

## The Cross of Christ

**Galatians 6:11-18 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. <sup>12</sup> It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup> For 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup> And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. <sup>17</sup> From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

<sup>11</sup> See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand (ESV).

<sup>11</sup> NOTICE WHAT LARGE LETTERS I USE AS I WRITE THESE CLOSING WORDS IN MY OWN HANDWRITING (NLT).

When Paul wrote his letters to the churches, he spoke and someone else wrote down what he said. There are those who believe Paul had some sort of disease that affected his eyes. It reminds me of being in Hawaii for the wedding of our oldest son. In the van the family was pointing out the humongous mountains and all I could say was, "What mountains?" After that I had cataract surgery. Whether or not Paul had eye difficulties is anyone's guess. Paul took the pen and wrote these final comments (F.F. Bruce, Commentary On Galatians, pg. 268). These concluding comments repeat some of the main points of the letter. Paul was not ashamed of anything that he said and put his own signature on it so to speak.

<sup>12</sup> It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ (ESV). <sup>12</sup> Those teachers of yours who are trying to convince you to be circumcised are doing it for just one reason: so that they can be popular and avoid the persecution they would get if they admitted that the cross of Christ alone can save (TLB).

The church has had false teachers, namely troublemakers since the church began. Paul addresses them up front in this letter to the Galatians. They are called the Judaizers. Their

wrong teaching can be summed up like this. The Cross of Jesus Christ + Circumcision equals salvation. The correct teaching is our salvation, being saved, being born again, being born anew is all the work of Jesus plus nothing. It is His work on the cross that makes us right with God. Circumcision adds nothing to salvation. Having said that there is nothing wrong with being circumcised, snip, snip. It is even healthy, but it adds nothing to the completed work of Jesus on the cross that saves us for eternity. Other churches today say something like this. The cross plus good works gets you into heaven. No! It is only the good work of Jesus that saves us forever. Any other teaching is false, heretical, of Satan. We are completely dependent on the work of Jesus and Jesus applies that work into our lives by grace through faith.

There are those who think all religions are equal and praying to the same God. That could not be more wrong. Some wrongly think all religions lead us to the same place. Just pick one of them and that is okay. No. Only Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins. No one else. Only Jesus can save you and no one else. Only by Jesus can we get into heaven. All other belief systems end up where you do not want to be. It is by Jesus and Jesus alone. Jesus says, "No person cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Is there salvation in anyone else? I want to hear a resounding no. We owe everything to Jesus.

Friends, we live in a day when people are super sensitive, super angry, just looking for a moment they can express their rage on any given topic. I want us to hear that there is no more important person or issue than Jesus, loving Jesus and living for Jesus. There are so many hot issues these days and hotter people with steam coming out their ears. Please let us not allow any issue to keep us away from worshipping Jesus together under one roof. I heard this said once. "I could not sit next to a person in church who voted for" and I will not name the candidate. Jesus is far more important and worthy of your worship regardless of who you vote for. It does not matter to me who you vote for. What matters is Jesus in your life, loving and living for Jesus. We ought to be willing to sit next to any person in church. The only qualification for entering the

sanctuary is being a sinner and as I look around, we are all more than qualified to be here. The Good News is everything Jesus did on the cross He did for you because His love for you is so great. If you look at God and just see an angry face, you are not looking at God. If you think God is against you, you could not be more wrong. The work of Jesus means God is completely for you. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Roman 8:1)

If the false teachers could convince the believers to be circumcised, they would have large churches, many more followers than those who followed the true Gospel espoused by Paul. The Judaizers wanted to be super popular and draw large crowds. The cross of Jesus was a scandal to them, something to be embarrassed by. And those who stuck with Jesus and Jesus alone for salvation were often persecuted, ostracized, lost their jobs their means of living, and worse. Paul was stoned and left for dead.

<sup>13</sup> For 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 (ESV).

<sup>13</sup> And even those teachers who submit to circumcision don't try to keep the other Jewish laws; but they want you to be circumcised in order that they can boast that you are their disciples (TLB).

In the church nationwide, we have been in a season of pastoral failures. I do not care to mention names but mega churches as well as small rural churches have seen a rash of the pastor saying one thing but doing something completely different in their own lives. It is do as I say and not as I do. Every article I read of pastoral failures bothers me because I too am a pastor. It makes us all look bad. I do not excuse these failures but none of these failures surprise me, and this is why. 1) Pastors are sinners just like any other human being and capable of any sin. Sinners sin. No one is above sinning, no not one. Pastors do not have some special ability that keeps us from sinning. Paul called himself the chief of sinners. No human being has impacted Christianity for the good more than Paul. His understanding of God's grace and

forgiveness gave to him the confidence to leave his sins behind him and proclaim the Gospel of forgiveness with great clarity. Pastors are sinners just like everyone else and are capable of any sin.

2) When I read of pastoral failures, my faith in Jesus is not impacted at all. We put our faith in Jesus, not pastors. Our faith is based on the truth of the Bible and when a pastor fails, no truth in the Bible is changed. God's Word remains forever. Nothing of God has changed. We can use their failures as a warning to ourselves lest we too do the very same thing. Lest you think too highly of yourself, we are all equal sinners at the foot of the cross. The sins of pastors do not stand out more than anyone else's but the fall out often does impact more people than any other profession. Pastor's will always let you down. That is just the way it is. Put your eyes on Jesus and never put your pastor on a pedestal. The higher the pedestal the bigger the fall.

I have heard this question for years, "How could a pastor do that?" That is the easiest question to answer. Because he or she is a sinner just like you are. Only Jesus is the one to base your faith on for Jesus never sinned. I am not excusing sin, just explaining how easy it is to fall into it. Pastor's failures bother me, but they never shock me. I think it is only going to get worse before it gets better. Please be in prayer for the call committee calling the next pastor. That is a huge decision worthy of intense prayer.

<sup>14</sup> 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 (ESV).

<sup>14</sup> As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in all the attractive things of the world was killed long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead (TLB).

There is absolutely nothing more important in the universe than Jesus' sinless life, death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven. Those actions of Christ, summed up with the phrase, the cross of Christ, ought to always be our primary focus every

day. The cross of Christ is the key that opens the door to eternity. The cross of Christ gives us good reason to be in worship every Sunday, pondering the work He did for us that saves our souls and sustains us in this life. We owe everything to Jesus for He gave His all for us. I totally believe that Jesus felt the fulness of hell while on the cross when all of your sins, all of my sins were placed upon Him. In His worst of suffering Jesus never gave up trusting in the Father for His very life. Jesus knew the resurrection was coming but there was hell to pay first.

In my mid-twenties I studied at great length Luther's theology of the cross. It is one of the main reasons I stayed Lutheran for Luther's theology of the cross is at the absolute center of what he taught and right on. Because of Jesus and the cross, we always have reason to hope. Because of Jesus and the cross, we have no reason for despair. Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. That resurrection power is ours and is there to raise us above everything in this life and literally into heaven. Jesus' death and resurrection means Jesus has taken care of everything and we will have eternity to thank Him.

We all face terrible hardships, seasons of suffering, news that shatters our perspective, sins that we cannot stop. There is a completely different place to go than to enter the pit of despair and think life is not worth living. We go to the foot of the cross where Jesus made all things right. Everyone of your sins was dealt with, cleansed, paid for at the cross. It is not for you to die for your sins for Jesus did it already all for you. All the pain you have ever experienced can be given over to Jesus at the cross and you can be healed as His blood heals you of all your grudges, bad memories, and more. At the cross we are made whole. Jesus' resurrection means nothing can come your way that has the power to do you in for you are an overcomer through the resurrection of Jesus. No difficulty too great, no sin too deep, no sorrow so big that the cross of Christ and His resurrection cannot rescue you. What we can boast most of is the cross of Christ for every believer benefits from that finished work for all eternity.

What I am saying does not happen automatically in our lives. It boils down to what Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well." The cross of Christ and all that it means for us takes time on our part to learn, all the personal applications that brings healing to our spirits, our souls. Faith is the assurance, the certainty that no matter what happens to you God will help you through and bring you to victory. The victory does not mean you get the outcome you wanted. It does not mean you score the most points over an enemy. It means God has found a way for you and God rescues you from yourself.

i.e. Lt. Glenowitz' suicide. I thought a lot about this. Why would he do this to his two sons and lovely wife. There is no sin so great that Jesus will not forgive. Yes, there would be jail time. But at least he would still be alive for his family. If I did something illegal and end up in jail, Praise the Lord I am still alive and I can do prison ministry with a captive audience. Because of the work of Jesus, the cross of Christ, life is always worth living no matter what. God always makes a way and Jesus is the way.

The cross is rightly at the center of this church and a word picture of the cross of Christ being at the center of our lives. It is the only way to live. We no longer have to hold onto long held grudges. We no longer have to carry loads of guilt and shame. We no longer have to live with a depth of sorrow that makes you feel like you are buried alive. All was made right with Jesus' sinless life, death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven. When Jesus comes again, we will see, feel, hear, and experience the fullness of the cross of Christ. We have so much joy to look forward to it can help us endure the present and stay out of despair. We can even boast about it now. This world loses its appeal to us because our futures are so bright. We gain an eternal perspective, knowing the end is just the beginning. We can even sense sometimes what that will feel and be like, to be with the Lord forever and ever.

**Galatians 6:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen and Amen.