

Boast about the cross of Christ.

Text: Galatians 6:12-16 for 9/17/2017 by Pastor Bolwerk

¹² Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

What is one thing that you feel you can do better than anyone else? Maybe it is not something that you are the best in the world, but when it comes to family, friends, and acquaintances you feel that you are the best at that one thing. Maybe it's math, or some sport that you like to play. Maybe you feel you are the best at baking, or fixing things, or maybe you think you are the best at telling a funny joke. We all have those things we feel we are the best at, even if it is just being the best among the people that we know. We often let those around us know we are the best by boasting, even if it's just a little.

But why do we do that, why do we boast about something we are good at? We might do it to try and give ourselves some advantage over others. Yet how often do we boast more to convince ourselves that our lives in this world really aren't all that bad? We can be tempted to boast about ourselves and act as if our lives are somehow better than they really are. But if we're honest we would have to admit that every day we face troubles that make our lives difficult and unpleasant. Boasting may make us feel better, but it doesn't actually make our lives better. As the Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians Paul points us to something that we should boast about. With his words, Paul encourages us to boast about this same thing because it is something that does make our lives better. Paul says,

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I. Don't avoid the cross.

II. Let it recreate you.

Now the Christians Paul was writing to in Galatia were being persuaded by others to do things that would make them less of a target for persecution. Some of the Christians in Galatia had been Jewish before they came to faith in Christ, and much of the persecution they faced came from the Jews. That led some of these new Christians to try and 'cover up' their faith by living and acting as if they were Jewish. Following these Jewish customs was not wrong in and of itself, but these so-called 'Christians' were forcing others to also follow these customs.

Paul wrote, **"Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you"** to follow those Jewish customs (v. 12a). These 'Judaizers' as they were called, would tell others that if you wanted to be true believers they not only had to trust in Jesus, but you also had to keep all the Old Testament laws and rules. Their arguments may have sounded good, but Paul points out that **"The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ"** (v. 12b). These Judaizers called themselves Christians, yet they pushed aside Jesus and the cross by saying God's Old Testament laws and regulations must be kept to be saved. These people tried to "fit in" with the world around them so that they would not have to face persecution.

Sadly, many so-called 'Christians' do the same thing today. We hear these people say things like: "If you really want to be a Christian you must be tolerant, and accepting, and not

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judge anyone.” The real reason they are saying these things is because they don’t want to face persecution. They don’t want people to get angry with them or be offended by them for talking about Jesus and his cross.

We can also act like these, so-called, “Christians.” When people tell us they’re letting their children choose for themselves if they want to be baptized, and we don’t mention the blessings of baptism for fear we might be accused of “meddling.” When we find out a friend has moved in with their boyfriend or girlfriend, yet we don’t speak up for God’s Sixth Commandment because we are afraid they will become angry with us. Instead of standing up for what God says is right we silently accept what everyone else says and does so that we won’t be persecuted. We hide the cross of Christ so that we won’t have to feel the pain and discomfort of persecution in our lives.

Yet Paul encourages us to boast about the cross of Christ. But as we look at the cross it doesn’t look like something we want to boast about. It looks painful. Our sinful nature looks at our life of faith in Jesus, a life that is lived under the cross, and it says, “That’s not what I want. I don’t want any pain or suffering. I want the easy life. It might be better to just stay where I am at.” But what does the easy life cost you? It costs you your freedom. We need the cross to point us to freedom.

To avoid the cross is to avoid Jesus. It is easy enough to say, ‘I am a Christian’ but if the cross is something we push out of our lives than what Jesus do we really believe in? Is our Jesus that picture hanging on the wall of a smiling, bearded man in a long robe surrounded by a bunch of perfect looking sheep? Is that the Jesus we believe in, where everything in the picture is always perfect? That might be our picture of Jesus, but that is not the picture of Jesus we find in the Bible.

If our picture on the wall looked like the picture in the Bible then the sheep in the picture would be dirty, diseased, and deformed. They would be broken and bleeding. They would be ugly sheep, disgusting sheep, sheep that no one would want. Those sheep would be us. And in the middle of those sheep would be a battered and bloody Jesus hanging on a cross with his blood dripping down onto the sheep. The Savior displays his incredible love by bleeding and dying for sheep who are bleeding and dying. Jesus ugly death on that cross is what brings life to our ugly, dead souls. His payment for sins binds up the wounds that we inflict on ourselves: the times we shun the cross wanting the easy life, the times we are ready to set our faith aside so we don’t have to face persecution. These sins, and all the sins we commit, are healed by the blood of the lamb who was sacrificed on a cross at Calvary.

The cross points to true freedom. The cross points us to Jesus, not only his death, but also his rising from the dead. Christ’s resurrection is the proof of our freedom. It’s a freedom that allows us to live life now: a life free from the control of sin, free from guilt, and free from the fear of eternal punishment in hell. We live in this freedom as we wait in joyful hope for that glorious life that is never going to end. This is a freedom we can boast about! But the boasting is not about us. No, we boast about the cross of Christ. Don’t avoid the cross, but bask in the glorious freedom that you have because of the cross.

If it were not for what Jesus did on the cross there would be no freedom for anyone. We would all be slaves to sin and headed for hell. The cross brings death, yet in death Christ brings a new life into being. Jesus’ death won for us the forgiveness of our sins. Now, through faith in Jesus, we have forgiveness as a gift. The gift of Christ’s forgiveness covers us and makes us perfect before God the Father. It makes us spiritually alive so that one day we will

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enjoy eternal life. And this was all made possible because of the cross. So boast about the cross of Christ, and as you do let it recreate you.

Paul said, **“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”** (v. 14). Paul would go on to say that, in connection with Christ and his cross, **“What counts is a new creation”** (v. 15). When we are connected to Jesus by faith we become that ‘new creation.’ That new creation is connected to Jesus’ cross and his death, but it is a death that makes us alive.

This New Self boasts about the cross of Christ. It understands what Paul means when he says that through the cross **“the world has been crucified to me.”** Something that has been crucified is something dead. Something that is dead cannot do anything for you, and it has nothing to offer you. In Christ and his cross, we realize how worthless and dead the things of this world really are. Fame, money, popularity: what good are those things when this life ends? Electronics, toys, games, and hobbies: can any of those things save your soul? Sports, leisure, property, and all the stuff we accumulate throughout our lives: can any of that get you into heaven? Sure, God can bless our lives in this world through those things, but in the end, all those things are “dead”; they cannot do anything to fix our relationship with God. Our New Self recognizes that, so we don’t put our hope in those things. Instead, we boast in the cross, which Jesus used to fix our relationship with God the Father. Faith in Jesus and his saving work on the cross, that is what gets us into heaven.

And this New Creation, this faith we have been given, says right along with Paul that we have been crucified to the world. That means the world cannot do anything to take away our connection to Jesus. For all of its science and technology, the world cannot make a dead person walk five miles. The world cannot make a dead person stand up and dance. The world cannot make you leave Jesus. Through faith we have been crucified to the world. That means we have died to the world and its power. Sure, the world can tempt us to leave Jesus. It can persecute us to try to get us to leave Jesus, but it cannot *make* us leave Jesus. Jesus said of his believers, **“no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand”** (John 10:29).

Knowing that gives us even more reason to boast about the cross of Christ. By the cross of Jesus, we have the power to stand up to the world’s temptations. We have the power to say ‘no’ to sin, and to proclaim freedom to those who are trapped in sin. In Jesus’ cross, we find the power to endure persecution, not by hiding our faith, but by boasting about our Savior and what he did for us on a cross. Remember you have nothing to fear from the world, because by the cross of Christ the world has been crucified to you, and you have been crucified to the world. The world no longer holds any power over you. So, go ahead and boast. Boast in the cross of Christ, and let it recreate you day after day.

Our lives as believers are filled with dangers and hardships. Yet through it all God keeps us safe, strengthening our faith with his word and watching over our lives. Our journey through this life to heaven may not be an easy one, but the freedom that waits for us there is worth the trip. It is freedom won for us through Jesus’ death on a cross so that we can enjoy the freedom of a perfect, eternal life. Amen.