

Boasting in the Cross

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 December 2017

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] ...to you with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that they may boast in your flesh.

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.

For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation. And as for all 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 marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers.

Amen. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful to have your word and to be able to read it and now to be able to sit under the preaching of it.

[1 : 35] We ask, oh Lord, that you would give us hearts that are attentive and receptive to your word. And then, Lord, we ask that you would make our wills obedient to your word.

Lord, give us all grace to hear, Lord. Would you give me grace to proclaim faithfully this text to your people.

We ask you these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, in the providence of God, we find ourselves on the eve of a new year concluding this sermon series that we have been in in the book of Galatians since the early part of the year.

We started this series back in March of this year. And when we started it, I referred to the message in the book of Galatians as the gospel of grace.

And those of you who might recall the introduction to this sermon series, I mentioned that there are people who do not understand the gospel of grace.

[2 : 52] They don't understand the gospel of grace. If you were to ask them, how are you saved? They will say, I'm saved by grace. But as you probe them further and try to understand exactly what that means, you soon conclude that what they really believe in is they're saved by works.

They're saved by what they do or what they do not do. The good things they do and the bad things they don't do. That is what their functional belief about salvation comes down to.

And that was the situation in the churches at Galatia that the Apostle Paul was addressing. There were people who felt that they could gain acceptance before God by what they do, by the laws they kept, by the things they did and did not do.

But those of us who have come to trust Jesus and the message that we have seen in the book of Galatians is that we are saved by grace, separate and apart from human works.

That's the message of Galatians. But there are still these two approaches to acceptance before God. The use of human effort and the trusting in the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

[4 : 21] That was true in Paul's day and it is true in our day. It is true in our day just as it was in Paul's day that there are people who believe that the basis for their acceptance before God is rooted in their works.

And there are people who believe that the basis, the only basis for their acceptance before God is rooted in Christ's cross. And in a nutshell, as the Apostle Paul concludes this letter, this is what he reduces it to.

This is his summary of the issues that are in this letter. So what we see the Apostle Paul doing now is he moves away from this extensive treatment of the law and these analogies of the law and he brings it down to its raw core issues.

Paul summarizes these two views of salvation and he points out, here's what he points out in these concluding verses. Whatever we have confidence in, we will boast in.

Whether the works of the flesh or the cross of Christ. So Paul does, he concludes this letter, he doesn't want them to be lost in the extensive treatment of the law that he gives and the analogies of the law that he gives.

[5 : 54] He reduces it down to this. He says to them, brothers, whatever we have confidence in, we will boast in. Whether it is the works of the flesh, what we do or what we don't do, or the cross of Christ, what Christ has done for us that we can never do.

That is the simple point that he makes as he concludes this letter. And so this morning, I have two simple points and they are, number one, the flesh and boasting.

Number two, the cross and boasting. That's considered the first one, what the Apostle Paul says about the flesh and boasting. In writing letters, the Apostle Paul was a typical letter writer in his day. And in Paul's day, if you were writing a formal letter, what you would do is you would have a secretary to whom you dictate that letter and that secretary would write the letter out. Write it out by hand.

There were no typewriters or word processors or computers in those days. And as was Paul's custom, after he would have dictated this letter to a secretary, what he would do is he would sign the letter and he would do a brief commendation of the people to God, to the grace of God or to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 29] And Paul did this to safeguard against forgery. It was in a time when Paul's teachers would write letters and they would say this letter is from Paul and they would circulate it.

And they actually did that in the churches at Thessalonica. And so, for example, in 2 Thessalonians 3, 17 through 18, here's what Paul writes as he concludes that letter.

He writes, I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness of every letter of mine. It is the way I write.

And then he says, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. So Paul would typically dictate his letters and then he would sign them with some commendation of the church to the grace of God. But in this letter, he takes a different approach. In this letter to the church at Galatia, what we see is that Paul started this letter differently. Remember, we talked about how when Paul started the letter to the Galatians, he had no salutation of grace for them.

[8 : 41] He started this letter out rebuking them and correcting them for their desertion of the gospel. So he started this letter differently and he ends it differently.

And what we see Paul doing is he sees that it's not enough for him to just sign his name and commend the Galatians to the grace of God. Look at what he says he does in verse 11.

He says, See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. And some speculate that Paul wrote large letters because he had an eye problem.

But the context seems to suggest otherwise. It seems to suggest that what Paul was doing was he was writing in big letters for emphasis. He wanted to help the Galatians to see how critically important it was this issue that he was addressing.

He wanted to draw attention to what he was writing. One theologian wrote that Paul was writing to arrest the eye and rivet the mind. And so as he concludes this letter to the Galatians, he gets to the heart of the issue.

[9 : 54] He's summarizing the letter for them again. And he gets to the heart of the issue that establishes the differences between the false teachers who were trying to introduce the Galatians to false gospel and himself who had preached to the Galatians the true gospel.

Paul is helping them to see a distinction between what the false teachers were trying to lure them to and what he had preached when he established those churches.

And he compares and contrasts the two. He begins by pointing out the underlying reason for the false teachers spreading their false teachings among the Galatians.

Look at what he tells them in verse 12. He says, it is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

What Paul is essentially saying to the Galatians, he's saying that these false teachers they make much of religious works of the flesh. and the prideful satisfaction it brings to them that they're forcing the Galatians to be circumcised and that's why they were doing it.

[11 : 26] They were doing it out of the self-gratification that they got out of it. They made much of the works of the flesh. And when Paul talks about the works of the flesh, he's not talking about this

literal flesh that we wear on the skeletons of our bodies.

Instead, when Paul talks about the work of the flesh, he's referring to a religion that is human in origin, a religion that is man-made. And he uses the word flesh to distinguish it from that which is divine, that which has its origin in God.

And the point that Paul is making is that religion of the flesh is a waste of time. It's a waste of time because it cannot truly satisfy the requirements of God.

And that's the point that he makes in verse 13 about the false teachers themselves. He says, for even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law. And the reason they don't keep it is they can't keep it.

Because for God, it is not just 90% will do or 99.99% will do with God to please a holy God.

[12:41] It is 100% perfection. And so Paul says, even they who are forcing you to be circumcised, they themselves don't keep the law.

And that was the dilemma that Paul addressed earlier in the letter about how we all fall short of keeping God's law. What the false teachers were focused on is they were focused on these external acts of religion, these external religious acts.

They were focused on trying to get others to conform to particular duties and particular rules and particular practices. And Paul says, and they get great satisfaction that they are able to boast.

And what Paul is saying is, it doesn't matter how religious it looks, no matter how pious it looks, no matter how holy it looks, it is flesh. It is of the flesh. It is fallen.

And it is worthless. And Paul said it was circumcision. People made much of circumcision as they were doing in the Galatian church.

[14:01] And in our day, it is different things. For some it is baptism. They will tell you, unless you are baptized, you cannot be saved. And many of them will take people at crazy hours of the night even, and get them to recite some words and baptize them and get great satisfaction out of that.

then there are those who would say it is in keeping the Sabbath and refraining from eating certain meats or refraining from eating meat at all. And Paul's point is it is all flesh.

It is all man-made religion that can never meet God's righteous requirements. And therefore it cannot save us. And as in Paul's day where people drew satisfaction from getting others to conform to works-based religion, it's the same today.

People draw great satisfaction from getting others to follow their rules and their regulations. And here's what's the natural result of that. The natural result of that is boasting.

The natural result is that we will boast about whatever we have confidence in. You have confidence that if a person is baptized, reciting some words, they'll be saved, you will rejoice and you will boast in that when they conform to it.

[15:27] But you persuade someone that their salvation is in jeopardy because they aren't worshiping on Saturday or they are eating certain meats that you feel they should not eat and they conform to that because you have confidence that you rejoice in that, you boast in that, that you've gotten them to follow that particular rule or that particular practice.

And that's what was happening in the Galatian churches. And it's a contradiction because such works of the flesh, as religious as they appear, they do not bring people to God.

They do not bring people closer to God. that's what works-based religion is all about. It gives its appearance of knowing God and drawing near to God and you're far, far away from God.

But Paul was not about that. The false teachers were about that, but Paul was not about that. And this brings me to my second point.

The cross and boasting. Paul was about boasting in something completely opposite to the flesh and to man-made outward religion.

[17:02] The very nature of the cross offers us no reason for boasting. Notice what Paul says.

In contrast in verse 14, he says, but far be it from me. 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. I like the way the King James reads it. The King James says, God forbid, God forbid that I should boast in anything, that I should glory in anything other than the cross.

You see, the very nature of the cross offers us no reason for boasting. No reason for boasting. Look again at verse 12, what Paul says about the false teachers.

He says, it is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

[18 : 21] Paul helps us to see that there was persecution associated with identifying with or preaching the cross of Christ.

And here when Paul refers to the cross of Christ he is not talking so much about the literal physical cross of Christ and people make much of that as well to wear it nothing wrong with wearing it but if you revere it and worship it well then you've missed!

the point of it what Paul is addressing is he's addressing! the work of Christ on the cross the cross of Christ is shorthand for the finished work of Jesus Christ the atoning redemptive work that he accomplished on the cross on behalf of sinners the substitutionary death that he died the reconciling work that he did that is what Paul is addressing when he says the cross of Christ in short it is the gospel it is the righteous dying for the unrighteous that we might receive forgiveness of sins and we might be reconciled to God and Paul's point is that persecution comes to everyone who identifies with the cross we see this from the earliest days of the church in the new testament the preaching of the cross attracted persecution for all who preached it and that remains true to this day now why is this why is it that preaching the cross results in hostility and persecution for those who preach it the reason is that the message of the cross is unattractive the message of the cross tells sinners there's nothing that they can do to save themselves and they have to be wholly dependent on the mercy and grace of

God to do that unlike a message that tells people if you do this or you do that then you can be saved and they're quick to run to do those particular things it tells them that the sins that Christ bore on the cross and died for were their sins and the death that Christ died was the death that they deserved to die that is what the message of the cross communicates the deceased pastor and the the the the the the the brilliant way that he gives the reason that the cross is unattractive he writes the cross tells us some very unpalatable truths about ourselves namely that we are sinners under the righteous curse of God's law and we cannot save ourselves Christ bore our sin and curse precisely because we could gain release from them in no other way no other way if it were possible for human beings if it were possible for sinners to be reconciled to

God some other way than God was most cruel to have Jesus to die that death that would be an unnecessary death but it wasn't necessary death and not just that he would die but that he would die the death of a criminal that he would die that death it was not enough for Jesus just to die if that were the case then God could have done it some humane way like they talk about in executions instead of hanging why don't you just euthanize them some other way but no he needed to die the death of a criminal because he was taking the place of sinners he was taking the place of those who deserve to die and what we see on the cross is a message about us the seriousness of our sin the extent of our sin and the punishment for our sin and the only way for that sin to be addressed by [22 : 45] God was that he would substitute his own son who knew no sin that he might forgive us that he might treat us the way his son deserved to be treated so he didn't treat us the way we in our sin deserve to be treated the message of the cross is unattractive and it results in persecution for those who identify with those who preach it sinners don't flock into buildings to hear it because they don't want to hear it they don't like to hear it and the truth is unless God breaks into our lives we will not hear it left to ourselves we would hate it and we would resist it it is only through the mercy of God that we are able to hear the message of the cross and believe the message of the cross about ourselves and about

Jesus Christ and be reconciled to God John Stott goes on he writes nothing in history nor 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 the cross helps us to see ourselves as we really are it takes us to a place called Calvary and God by his grace helps us to see that Christ's cross is indeed our cross he took our place he bore our sins he died our death and again unless God has mercy on us unless God grants the gifts of repentance and faith we remain hostile to the gospel we remain hostile to those who preach it and see this is why the message of the cross will not get you an invitation on Oprah will not get you an invitation on Dr.

Phil but a message on how to have your best life now you'll get an invitation on Oprah or Dr. Phil a message on how to maximize your purpose and your potential will find you get you an invitation in those places it is palatable but it is unattractive and it is considered barbaric and old fashioned and

fundamentalist and narrow minded and Bible thumping to believe this message about an innocent savior who went to the cross to bear sins that were not his own because sinners were so lost and so helpless and could do nothing for themselves and their only hope of salvation is through that crucified one it's a message that is rejected as not being inclusive enough it's not attractive it doesn't appeal to our human flesh it doesn't make us feel good about ourselves it was I remember reading Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones famous preacher from the United Kingdom he's dead now and he recalls this time when he had preached a sermon and he was standing at the door and greeting those who had come to the service and this lady came to him and said doctor you made me feel this small in that sermon and he said to a man that's not small enough because he understood we are nothing we are nothing when we stand before the cross of Christ if we stand before the cross of Christ and we can walk away and beat our chest and feel proud we've not seen the cross of Christ we don't understand Calvary but we can walk away and we can boast about how good we are!

[27 : 33] It's important for us to recognize that the apostle Paul is addressing this church as I read these words in verse 17 when he says from now on let no one cause me trouble for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus it strikes me that Paul is not wary of them but it strikes me this is a man who's had great experience a man who's been through a whole lot for the Lord Jesus Christ and truth be told the false teachers who were troubling this church in legalism and in pharisaism were nowhere near where the apostle Paul was when he was on that road this is one thing to talk with someone about something that you have really no experience about you have some ideas about it but you don't have experience about it it is a completely other thing to talk to them about what you absolutely know and that was the apostle

Paul's situation here so he was speaking from both worlds he was talking as one who had done what these legalists who were troubling the church and the churches in Galatia were doing he had been there Paul gives us his testimony in Philippians chapter three he tells us how he was a zealous Pharisee and how he had every reason to boast if anyone had reason to boast and then he says but I came to the place where it all became rubbish to me I came to the place where I counted it all lost for one reason that I may gain Christ that I may gain!

he said when I got a vision of Christ when I saw the Savior that fell away it was nothing to me I would not boast in that anymore it's rubbish to me and he's addressing this church as one who understands that way will never lead you to God if it could have led anyone to God it would have led!

me to God and Paul is speaking to them from his heart from his own experience notice in verse 14 that Paul talks about a double crucifixion he's not only talking about the crucifixion of Christ but he helps us to see the implication of the cross of Christ and the work that Christ did there he says but far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and again cross is the finished work of Christ the work that he did there!

what he accomplished there by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world through the cross of Christ Paul says the world has been crucified to me and I to the world what Paul is saying is that what Christ accomplished on the cross through his death resulted in separating him from the world the world crucified to him and he to the world and it is only through understanding the message of the cross that we can live out the reality of the world has been crucified to me and I to the world Paul is essentially saying that the world is unattractive to me the world is dead to me there's a separation between me and the world it is crucified to me

[31 : 42] I am crucified to it that is the result of the cross and I want us to consider this morning our own relationship to the world and when I talk about the world I'm not talking about the world of flowers and trees and birds and bees!

Not that world talking about the world that is as the Bible defines it lost humanity organized in its rebellion against God all of its values all the things that it esteems and loves Paul says that's all been crucified to me and I'm crucified to that as well and I ask you this morning what is your relationship with the world if we live in it we work in it we relate to it but it doesn't have a tug on our hearts are there things about it that are attractive are we living our lives to seek to impress the world are we overly concerned about what the world thinks about us and what we do and how we live and the values we hold the world!

is crucified to me and I'm crucified to the world that doesn't mean that temptations don't come it didn't mean that Paul wasn't going to be tempted no those temptations comes but as it relates to

the values of the world and what the world esteems and doesn't esteem Paul says it's crucified to me and I to the world in verse 15 Paul gives us the measuring rod of true religion here's the measuring rod of true religion you want to recognize whether a religion is true or not look at verse 15 for neither circumcision counts for anything neither uncircumcision but a new creation Paul said this is what matters this is what matters that your religion can bring about the new creation not just religious works not just conforming you to do some religious duties and to have an outward show an appearance of knowing

God when you don't truly know God from deep within your heart he says it's a new creation Paul writes in 2nd Corinthians 5:17 if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation not a remodeled sinner who is now doing some things he no!

longer did stop doing God it's not that it is an absolutely new creation Paul says this is what it comes down to this is what it comes down to from these two particular views of those who are trying to make themselves righteous through what they do and those who are trusting Christ in his grace alone and what it can do he says does it produce the new creation can it do that a few months ago I was in conversation with a young man who has gotten tangled up in a bizarre false religion as I talked with him it literally became so frustrating because you could not find common ground to talk about you just couldn't find it because he didn't believe the

[35 : 34] Bible was true and had all kinds of other strange ideas and I remembered just listening to him as he rambled and rambled and rambled and knowing him a little bit I just said to him I said let me ask you this can what you believe transform your life the transformation that I know you desire and the transformation that you need can that change your life I said to him I said when you sit in that place and you hear that stuff you ask yourself how is this changing my life how is this affecting my life other than filling my head with a bunch of things that I can go and spout on people what difference is it making in your life you know what is wrong you know what is right how is helping you do what is right this is what

Paul brings it down to and see Paul knew that what the false teachers were promoting in the churches of Galatia could not bring about the new creation it cannot bring it about the new creation creation is out of this world it is God coming into this world and giving the new birth causing a person to be born again it doesn't come from human activity and Paul says this is what matters the new creation and see this is one of the things we can do notice Paul calls it a rule he says he goes on in verse 16 he says and for all who walk by this rule peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God it's a rule and so for me when I think about groups who may differ from us theologically on certain things I always ask myself this question do they have what it takes in terms of the gospel they preach to bring about this new creation to bring about the new birth to transfer a person from death to life from darkness to light can it do that and if it can't do that it's not a true religion and if it can't do that those people are not my brothers and not my sisters if the Gospels in particular, you would see that the Jews prided themselves.

So we are Abraham's seed. We are the people of God. And they believed they could do no wrong. Once they were attached to Abraham, they had it made. And Jesus would challenge them. Jesus would say to the Pharisees, he would say to them, the tax collectors and the prostitutes, they're going into the kingdom ahead of you. You're going to be shut out from the kingdom.

Jesus said to them, you are not Abraham's children. You are your father, the devil. So, and Paul is addressing that right in this statement, because in the Galatian church, there were those who identified with Moses.

There were those who identified with the law. They felt that they were the Israel of God. Paul says it this way. He says, those who live by this rule, this rule of the new creation that only comes through the cross of Jesus Christ and embracing the message of the cross, those who live by this rule, they are the Israel of God.

[39 : 35] And that Israel of God is made up of natural Jews and Gentiles. The whole idea of a special place for natural Jews today, scripture refutes it.

There's only one Israel now. It is the Israel of God, and it is not an ethnic Israel. It is not based on ethnicity. It is based on connection to Jesus Christ.

Connection to God, being adopted by God through Jesus Christ. And Paul says, all who live by this rule, this rule of the new creation that only comes through the cross of Jesus Christ, all who live by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.

in essence, and they are the Israel of God. Jew and Gentile who have come to know Jesus Christ and receive pardon from God because of him.

Verse 17, Paul distinguishes himself from the Judaizers when he again says, let no one cause me trouble.

[40 : 54] I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. And again, Paul is alluding to for the Pharisees, the mark that they wanted to see was circumcision.

That was the mark they wanted to see because for them, it evidenced that you were keeping the law. It evidenced that you were being a good student of Moses.

No doubt, Paul was circumcised as a Jew. No doubt he was. But Paul says, there's a different mark that I have.

He said, I bear in my body the marks of Christ. And no doubt he could have been talking about his many persecutions that he suffered, physical violence to himself.

And no doubt those marks would have been visible on him. But this word for marks is also the word for branding a slave. It was the word they used to brand a slave to show who that slave belonged to.

[41 : 55] And Paul was saying that he was marked as belonging to Jesus Christ, belonging to the one who can bring about the new creation. Identifying with Christ, not identifying with Moses, not identifying with the legalism of the false teachers.

He said, I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. And truthfully, on two levels, the false teachers couldn't say that.

They avoided the preaching of the cross and they weren't persecuted. They had no hardship like the Apostle Paul did. And certainly because they were trusting in their works, trusting in what they did and didn't do, they did not bear the mark of Christ in the sense of belonging to him through the new creation.

For Paul, the most important mark was not that which pointed to Judaism, but that which pointed to Christ. You recall how throughout this letter Paul expresses concern for the Galatians.

he says to them at one point, I believe I've run in vain. He was questioning whether they were truly converted based on their attempts to go back to the law and to try to keep the law to be justified by God and Paul says, I wonder if I've run in vain.

[43 : 33] And so throughout this letter he is tentative. There are times when he sounds more hopeful than others. but the general tone is one of doubt. But we see as the letter concludes in verse 18, Paul ends it on a very positive note.

He ends it by referring to them as brothers. And he commends the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with them.

And we don't know. We don't know whether they widely heard the correction that Paul gave them in this letter. We don't know how this letter was finally received by the church as a whole.

But Paul ends it on this gracious note in verse 18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit brothers.

Amen. And I think it should be instructive for us. I think it should remind us that whenever we are questioning and challenging another person in terms of their standing with Christ if we're going to err we want to err on the side that they're brothers and commend them to God and leave them to God ultimately trusting God to do the work in their hearts that we can't do that our words can't do but only God can do and that's what Paul had to do with this church.

[45 : 17] we have no record of further communication and what actually took place with this church but Paul commends them to the grace of God and he calls them brothers and he holds up this hope for their salvation.

brothers and sisters I believe that as we stand on the threshold of a new year as we go into a year that we don't know what it holds for us let us hold on to the gospel let us hold on to this gospel that can bring a new creation that can bring transformation in our hearts that is not just a bunch of rules that we follow but it is that the Lord has come the Lord has touched us and he has transformed our hearts he has changed our affections and see when that happens in your life you're able to remember that there was a time when there were particular ways of living that were wrong that brought you great pleasure and now with the grace of God they don't and now there are things that would never have brought you pleasure the things of God being in a gathering like this this morning and because of the gospel a new creation has come and so as we go into this new year let us hold

on to the gospel and let us remind ourselves of the gospel because we forget and we who would
this morning profess that we are saved by grace can find ourselves beyond careful when life gets
crazy we are trying to earn our way to
God by what we do and so may God help us to remember the message of the letter to the Galatians
let us let us pray let us Thank you.