

The Cross(1) - Boasting In The Cross

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[0 : 00] Galatians chapter 6 and looking this evening at verses 14 and 15. 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. Especially the words of verse 14. God willing from now till the communion at the end of next month, five intervening Lord's days, I'm going to look in the evening at some verses or passages that deal specifically with the cross of Christ, with the death of Jesus on the cross.

And that will take us to look at the cross in relation to our lives personally in different ways. And to try and prepare for the communion where we remember the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper, where of course the cross is such a central feature of the death that we remember as the death of Jesus on the cross.

So we'll look at some studies like, for example, Philippians chapter 3, where Paul speaks about being enemies of the cross of Christ. So we'll ask the question, what is it to be an enemy of the cross of Christ?

And correspondingly, what is it to be a friend of the cross of Christ or of the Christ of the cross? 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we'll look there at the cross as the wisdom and the power of God.

[1 : 42] How is the cross the wisdom of God, as well as being the power of God towards the salvation of his people? Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 2.

Thirdly, we can look at that passage which deals with Christ himself enduring the cross and the shame of the cross. What was the shame of the cross?

How is it a thing of shame and how did Jesus endure that shame of the cross? And then in Luke chapter 9, we'll finish by Christ's own emphasis there on our taking up the cross, taking up our cross and following him.

What does it mean to take up your cross? How does that relate to the cross of Jesus himself? What is the connection between what he calls taking up our cross and the cross of Jesus himself?

But tonight we're looking at this passage where Paul is boasting in the cross of Jesus or glorying in the cross of Jesus. And he's dealing here, as you can see, very much with his own personal relationship with the Lord.

[2 : 53] He's personalizing it very much where he's saying, Be it far 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.

So the cross of Jesus there is very much taken by Paul into his personal experience, his relationship with Jesus himself and with the death of Jesus on the cross particularly, as he says here that the world has now been crucified to him and he has been crucified to the world.

Now the focus here is on boasting in the cross. He says, Be it far from me to boast, or in the old translation, God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What he means by boasting is really to have your confidence in something. When Paul uses this word, he's dealing with having your confidence in something or trusting in something or rejoicing in something.

All of these shades of meaning come into the word that Paul is using and it's translated in different ways because of that. Either boasting, having your confidence in it, trusting in it, and what he's saying here is the cross that I'm boasting in.

[4 : 11] It's the cross I have my confidence in. It's the cross I'm trusting in. It's the cross I'm rejoicing in. That's where my boast is. I'm not, as we'll see, in the flesh or anything outwith of that.

Because the great question really that arises from what Paul is saying here, and indeed all the way through Galatians, that's the burden of the epistle to the Galatians, is this great question.

How do I come to be right with God? How do I come personally in my own relationship with God? How do I come to be set right with God?

What is it as the ground of my acceptance with God? Is it something I'm able to do myself? Is it within myself? Is it within my own ability?

Is it in how committed I am to serving the Lord? Is it in how diligent I am in following certain rules and certain aspects of a confession?

[5 : 11] Is that what gives me the ground of confidence? Is that where my acceptance with God is grounded? Is it built upon that? Or is it something outside of myself?

Is it something entirely to do with what someone else has done for me? And of course what he's saying is, it is that, and that someone is Jesus, and Jesus' death on the cross is the ground upon which acceptance with God is based.

You can put other words to it, that Paul uses elsewhere, how we come to be righteous in the eyes of God, and accounted righteous in the eyes of God, and declared by God to be righteous perfectly. How am I that? Is it by my own keeping of the standards of the law of God? Well, we'll see. That's what Paul tried to do. That's what Paul was sure he was doing, until God showed him that that's actually not the ground of your acceptance with God.

It's rather in the cross of Christ, what Jesus has done for us. That's the big question then tonight. How am I set right with God? And you can follow that for yourself, and I can follow it for myself as well, by another question.

[6 : 29] Am I therefore right with God? Am I indeed in God's favor? Have I come to be set right in righteousness before God?

Or am I mistaken about that? Because what Paul is dealing with here is obviously fundamentally important, not just in terms of what we experience, and what our thoughts might be, but on what our relationship with God actually is.

Is it really that he accepts us fully in Christ or otherwise? So let's look at the two things that we want to focus on this evening.

First of all, Paul here sets out a repudiation of boasting in the flesh. By the flesh, we'll see that he means his own ability or his own work, his own ability to please God as he once saw it.

So it's a repudiation, a casting away of, or turning his back upon the idea that he can boast in the flesh, that he can have confidence in that, rather than in the cross of Christ.

[7 : 36] Secondly, we'll look at a celebration of boasting in the cross, because at the same time that he repudiates boasting in the flesh, he actually says that he does boast in the cross of Christ.

God forbid, or be it far from me, to boast, except in the cross of Jesus Christ. So here he is saying he's repudiating boasting in the flesh.

Now he's been going through the epistle, the letter here, in various ways setting out the works of the flesh. The previous chapter has that towards the end of the flesh, as against the work of the Spirit, or the fruit of the Spirit.

And what Paul is actually facing in the problem that the Galatian Christians had, and this is itself significant, this was very much a threat to the gospel, as Paul knew the gospel and knew what the gospel was.

Salvation in Christ offered to sinners like ourselves. That salvation in Christ is based upon the death of Christ. And Paul, in writing to the Galatians, knew that that was under threat.

[8 : 50] And so much so was it under threat, that when you go back to the first chapter, and verse 7, you can see Paul's sense of real annoyance, that the Galatians have actually allowed this teaching to infiltrate their own thoughts and their own fellowship.

And the point there is that the threat to the gospel for the Galatians was not outside of the church, not outside of those who are actually confessing Christ, it was actually inside.

And that's why he says in verse 7, in verse 6 of the first chapter, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ, and are turning to a different gospel. Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

No, you can't get stronger language than that. And it shows you how seriously the apostle took this matter, that he could use such language. Because this idea, as we'll see, that something other than, or something in addition to the death of Christ, was needed for the ground of our acceptance with

God.

[10:13] To Paul, that was an anathema. Because it meant it was destroying the gospel. And the gospel that he had preached said, the death of Jesus is what God has provided to answer for all our sin and all our debt in our sins.

So it's a threat to the gospel. And what they were saying, these opponents of Paul and of those who had set out this teaching, was you need to be circumcised.

As well as trusting or believing in Jesus, you need to be circumcised. Now that, of course, was the Old Testament way of showing that you belong to the covenant people of God.

As God had, all the way back to Abraham, where he had initiated the ceremony of circumcision. It's been replaced in the New Testament by baptism. But that ordinance, that outward ordinance, here were people who were actually saying, this is absolutely essential.

You can't be a Christian without that. You can't be accepted by God without this circumcision as well as what you believe. Well, here is Paul saying, circumcision counts for nothing, not uncircumcision, but a new creation.

[11:25] You see, Paul is saying, it's not something either done to you outwardly or something that you yourself are able to do that gives you the ground on which you are accepted with God.

God has done that in the death of Jesus. And nothing is to be taken from it or added to it. That's the ground of our justification, our acceptance with God, our being righteous in the presence of God.

And the motive, of course, he's saying also in verse 13 there, 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.

That they may say about themselves, well, we've actually won that argument and we actually now are successful in what we're saying in regard to what it means to be right with God.

That's what they're aiming at. He says, don't listen to them, don't accept that because they're just using you as a ground to promote themselves. That too, of course, was a serious issue for the apostle.

[12:33] So how are we set right with God? Well, it's not anything other than in the cross or by the cross, far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nothing is added to it or taken from it. If you go to Paul's testimony, if you like to call it that, in Philippians chapter 3, you just flick over a few pages and you come to his letter to the Philippians and chapter 3.

Again, he uses very strong language there to pretty much set out the same thing. He's facing a very similar set of opponents when he wrote to the Philippians as well.

And look at what he's saying right near the beginning of the chapter there. Verse 3, he says, For we, that's we who believe in Christ and accept the death of Christ as our ground of acceptance with God, we are the real circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God or in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus.

Now that word glory, it's the same as he's using in Galatians, boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Why is he using the word flesh?

[13:50] What does he mean by that? Going back to Galatians. Well, then he gives us, if you like, an exposition or an opening up for our understanding of what he means by the flesh. So it's not that we are to boast in the flesh because this is the flesh, he says.

Although I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I more, circumcised on the eighth day, the people of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But whatever gain I had, that's by those things, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own.

See, all the way through there, Paul is saying, this is how I used to think. This is how I used to live my life. I thought that the works of the flesh, the works of my own ability, my own keeping of the law of God, my own being true to what God had set out in his law for me as the moral basis of my acceptance with God.

[15 : 19] That's how I once thought I was made acceptable with God and I had worked that acceptance up for myself. And there are many Christians, people in the world today would say, this is why I am a Christian, because I do such and such or because I don't do such and such.

You would find that quite commonly to be the view of people in the world and people even in the church in the wider sense who would say, are you a Christian?

Yes, I am a Christian because I do such and such. Whereas Paul is saying, I am a Christian on the basis of what Christ has done for me. My acceptance with God is not by the works of the law, by the works of the flesh.

It's not in my being circumcised. It's not for you or for me. It's not in our being baptized. It's not in our appearance. It's not in the clothes we wear.

It's not in the upbringing. It's not in the family we belong to. It's not the church we belong to. It's nothing in terms of any tradition in itself that gives us that acceptance with God because they are all additions to the cross.

[16 : 26] And what he's saying is, God forbid that I should boast except in the cross. He's ruling out everything else and particularly his own ability, his own doings, the works of the flesh.

And he's narrowing it down and confining it to this, to the cross of Christ. That's why he's saying at the beginning of chapter 5, For freedom Christ has set us free.

Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. A person who tells you, you can't possibly be a Christian if you dress that way.

You can't possibly be a Christian if you do certain things that traditionally are not associated with Christianity. I'm not saying by this at all that there isn't a very high standard of Christian behavior or even of Christian appearance as far as modesty and things like that go.

But they are not the ground of our acceptance with God and never can be. Only the cross is that.

We have to guard that jealously. Because for one thing, as we'll see, that's what Paul is confining it to absolutely.

[17 : 47] God forbid that I should boast except in the cross. So tonight, what, in terms of your own life, what are you basing your acceptance with God on?

Where is your acceptance in your own thinking? Where is your acceptance of God situated or grounded? On what foundation does it rest or does it stand? Is it that you go to church?

Is it that you pray certain times in the week? Is it that you read the Bible? Is it that you actually know other Christians and delight to be with them? Is it any of these things or other things that you are able to do yourself?

Well, I hope not of myself and of yourself. I trust not. Because what this is saying to us, what God is saying to us through this passage is, my acceptance with God is based on the cross exclusively. What Christ has done for me. See, the logic of it is this. If my acceptance with God and your acceptance with God were in any way to be of the works of the flesh or based on my own ability or something that I'm able to do in a life of good works or whatever you call it, why would Jesus have to die?

[19 : 12] Why would the Son of God come into this world specifically to give His life and to die that death of the cross if in any way at all I can be accepted with God by something I do myself?

It would be unjust of God to give His Son to the death of the cross unless it is because of this.

Because I have nothing whatsoever that I can do, that I can think, that will give me acceptance with God.

It's all in what He has done and what He has done in His death particularly is what I boast in, what I have confidence in, the only ground of my acceptance with God.

That's why Paul is using such strong language, be it far from me, far from it, far be it from me to boast. The older translation as I mentioned perhaps brings it out even more strongly, God forbid that I should boast.

Let this never actually be the case with me. That's a very strong assertion and point, language used to make the point by the apostle. And this is why he's using such strong language.

[20 : 35] Not only is the gospel under threat by this kind of teaching coming to infiltrate the church, but for his own personal salvation and for all our salvation personally of all of us.

Unless it's the cross that proves to be the ground of our salvation, then there is no other ground of acceptance with God at all. But that tonight surely is your confidence, your place of boasting or of confidence, your rejoicing, your trust, your security, is in all that Jesus has done.

The death that he died as God's provision against our sin and our lostness. So that's the repudiation of boasting in the flesh. But secondly, a celebration of boasting in the cross. God forbid, or let it not be, that I should boast except in the cross. And you see, when he's saying this, we mustn't think that he's not actually boasting in the cross.

He is. He really is boasting in the cross. He's rejoicing in this cross. He's finding in this cross his absolute security and his trust and his trust and his confidence is wholly in this cross and what Jesus has done in his death.

[21 : 57] He's celebrating the exclusiveness of the cross, if you like. No, that's not popular for us to think in those terms today of anything that's exclusive because we live in a world that wants to be inclusive.

And sadly, there are many species of theology as well that wants to be as inclusive as possible. I'll mention that in a minute. But what Paul is saying is the cross exclusively to the exclusion of all else, all others, and all other works is my ground of acceptance with God.

God forbid that it should be otherwise, that I should think otherwise. It's such an important, foundationally important thing because the cross has met all of God's demands.

It has paid the price of our sin. Jesus has done that in his death. He has himself endured the wrath of God. He's taken our place.

All of these things the cross has achieved. And that's why it has to be the cross alone in which we boast. But then he mentions a separation.

[23 : 10] He says, God forbid, be it far 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.

Now, he's got that separation in mind there. He's quite specific about it. By the cross, by the death of Jesus on the cross, it's come about, now he says, in my own experience, in my relation to this Jesus and to this cross, that the world has been crucified to me.

As far as I'm concerned, he's saying, the world has been crucified by the world. Paul actually means what's opposite to the new creation.

We often think of the world as that which is opposed to God and that's essentially what the Bible means often by the world. It's not the geographical thing but it's that spiritual, that moral thing that stands in opposition to God until God comes and changes our lives so it becomes a new creation. And what he's saying here is the world, that view and that world, that outlook, that approach to things that is the world, that's been crucified to me.

[24 : 24] I have put that away, I have put it to death. I'm done with it. That's the flesh. That's how I once used to think.

And I have no confidence in that anymore. As in Philippians 3, we are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

The flesh, you could say, in many respects, is the world, the world's view of how we come to live acceptable lives or be acceptable with God. No, he says, I've put that away.

I have crucified it. It's crucified to me. Now, in other words, Paul and the world, Paul and the flesh, have parted company.

But they've not parted company as the best of friends because Paul knows that the world is actually not his friend, it's his enemy. You go back to what he says here in chapter 5, verse 24, those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

[25 : 35] You go back earlier in the chapter where he says the works of the flesh are evident, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

What a list that is. And yet it's not complete. But that's the flesh. That's the spirit of the world. That's what's been, now he says, crucified to me.

I've turned away from that. I've put it behind me. I've had a separation between myself and the world. But there's a corresponding reaction on the part of the world because Paul speaks here in chapter 5 about a warfare.

In verse 17, the desires of the flesh are against the spirit or war against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh for these are opposed to each other or against each other.

See, when you come to be renewed in Jesus Christ, when you come to be a new creation, this is exactly what happens. The world comes to be crucified to you and the world as it looks in at you or upon you sees you as crucified to it, separated from it.

[27 : 09] The world is turning its back on you as you turn your back on the world. what is opposed to God, what's at enmity with God for the Christian, that's something that's crucified.

The flesh, the world, the devil. And as far as the world is concerned, the Christian is put at a distance as well. The person who is in Christ, the person who is true to Christ.

And there's a conflict because these things are mutually exclusive. The corresponding reaction of the world is that the world is, that he is crucified to the world as well.

And in order to really see how up to date this message is, think of how that fits into the thinking of our own society and indeed sadly of aspects of the church today as well.

Because you have not only people who are who stand in opposition to all that is true of Christianity, but sadly you find some who are evangelicals.

[28 : 20] People who confess some of the core doctrines of the faith and yet will actually nowadays say, oh I don't believe that Christ is a substitute on the cross. I don't believe that you should have an idea that God is really essentially angry with anybody and that Jesus as a substitute took the wrath of God to himself.

Some evangelicals will now say that is actually just abuse, that's cruelty. It's equivalent to personal or child abuse.

That's the kind of language that's used. That's something that's infiltrated the church in the wider sense, the church in our day, the church in our context, the world in which we live, the generation we belong to.

And in addition to that, of course, you have more recently as well the addition of LBGT issues and people will say you have to be inclusive.

As a Christian and as a church, you have to be inclusive and accept such things as LBGT Christianity, LBG Christians. Well, I hope nobody misunderstands this because for one thing as a church, we are inclusive in terms of loving people in order to see that they are welcomed in the church but with a view to being the kind of people God would have them to be.

[29 : 55] don't think that we are actually against people themselves. We have to be welcoming to every kind of person and trust that they will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever lifestyle they are actually living in that is against the will of God and the word of God, our intention is to actually lovingly present the gospel to them in such a way that we will actually be blessed by God so that they will come to find and know the truth for themselves because this is not the truth and not in accordance with the truth.

I know that's unpopular. I know that brings a lot of opposition to people who stand up and say this sort of thing and especially say it publicly but it has to be said. That's why Paul is saying God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world. see he's saying here that these people who in his day were deciding them to be crucified in Galatian church so that they may boast in your flesh.

And as you go back over what he's been saying previously you can actually see that what he calls the offense of the gospel is something that will have ceased if I become inclusive he says to that extent.

[31 : 22] Then the offense of the gospel will actually cease. Why he says do I still suffer persecution if in fact I'm not true to God and not true to what he's actually saying in terms of the gospel itself.

So what he's saying really essentially is this. To be inclusive is really and this is really the problem we're facing today I think very much. We don't want or the people who advocate this set of inclusiveness they don't want people to be offended by the gospel.

Offended by some of the teachings of the gospel. Offended by the fact that God says you have to be born again if you're going to be saved. Offended by the fact that God is saying you have to live in a way that's true to my standard true to my will true to my word where my will is set out.

You cannot have the gospel and the gospel message without the element of offensiveness because to me as an individual in my sinful state God coming to me and saying unless you change you're not going to be saved.

you'll go to a lost eternity. I will say back to God in my natural state if I'm still unsaved if I haven't had my eyes opened I find that offensive.

[32 : 53] Of course you find it offensive. It's meant to be offensive. It's meant to get to your conscience. Otherwise what's the point of the gospel?

gospel. When Christ crucified is so different to what we ourselves would want in our own natural way of thinking.

That's why one of our studies will be in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 because not only is the cross the power of God at work in tackling sin and providing salvation, it is the wisdom of God.

God. And in that passage Paul is dealing with how contrary the thinking and the wisdom of God is to that of the world. That's what he's saying here in Philippians 2.

Yes, we want to be inclusive in a good sense. But what he's saying really is if the cross does not antagonize, we're not preaching the cross properly.

[33 : 57] If we're saying inclusive in the sense of just leave everybody the way they are but include them and love them, well that's not true to God, it's not true to what he's saying.

The cross has its own offensiveness towards human thinking. I cannot come to make the cross something that's desensitized, something that after all isn't offensive.

offensive. You might even say what is as offensive as the Son of God giving himself to the death of the cross, to the wrath of God for sinners.

Of course that's offensive. There's nothing nice about the cross, but it's all to do with our redemption, God's with God's wisdom, with the ground of our acceptance with God.

And it destroys the idea that sadly is promoted even in the church today, that you and I are essentially good, that at heart in our souls we're essentially good, we just need a bit of tidying up, a bit of reformation, just a little bit here and there to help us be better people.

[35 : 36] And the gospel is an example in the example of Christ. Paul is saying, God forbid that I should boast in that sort of thing, saving the cross in all its offensiveness, and all the wisdom of God in it, because this is Paul's great concern that you and I be saved, that the Galatians be saved, that you and I be saved is God's great concern as we come to read his word and deal with these issues, difficult as some of them are to deal with.

It's not a case of winning arguments, friends, it's a case of winning souls, that's what God is about. It's not one set of arguments against another, one set of arguments coming out on top, that's not what we're in, although that's part of how we reason the gospel, it's winning souls, it's boasting in Christ Jesus and in his gospel, it's regarding the gospel of Christ and it's regarding the cross of Christ as the ground on which we are accepted.

One of the founding fathers of the free church, Thomas Guthrie, in one of his writings, says as follows, Once a Golgotha, the place of a skull, Calvary has ceased to be a place of skulls.

Where men once went to die, they now go to live. And to none that ever went there to seek pardon and peace and holiness, did God ever say, you are seeking me in vain.

Why? Because that is where Jesus died. And in the death of Jesus, God was laying out the foundation of our acceptance with him.

[37 : 33] God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross, of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.

Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, help us, we pray, to understand your word as you set it before us.

Forgive us, we pray, for our inability in handling it and dealing with it. We pray for your spirit, Lord, to enlighten our hearts, to open up our minds, to teach us, for you are the great teacher.

We pray that you would bless your word to us, that we may indeed have our lives set upon that proper ground of acceptance in the death of Jesus, the Savior.

We thank you for that death. We thank you for all that it is to your people. We thank you for its exclusiveness, and for the way that you require nothing in addition to it, as the ground upon which we come to have your favor.

[38 : 41] Bless to us, we pray your word again. Grant that you bless us now throughout this week we've entered upon in all our ways help us to acknowledge you, and do thou direct our paths in it.

We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. We'll sing now in conclusion in Psalm 89, that's in Scottish Psalter, Psalm 89, page 345.

And the tune this time is Newington, we're singing verses 15 to 18, page 345, at verse 15, O greatly blessed the people are, the joyful sound that know in brightness of thy face, O Lord, they ever on shall go.

To the end of verse 18, to God's praise. Amen. Amen. O greatly blessed the people are a joyful sound that know and brightness of thy face O Lord they ever shall go say in thy name shall all the

day rejoice exceedingly and in thy righteousness shall they exalted be on high because the glory of their strength doth only stand in thee and in thy favor shall our Lord and power exalted be for God is our defense and he to us doth safety bring the holy one of Israel is our almighty king I'll go to the side door to my left this evening now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more amen to him