

*What is in view*

Paul is drawing his argument to the Galatian believers to a close. But for him, this is no ivory tower, academic discussion. For Paul, the message of the cross and the work of Christ and the presence and power of the Spirit is the grounds for real celebration. In fact, it is the only thing really worth celebrating!

*What is helpful to note*

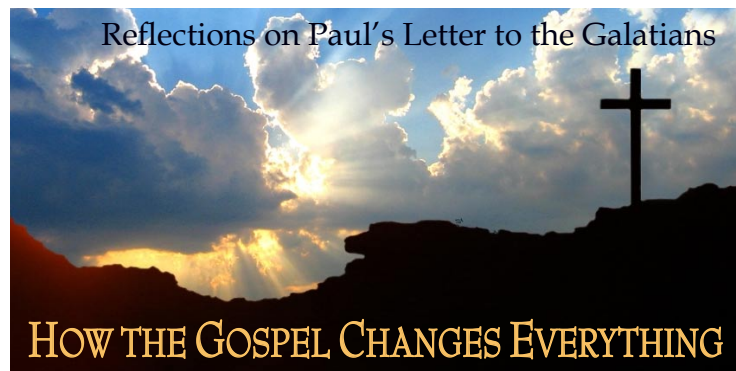
At first read, it could seem that these closing verses of chapter six are just a string of disjointed thoughts. But this is not the case. Let's walk through, verse by verse, and make sure that we are following the flow of thought.

6:11: Paul often dictated his letters; someone else would have actually penned them. By saying what he does here, Paul is really underscoring his personal connection to and passion about the message.

6:12: Those who are compelling others to get circumcised are doing it, primarily, for appearance sake. You will recall that circumcision is not the only issue in view, it just serves as the key example of a legalistic/rules-based approach to life with God. And Paul says that those who have adopted this approach do so because this minimizes the offense that the cross brings. The cross says we can add nothing to our salvation; that offends our sense of "pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps." By adding law to grace, the false teachers can circumvent that seemingly offensive idea.

6:13: Ultimately the legalists end up "boasting in the flesh." We have to understand what this means. First, the word "boast" speaks of "joyously exulting;" thing of an

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emotion-full and heart-felt expressive celebration. The "flesh" here is not "wicked sinfulness" (as if someone actually celebrated another's sinfulness!); flesh is referring to natural human effort and endeavor. The legalists, by imposing rules on others and seeing those others adopt the rules, end up celebrating that they got others to "toe the line." They celebrated what man could accomplish—both what they accomplished by getting others to join them in law-keeping and in what the others themselves did in keeping the rules.

6:14: Paul makes it clear that in no way could he celebrate on such grounds or for such reasons. When Paul refers to the "cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," he is not speaking specifically of the piece of wood on which Jesus died. To speak of "the cross" is to offer a kind of mental short-hand that captures all that Jesus accomplished in coming into the world to die, giving His life for sinners, and conquering death and sin through His death and resurrection. Paul boasts in what Jesus has accomplished; he won't be dragged into making much of men.

6:15: Here Paul offers a profound yet succinct summation of where his thinking has been going. The outward rules don't matter; the legalists miss it. Why? Because they try to take people who are given over to one system of living (that's what he means by "world" in 6:14) and change them by simply giving them more rules to follow. And Paul says that none of that really matters! What matters is that God is making people new—through the cross, because of the work of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit. What matters is that people are made "new creations." And that is a creative work of God. And that is Paul's ground for celebration—that is what he will "boast" about.

*Talking to your group*

As you talk about "boasting" and exuberant joyous celebrating, some of your people might not see how this either fits or flows out of Paul's argument in the letter. It really is simple: We make much of what matters most to us. In other words, we "boast" about what is most important.

What you want to help your people grasp is that it is the reality of the amazing news of the Gospel that has gripped the heart of Paul that drives him to boast and celebrate (and oppose the legalists!) the way he does. The only question left for us is this: Have we been gripped with the magnitude of the "good news" as Paul had been? If we have, we will boast!

*"The 'world' [here in Galatians 6] means not so much the physical world of space and time but rather the world-system that in its basic values and orientation is alienated from God. To be crucified to the world, then, means . . . to walk in freedom [from that system]." Timothy George*

*Thinking . . .*

What was the last thing you really cheered about? Although we don't all "get excited" about the same things, most people do get excited about some things. So, for you, what was that last experience that really stirred you to cheer?

What did you do? And—perhaps even more importantly—why did you do what you did?

*Reflecting . . .*

Paul has not left his great theme of Galatians as he closes this letter. He is still contrasting two radically different approaches to life. Read Galatians 6:11-5 and note the contrasts he underscores.

What do the legalists/rules-keepers "boast" in? Why?

What is Paul's basis for dismissing the grounds the legalists turn to for their boasting?

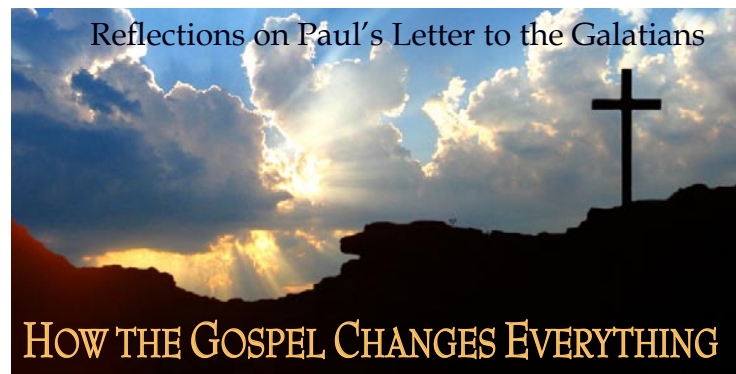
What does Paul say that he "boasts" in? Why?

How does this focus on "boasting" bring closure to Paul's whole argument of the letter?

*Responding . . .*

Paul cannot imagine not "getting excited" and cheering about what Jesus has done, what the Spirit is doing. Why would it be beneficial to cultivate such "boasting" in your own life?

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