

Because not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. That's right. You're right. Matthew chapter 7. He says, Many will say to him on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name cast out demons and in your name perform many miracles and then I will declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. See, here's the thing. The only way to really boast in the cross is to be really saved. And just because you have a spiritual experience doesn't mean you are.

[23 : 50] Does Christ know you? This is part of the solution to the problem is boasting in the cross of Christ. The second part of the problem or the solution to this is to bear the marks of Christ.

This is in verse 17. Paul's giving the Judaizers warning. So here's what most theologians think. Most theologians think Paul went through Galatia preaching at these different churches, returned back and came to Antioch and then began to hear that these Judaizers had followed his same path and went right behind him preaching their gospel of circumcision.

And so one of the things it seems from his phrasing is that they're hoping to catch up to Paul to convince Paul to agree with them. And so what Paul is doing in verse 17 is like, stop it.

Just stop it. Stop trying to mess things up. Stop trying to convince me. You're never going to convince me. I'm never going to be on your side. Because why? Because I bear on my body the brand marks of Christ.

Paul uses the word stigmata here. Unfortunately, our cultures mess this word up with terrible movies and bad theology. But the point is that there's two strands of thought in Paul's mind.

[25 : 06] The first is that Paul has suffered persecution. He's been beaten with whips. He's been stoned with stones. He's got scars all over his body. That's the first thing.

The second thing, in Exodus chapter 21, verse 1 through 6, in the nation of Israel, if they had a slave, you could hold a slave for six years.

In the seventh year, you had to release the slave. If the slave said, no, I love my master, I want to stay with my master, then the master would take his ear and an awl and put him up against a post and poke a hole through his ear and put a ring to signify this was a bond servant, this was a slave who's decided to stay a slave because he loves his master.

When Paul says, I bear on my body the marks of Christ, he is saying, these scars are the brand that Jesus has put on me. I'm under his brand.

He owns me. He owns me. This is the solution to the problem of being afraid of the world and afraid and therefore compromising the gospel.

[26 : 20] We belong to Christ. Christians, you need to understand that if you are a Christian, you are a slave to Christ.

And I am not going to change that word to servant or something else. I'm going to say it that way because I think it's important that we understand the relationship we need with Jesus is that he's the master and we are his slaves.

This is how we ought to see ourselves, that we have been branded by him and he owns us. It ought to make us, it ought to make us sing.

because as we see ourselves as slaves, Christ, in the salvation he brings, turns us into children.

You see, if you have been branded by Christ, if you are owned and belong to Christ, it ought to change the way you think. I'm a big proponent.

[27 : 37] I will say this so often and so much that you'll get sick of hearing me talk about it. The way we think needs to be distinctively Christian. We should not think the way that the world thinks.

We need to think the way the Bible teaches us to think. And if we belong to Christ, it means that we understand that the word of God is sufficient for every problem and trouble and difficulty in life that we will encounter.

My question to you is, do you know how to use the Bible to solve your problems? I would say most of us don't. That is one of the reasons I teach the way I teach Thursday mornings, Sunday school, right here in the service.

to help us learn how to use the Bible to solve the problems of life. It ought to change how we treat our families. If we belong to Christ, if I belong to Christ, then as a husband, I know that I have to take up the leadership of the home and I know that the discipleship of my wife is my responsibility.

I know that the raising of my children and the instruction and the admonition of the Lord is my responsibility. I cannot farm it out to anyone else. It's my responsibility.

[29 : 02] If I belong to Christ, then wives, you need to take up the role of mirroring the church by being submissive to your own husbands. If we belong to Christ, it ought to change the way we see our stuff.

I mean, do we really need all the stuff that we have? I mean, we buy more storage buildings so that we can keep all the stuff that we've got. Most of that stuff could be sold and that money could be used to give to missions.

But because we need our stuff, I mean, what I'm saying to you is this, is that if you belong to Christ, it ought to impact your entire person and who you are and what you do and how you think and how your husband, how your wife, how your children, how your parent, how you do your money, everything.

because you belong to Christ. But there are some you've never trusted Christ.

You've never given your life and your heart to Christ. And as we're talking about right here, what we're saying then to you is that you do not belong to Christ.

[30 : 18] and to not belong to Christ is to still be under his wrath. And your only hope is to abandon being the boss of your own life and run to Jesus Christ.

You don't have to walk an aisle to do that. You don't even have to pray a prayer to do that. You can right now in your own heart as you're sitting there and you're thinking to yourself, I have sin and I know that if I were to die today I would bust hell wide open and I don't belong to Christ but I see my sin and I want to be saved.

In this moment if you're willing to say I want Jesus to save me then in that very moment you can be converted. He says whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Even before this next sentence is finished in my mouth you could be saved. and so why not? Why not turn to him?

You've kind of made a mess of your life on your own anyway. Why not turn it over to him? Let him be the boss.

[31 : 35] May we boast in the cross of Christ more and more. Let's pray. Thank you.