

Grace Alone

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[0 : 00] If you were to open your Bibles to Galatians chapter 6 on page 180, that would be great. And if my volume increased during the prayer, that wasn't you, it was me.

The microphone started working during the prayer. Page 180, we come to the last section in the book of Galatians. And I must confess, I always get a bit sentimental when we finish a book in the Bible.

Part of it's nostalgia. I've honestly felt wonderfully fed myself and I've learned a great deal going through Galatians. Part of it's regret. I feel like we've just squeezed the first drop out of the orange. And we should go back and start again, chapter 1, verse 1 next week. We're not going to do that. We're going to go and have a look at the Sermon on the Mount next week. But here we go with the last passage.

And these eight verses are astounding. They bring together all the themes that the Apostle has been laying before us in the book of Galatians. And he says, you stand back, it's about one thing.

[1 : 06] He wants us to grasp one thing. And it's the absolute centrality and the transforming power of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Do you notice when Deb read it, there are two references to the cross. In verse 13, even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law.

They desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. The end of verse 12, they don't want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Verse 14, far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, the main thing, which is the main thing, is the cross of Jesus Christ. At the heart and centre of our faith.

At the heart and centre of our relation with God. The heart and centre of all Bible religion is the cross of Jesus Christ. And I want to find a way to illustrate this from somewhere else in the Bible.

[2 : 12] And so, let me ask you this question. How important do you think the miracles and teaching of Jesus are? Very important. I mean, never in history before or since have such deeds and words been achieved.

But when you look at the Gospels, the Gospel writers tell us that even though they were important, the death of Jesus is far more important. In fact, without the death of Jesus, his words and his miracles are powerless.

If you take Mark's Gospel and just stand back from it, over a third of the Gospel is dedicated to Jesus' death. Take John's Gospel. Over a half of that Gospel is dedicated to Jesus' death.

Do you know, in the last chapter, John leaves this tantalising verse. He says, look, Jesus did a whole bunch of other things. And if you'd written them down, they would have filled all the books in the world.

And a lot of us would want to say, just give us some of them. But he didn't. Because he wanted us to focus on the death of Jesus Christ. What is vitally important, you see, to the Gospel writers, is not so much how you and I live, but what you and I believe about the cross.

[3 : 25] Yes, some people say, it doesn't matter what you believe, what matters is how you live. Let's not get caught up in doctrinal disputes about resurrection and atonement and angels on the head of a pin.

Let's all just live the golden rule and make for peace. But if that's true, we're going to have to go back and we're going to have to correct the Gospels and their emphasis. And if it's true, we're going to have to go back and help Paul, aren't we?

And tell him that he needs to glory in a lot of other things apart from the cross of Christ. You see? The very shape of the Gospel tells us that what matters is not so much what Jesus tells us to do,

but what he has come to do for us.

The world doesn't need another moral teacher. There are plenty of them. And they're all basically saying the same thing. I'm not putting Jesus in this category, but the Buddha says, love one another. The problem is we can't do it.

And what we really need is not someone to come and tell us what to do. We need someone who will come and who will take our hearts and make them into something that they're not. Someone from God who will create us and make us new creations.

[4 : 36] And that is why the true church is always marked, not by circumcision or institutional conformity or anything external. The true church is marked by being a community that is centred on the cross of Jesus Christ.

You can always tell a true Christian church, it will not sit under the slavery to some central authority, to rituals, to rules. It won't sit under the influence of one teacher or one great leader, inspirational though they may be.

It's one that seeks to be under the scriptures and that recognises Christ crucified as its life and hope. And I think that's why Paul finishes the letter with these words.

If you just look at the last verse. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, he says, be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.

And I want to ask two questions. What is this grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in these last verses? And how do we get it to be with our spirits? They're the two questions.

[5 : 44] Firstly then, what is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? Now in these verses, Paul says, there are two sides to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. One is objective, external, outside us.

The other is subjective, experiential, inside us. This is going to be tricky. Haven't we found this again and again and again with the book of Galatians?

We need to think hard together. It's like a marriage. A marriage has an objective side. You sign the document, new family created. There's a subjective side, the quality of the relationship. Now in verse 14, we get both these sides together.

If you look down. Far be it from me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now he says the objective side, by which the world has been crucified to me.

And then the subjective side, I to the world. Let me take the objective side first. I think this is the only place in all the New Testament where we are told that through the cross, the world is crucified to us.

[6 : 58] We usually, we're very familiar with the idea that we are crucified to the world. But the emphasis here is that the world is crucified to me. What does that mean? Verse 15.

Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. What it means is this. That in the death of Jesus Christ, it's not just the death of one man, not just the death of the Son of God, not just the point of our faith, but in the death of Jesus Christ, the world itself is crucified.

See, on the cross, we get a glimpse of this new creation that God has begun. The cross is like the sentence from God on this world.

What that means is that everything external, circumcision, uncircumcision, doesn't really matter. Every religious ritual that you can think of, be it a wonderful Anglican ritual, or a Baptist, or a Presbyterian, or a Catholic, or a Reformed, or an Evangelical, or a contemporary, or a traditional, doesn't really matter.

They're all matters of indifference because the world has been crucified to us. You see, the law belongs to this world.

[8 : 14] Human religion belongs to this world. But in the cross of Jesus Christ, God has begun a new creation. He's begun to make us alive by his Holy Spirit. And this is the first side of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I wonder if you understand this. You see, it means that we have a different relationship with this world. Put it this way. The world, if we move through the cross, the world no longer has a controlling influence in my life and in my thinking.

It's been crucified to us. It's amazing, isn't it? It's like God has taken the world and nailed it to the cross. The world is dying. It is passing away.

And so you and I as Christians, we're no longer slaves to the basic structures of this world. Let me give you an example. I think non-Christians sometimes look at Christians and say, you are just

weird.

And often, we'd have to say we agree with them. But there are sometimes good reasons for us looking weird. See, some Christians look successful, but they don't care whether they are or they aren't.

[9 : 29] Other Christians look like failures, but they don't care whether they are or they aren't. This last week, I heard of a man in the United States who's made a fortune on the internet.

He has come to faith in Jesus Christ and he is now investing literally millions of dollars building a place where ministers can come from around the world to be taught in the essential skill of teaching God's word.

You'd have to look at that guy and say, that's a very weird priority, wouldn't you? I have a friend who's a pastor of a church in London, in England, and there are a number of people in his congregation who've refused promotions with huge salary increases so that they can continue serving the Christian gospel and continuing spending time with their families.

The world has been crucified to them. We live in this world. We use this world. Some of us marry. And raise families. We have money, but we know that there is something far more important than our money. We want our children to do well, but we know that the cross of Jesus Christ is far more important to our children than anything and any success this world can offer.

[10 : 50] The best this world can offer, you see, has been crucified to us. All the principles of living a happy, successful and balanced life, accumulating lots of possessions, and I don't know whether you've been to the seminars or not, keeping your objectives and goals straight, it's all glorying in the flesh.

It's all completely impotent to move me one step closer to the Lord Jesus Christ. That only comes through his grace. Before we saw the cross as beautiful, before we saw Jesus Christ and him crucified and understood it, we're all deeply anxious to be in favour with the world.

And now we know that the best the world has to offer cannot promote our life in Christ. That's the objective side. But there is a subjective side as well, the internal side.

And I think about it like this. When we place our faith in the death of Jesus, it is like moving through a door to the other side of the cross, where we now look back on the world, so that our relationship with the world is forever changed, because we have been crucified.

One of the most important things that the book of Galatians does for us, is it brings together the cross of Christ, and you, yours and my daily experience of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

[12 : 19] There's no separate gospel of the Spirit. It's not as though there's a basic gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the cross, and then there's a subsequent gospel of getting the Spirit somehow. They belong together.

I want to show you this. Just turn back to chapter 4 for a moment, please. Chapter 4, verse 4. When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem us, that is, dying on the cross, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption and sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. It is through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross that we first receive the Spirit.

And it is through the redeeming work of Jesus on the cross that we continue to receive the Spirit. I wonder if you believe that.

[13 : 26] Look back at chapter 3, verse 1. Foolish Galatians. Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus was publicly portrayed as crucified?

Paul says, I preach Jesus Christ as crucified. Verse 2. Let me ask you this. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? How did they receive the Spirit?

It was hearing by faith Christ crucified. Verse 5. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you, and work miracles among you, do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

See, how does God continue to supply the Holy Spirit to us today? It is by the hearing of Christ crucified. The cross of Jesus Christ isn't just one simplistic message.

I used to work with a minister, who finished his sermon the same way, every week. Every week it was the same. And you'd sit in the congregation, and you'd get to the end of the sermon, and you'd start the same words, and everyone's heads would go like this.

[14 : 40] And I think people knew what was coming. But you see, do you think we can ever exhaust the glories of the riches of all the treasure and knowledge and wisdom that are hidden in

Jesus Christ?

Of course we can't. What we really need is to be taught the full extent of the gospel. But you see, this is what the false teachers were doing. If you go back to chapter 6, what they were saying was, the real action is not in the cross of Christ.

It's in your outward religious observance. They said, the way you grow in the spirit, the way you move on in your Christian life, is outward external observance.

It's not hearing Christ crucified. And I think this is a constant danger, particularly for us. We live in one of the most beautiful parts of the world, in a culture that is absolutely obsessed with the externals.

It's almost impossible for us to avoid this temptation, to elevate something which is external and make it essentially important. And the way we do it is we take things that are good in themselves, like circumcision, as these guys did, or Holy Communion, or Baptism, or Anglicanism, or the Lord's, anything like that.

[16:06] And we move it to the centre and we make it the key and important thing. Every church struggles with this. It might be, there are some churches that make the relevant style, the great sound system, the contemporary video, and I was going to say PowerPoint, but I promised never to mention it again.

Maybe for us, a bit closer to home, it's sound, orthodox preaching and correct liturgy. None of these things are wrong in themselves. The problem is, if we take any of them and we elevate those things and look at them apart from the cross of Christ, and when we do that, we empty the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, I don't know how to say this any clearer. In the cross, we commit cultural, social, personal suicide to this world.

It is a graphic and perfect way to describe our relation to this world and that's what the grace of our Lord Jesus is all about. Well, secondly, and let me ask just briefly, Paul wants this grace to come into our spirits, into our hearts.

How does that happen? And I think the simple answer is, everything depends on what we boast in, what we glory in.

[17:34] In verse 13, the false teachers glory in the flesh. In verse 14, Paul glories in the cross of Jesus Christ. What I glory in is my true joy.

It's what I trust in. It's what I base my life on. The centre of my personality. My field of dreams. The thing I think about as I go to sleep at night. The thing in my life which I need and if I don't have it, I just can't go on.

That's your glory. And if we boast in the cross of Jesus Christ, Paul says, this world has no power over us. We are free people.

Turn that around. If there is something that has power over you, if there is something apart from Christ that you cannot do without, it means that you are not glorying in the cross but that you are glorying in the flesh.

See, if I'm embittered and I just can't get past it, if I'm controlled by boredom or fear or something else, I may not be glorying in the cross. I didn't do this at the earlier sermon but if you go to chapter 6, verse 1, I want to say that we need each other to help each other glory in the cross.

[18:55] I think some of us are blocked in this because of huge wounds that we bear which stop us boasting in the cross. Look at the beginning of this chapter. Brothers and sisters, verse 1, if anyone is overtaken, captured in any trespass, he's not saying if anyone sins but if someone is overtaken, you who are spiritual restore them in a spirit of gentleness.

Look to yourself lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens. It is a burden to help each other. It's going to take some sort of sacrifice.

It's going to be a huge waste of your very important time. You see. What lies at the heart of this book of Galatians is two diametrically opposed views of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The apostle looks at the cross and he sees in it all his beauty and his glory and his honour and his joy. And the false teachers look at the cross and they're offended by it.

and they don't want to have anything to do with it and they especially don't want to suffer for the cross. But you see, there is only one way to receive the grace of Jesus Christ into our hearts and spirits and it is to go through the offence of the cross.

[20 : 19] The sweetness of the grace of God is on the other side of the cross. Put it to you this way. If you've never been offended by the cross you cannot understand it.

It is until we have come to grips with the offence of the cross that it becomes a transforming power in our lives. People never hear the message of the cross for the first time and just say oh that's just that's fantastic.

Because of what it says about us. It says some very uncomplimentary things about us. It says we're not all good people who can find our way to God. It says we're lost.

It says if you look at the world and what's wrong with the world that the curse of God that lies on the world is our fault and that we are impotent to help ourselves and that nothing short of the death of his son will rescue us.

You ask yourself the question why did Jesus die? You know someone says to you your friend your neighbour comes to you and says look I love you I want to show you how much I love you and runs off into the forest and gets eaten by a wolf does that show his love for you?

[21 : 28] How do you make a speech at that funeral? But if you discover that one of your children was being pinned to the ground by that wolf and your friend rescued your child and gave his own life then it's love you see then it's rescue.

Or if a friend comes and says I'm going to lay down my life and show how much I love you and runs out into the traffic and is flattened that doesn't show love but if your father is in the traffic and your friend pushes him out of the way and is killed in the process then that's rescue then that's love.

It's terribly offensive for us to be told that we're rebels against God and spiritually impotent and that there is only one place of rescue which is in the death of his son.

It's very offensive to be told it doesn't really matter whether you've lived an upright life paid all your taxes been a gentle and kind person in your family or you might have been someone who's lived immorally selfishly and abusively we all stand in absolutely equal need of the forgiveness of Christ on the cross.

We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves there is no health in us. That is why the true Christian church is always centered on the cross and that is why the true Christian church will always suffer because the cross is always an offense.

[22 : 53] I need to finish but I can't do so without skipping over verse 17. I just want to read verse 17 to you. Paul says Henceforth let no man trouble me for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

Paul had physical scars on his body. A number of them were got when he preached the gospel in Galatia.

Remember he was stoned and left for dead in a gutter and I want to tell you this story it's a I don't want to use this manipulatively but this is a great story.

My grandfather was a missionary in Kenya my father was a missionary in Tanganyika as it was then and when my dad went as a missionary some years after he learnt Swahili he went to visit with the Kikuyu tribe up in the Kenyan hills to visit with some people who had come to faith in Jesus Christ through my grandfather's ministry and he arrived in the village and the elders welcomed him with great joy and grabbed him to their breast and said welcome home.

The Africans do this whenever I meet an African from Tanzania they say to me come home when are you coming home to Tanzania? Anyway they also pulled up their sleeves like this and on their arms there were great welts in the shapes of crosses all up and down their arms.

[24 : 23] During the early 50s the Mau Mau uprising which was a local uprising in Kenya all who had converted to Christianity were called on to renounce their faith and these elders had been captured by their friends and they were told to renounce Christianity and as they didn't hot blades were held onto their arms in the shape of the cross to force them to turn from Christ and my father did what every westerner would do he apologised to them and the elders were absolutely dumbfounded they told him not to apologise they were proud of these scars and they said we bear in our bodies the marks of Jesus and I think they did because they gloried in the cross of Jesus Christ and we may never face physical persecution but if Christ is your beauty and if Christ is your boast you will receive scars we have been crucified with Christ we have been made children of the new creation by his spirit

Christ lives in us it is all grace it's grace that has brought us this far and it is grace who will lead us home the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits Amen