

## The Epistle to the Galatians: The Gospel of Grace

### Lesson 21: Glorifying in the Cross (6:14-18)

**“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.”**

In both the last lesson and (as you’ll soon conclude) in this one, we’ve used the terms “boast” and “glory” interchangeably. It’s a difficult Greek word to translate into English, because we don’t have an English word that carries the same intensity as *kauchasthai*. When we read the word ‘boast’, we likely think of being proud of something, and bragging about it. But that’s not a good definition of *kauchasthai*, and so sometimes we’ve used the term ‘glorifying’ to help our understanding. It’s beyond bragging, it’s boasting in something to draw maximum exposure and praise towards it. John Stott has a wordy definition that is helpful, he writes, *“It means to boast in, glory in, trust in, rejoice in, revel in, live for. The object of our boast or ‘glory’ fills our horizons, engrosses our attention, and absorbs our time and energy. In a word, our ‘glory’ is our obsession.”*<sup>1</sup>

When was the last time that you saw anyone obsessed over anything, and thought of it as a good thing? Even when we see people who are obsessed with eating right and exercise, we think to ourselves, *“They realize that there’s more to life than that! Don’t they?”* There’s a time and place for everything in moderation. But to be obsessed with the cross! Have you ever considered that thought? Does it define your life? How do you feel about that? What do you think others would think of you for that obsession?

I just asked you four questions. The first three you had to answer in your mind, but I can help you answer that last one: The world will think you’ve lost your mind. The world around you didn’t understand why you started going to church *at all*, so I guarantee you that they’ll think your marbles came loose if they see this Jesus become an obsession for you. Some of your more ‘inclusive’ friends and family may have allowed your newfound (and unnecessary) faith into your life, because they’d said that any moral and ethical influence is a good influence. But they’re likely going to raise an eyebrow if your focus never comes off the cross of Jesus Christ.

It’s just a strange thing for someone to be obsessed about, according to the world. The world around us glories in its flesh. People are obsessed about obtaining and maintaining popularity with their peers. People are obsessed about their physical appearance. People are obsessed about making more money. Whether the world admits it or not, whether the world is aware of it or not, that’s what they’re about. People glory in their intelligence, and their power, and their prestige, and their career, and their beautiful home, and their luxury car. No one abandons all of that, and glories in a Jew who died a criminals death, halfway around the world, two-thousand years ago, according to an old book.

If you think people today see ‘cross-obsessed’ people as unstable, they didn’t think much differently in Paul’s day. Even then, to glory in the cross of Christ was the equivalent to glorying in eating a bowlful of live spiders for dinner. You cringed at that thought, didn’t you? That’s how people thought of the cross

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* IVP p.349

in Paul's day. We wear crosses around our necks, or put them on our walls, or our bumpers. They thought of the cross as the dirtiest, nastiest, ugliest, most humiliating and terrible thing imaginable. The Romans considered the cross to be a degrading, disgusting, despicable, detestable, and disgraceful thing. But this is what Paul gloried in. This is what Paul boasted in. This is what Paul was obsessed with. More than that, this is what the early church was obsessed with too, and it made the world cringe.

There are words in our language that are foul. There are words in our language that no Christian ought to speak in any context. The Romans had a word that they never spoke in public, it was the word *crux*. The very thought of crucifixion was so terrible that it wasn't spoken of. It was the way that the worst of the worst came to an end. It was the most awful way to see anyone die. And yet here they saw people from their own society not only speaking about the cross, but glorying in the cross as the center of their newfound faith, and how absolutely necessary the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was.

Paul has spoken directly about the cross throughout this letter already. Earlier in 2:20 he wrote, **"I have been crucified with Christ."** Then two verses later he wrote in 3:1, **"It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified."** Later in 5:11 he spoke of **"the offense of the cross"**. In his opening chapter to the Corinthian church, he wrote about the message of the cross in verses 17-18. A few verses later in that chapter he wrote, **"But we preach Christ crucified."** (1 Cor. 1:23) In the next chapter he wrote in 2:2, **"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."** We could spend pages flipping through the New Testament, and reading passage after passage where Paul specifically mentions the cross. He was always glorying in the cross.

As we just read a moment ago in 1 Corinthians 1:18, the word of the cross (the Gospel of Jesus Christ) is foolishness to the world around us, but to us, it is the power of God. The predetermined plan of God to come to earth, live a perfectly righteous life, and die a substitutionary sacrificial death for His chosen children is the greatest news in the whole world to Christians! Without the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, there is no hope! So we glory in the cross of Christ. We don't deserve to be called children of God, we *get* to be called children of God because of the mercy and grace of God shown to us specifically.

Many years ago (I can't remember where or when), I read or heard that there are only two religions in the world, after you boil them all down. There's the religion of "I", and the religion of "T". Every religion in the world falls under the category of "I". What I do, what I don't do. What I did do, what I didn't do. What I will do, what I won't do. The only stand-alone religion is biblical Christianity which falls under the category of "T", signifying the cross. It's the only religion in the history of Earth that points to the glory of God at every stage of the justification/sanctification/glorification process, all centered around the work of Christ on the cross.

And so the Galatians stood at a cross-roads in their life. (see what I did there...cross...roads) They had to choose between following the Judaizers who wanted to glory in the flesh, or they had to choose to glory in the cross. You can't blend the two, you can only pick one or the other. John Stott comments again, *"The truth is that we cannot boast in ourselves and in the cross simultaneously. If we boast in ourselves and in our ability to save ourselves, we shall never boast in the cross and in the ability of Christ crucified to save us. We have to choose. Only if we have humbled ourselves as hell-deserving sinners shall we*

*give up boasting of ourselves, fly to the cross for salvation and spend the rest of our days glorying in the cross.”<sup>2</sup>*

Paul had made his decision, and we see how strong his decision was in verse 14, **“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** The words “far be it from me” is a strong negative in the Greek. It could be translated something like, “It’s impossible that I could ever, ever boast in anything else! Perish the thought that I would ever boast in anything other than Christ!” Paul’s glory was in the cross alone, and our decision ought to be also. Even John wrote in 1 John 4:10, **“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”** If you’re unfamiliar with the word “propitiation”, then you’ve not understood how good the ‘Good news’ of the gospel really is. Christ propitiated the justified wrath of God against us. Our sin incurred a debt against God that we could never repay. The penalty of our sin was death. (Romans 6:23) But that penalty was paid in full. The anger of God was propitiated, meaning that His white-hot anger was not only extinguished, but Christ has ushered in a new relationship with God as our Heavenly Father. Beyond bringing our debt balance to zero, Christ has made us spiritual zillionaire’s by attaching us to God! Considering even 1 John 4:10 alone, the message of cross is the greatest news anyone could ever hear! What else could anyone ever boast in?!

So Paul boasts in the crucifixion of Christ alone, and then he finishes verse 14 with these words, **“by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”** Paul is about to give us three reasons why he boasts in the cross of Christ alone. These three reasons will bring us to the close of this lesson, and this study through Galatians. The three reasons are: The cross brings freedom from bondage to the world, the cross gives power to do what the flesh cannot do, the cross has the power to save anyone.

Reason #1: The cross brings freedom from bondage to the world. Saving faith placed in the cross of Christ alone creates a freedom from the things that keep the world in bondage. The world around us is in bondage to its own image. People define themselves by their accomplishments in the past (or lack of accomplishments), or their failures. People are in bondage to ‘tomorrow’. They’re always chasing the carrot for the satisfaction that tomorrow will bring, but it never brings. People are in bondage to ‘today’, as they realize that tomorrow may not come, and death brings about ‘nothingness’, so they live it up today. Regardless of the philosophy, people without Christ are tied-up, they’re in bondage and without hope.

The cross frees us from living our lives according to the same hopelessness as our neighbors. We don’t have to chase the carrot anymore, because we know that the carrot is a lie, and true satisfaction is found in Christ alone. The hope of the Christian is not in this life anymore. When I was first saved, one song that I love to sing had a very simple message, *“You can have all this world, Just give me Jesus.”* It’s not that sunrises, and mountains, and family and friends, and my smoker meant nothing to me anymore, it’s that they aren’t the avenues that I take to find fulfilment and meaning anymore. I’d trade the whole deal in to have Christ in my life. As John Piper says, *“God has given you a mind so that you can know Him as He really is. And he has given you a heart so that you can treasure Him above all things. God gave us minds so that we would know ultimate truth. And God gave us hearts so that we would treasure ultimate value. There is no truth higher than God. There is no value greater than God. And God gave us bodies that we might act in accord with his truth and value. We were created to make*

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<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* IVP, p.180

*God look magnificent as the sum of all truth, and to make him look magnificent as the most valuable treasure in the universe. God shines brightly through His people when we know him accurately and deeply as He is revealed in His word. And God shines even more brightly when we treasure Him more than health, more than wealth, and even more than life itself.”<sup>3</sup>*

So Paul begins verse 14 by boasting in the cross of Christ alone, then he ends verse 14 this way, **“by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”** When Paul uses the term ‘world’ twice in this verse, he’s speaking of the realm that is in bondage to the Satanic system of influence. For those who are keeping score, unless you are freed from this bondage by God Himself, you are bound up in this world. The power of the Satanic world is alive, and strong. Though Satan is limited as to what he can and cannot do (consider the account before the throne with Job), we know that **“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”**. (1 John 5:19) So, regardless of whether you consider yourself to religious or not, outside of Christ, you’re in bondage to this world. All Christians, before they came to Christ **“walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”** (Eph. 2:2)

This world was crucified to Paul, and likewise, it is crucified to every believer, but what does that mean? It certainly doesn’t mean that the things of world matter nothing to a Christian anymore. We still obey the laws of the land. We still pay our taxes. So it’s not that we’re severed from the world, we’re still here. The world still has an influence upon us. When persecution comes, it’s still painful. Paul’s not talking about the power of the world over us. Just because we’re crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to us, they can still throw us in jail in certain parts of the world. The world still has power over us temporarily. But the world has lost its dominion over us. They can kill our bodies, but they can’t touch our soul. They can take our life, but they can’t touch our eternal life. As believers in Christ, we have overcome the world, **“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”** (1 John 5:4-5)

God wins. I love that I know the end of the story. As a boy, I always said that I believed in Jesus (although I didn’t know a Bible from a cookbook). And I was always afraid of the devil. I would lie in bed at night and think about how the world would end. I’d imagine a long drawn-out battle between God and Satan, watching as they traded devastating blows. And I would always hope that God was ready for the fight the day it actually came.

The good news from the scriptures is that God has already won! Do you realize that God could erase the entire demonic system with a word?! As Christians, we rest in God, we rest in the finished work of Christ, we rest in the sure victory of God. Because the victory is won, our sin is a dead issue. Not that we continue to sin so that grace may abound, but our sin is paid for. So the bondage is broken. The law is dead to us, not that ignore the law, but the penalty is broken. The world is likewise dead to us, not that we stop living in it, but we stop living for it.

Reason #2: Not only do we have freedom from the world’s bondage, but we have the power to do what the flesh cannot do. Verse 15, **“For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”** I find this verse to be very interesting, as Paul sums up the value of every man-made religion in the world. He lumps those who cling to circumcision, and he lumps the rest of the religions

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *The Gospel-Shaped Heart* [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)

(under the umbrella of uncircumcision), and he says that they don't count for anything. The cross of Christ gives us new life. Our Pastor has just recently preached through John chapter 3, where Jesus tells Nicodemus, **"Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."** We we're all born into this world in bondage, and God has freed us, and given us new life. It is this new life, this new creation that God has made in us, that gives us the freedom to live for God, and walk by the Spirit.

Reason #3: The final reason why Paul boasts in the cross of Christ alone, is because the cross has the power to save absolutely anyone. Verse 16, **"And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."** The cross has the power to save any 'who walk by this rule'. What does that mean? Simply this: You walk in God's world, He doesn't walk in yours. There's a way to be saved, and it's a very specific one. Peace and mercy is upon those who walk by the rule, who enter by the narrow gate. We don't have the liberty of justifying ourselves based upon our own standard of righteousness. God sets the terms, we must take it or leave it.

For those who are born-again in Christ, for those who serve Christ as Lord, for those who place their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, salvation comes! Peace and mercy will be upon them! The believer will now experience peace with God where they previously had war. And they will experience mercy from God where they previously experienced wrath. Lastly, in this verse, Paul mentions the 'Israel of God', which refers to Jewish believers in Christ. And so, whether a person be a Jew, or a Gentile, the cross of Christ is powerful enough to save them, and Paul boasted in that!

Verse 17, **"From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."** This final warning is from Paul to the Judaizers, most likely. While it's possible that he's asking a few trouble-makers in the church to stop causing him trouble, within the context of this letter, he's still talking about the Judaizers. These men had been on a mission to discredit and destroy Paul's image and reputation. They had been on a mission to discredit the validity of the gospel that Paul preached.

Because of Paul's faith in Christ, and his ministry for Christ, he faced much intense persecution, and thus bore on his body the marks of Jesus. Many Christians throughout the centuries have met a similar fate. While the Judaizers could point to the mark left of their body after circumcision to boast in their religion, Paul pointed to the marks left on his body because of his boasting in Christ. He was bruised and beaten, and scarred because of his faith in Christ.

Finally, verse 18, **"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."** Paul signs off this letter in a very familiar way. He reminds them that it's all of God's grace. You need His grace to cause new life in you, you need His grace right now and forevermore. This is a prayer for God's blessing on everyone who will trust in the gospel of grace and be justified by faith alone in Christ alone. May we echo Paul's words and pray the Lord would save all who would gather here this morning, and strengthen our spirits that we might live to make much of Him! Amen!