



World Christian Fellowship

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Galatians

Lesson 63 – Cross and its wonder

Galatians 6:11-18, *See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! ¹²As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. ¹³For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. ¹⁶And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. ¹⁷From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁸Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

Everything happened at the cross. That contrasts with what was being taught in the Galatian churches.

Some Jewish teachers had come from Jerusalem and said they believed in the Messiah Jesus, and said they were a part of the church.

But they said,

- You are not true Christians.
- You are not possessors of eternal life.
- You are not forgiven.
- You are not going to enter the kingdom.
- You are not on your way to heaven.

Why?

Because Jesus Christ is not enough. Believing in Him is part, but you must be circumcised, and you must follow the prescriptions of the Mosaic ceremonial law.

They were called Judaizers because essentially, they were saying that one can't just go into the realm of salvation, unless they must pass through Judaism.

Even Gentiles were required to be circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic law.

So, they believed that you were saved by works as well as by believing in Jesus. This is a false gospel.

In fact, it's so false that Paul says in chapter

Galatians 1:6-9, *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any*

other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

False gospel is saying yes to Christ, but Christ is not enough. It is just as false as saying no to Christ. You can deny Christ, or you can accept Christ and add works, and you end up with the same damning message.

You can't come by the law.

Galatians 3:10, *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*

You want to come by way of the law; all it does is curse you, it doesn't save you.

If you want to come by law, then the requirement is always that perfect adherence to the law.

Therefore, no one is justified by the law, it's impossible.

The righteous man lives by faith.

Galatians 3:13, *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),*

Christ became the curse on the cross.

There are only two possible roads to heaven to God, two gates, two ways, and two religious' paths.

One is the religion of human achievement. You earn your way by your morality, by your goodness, by your religiosity, by ceremonies, rituals, and rites. This is the religion of human achievement; you must do something.

This is the category in which all false religions on the planet fit. They are all just different forms of the religion of human achievement. If you break one law of God one time, as James say, you are guilty of violating all of it and you are cursed. There is no hope for those people who come that way.

The other is the true religion of divine accomplishment, where everything is done by God. It's offered to us by grace and received by faith, not works. That is what Paul's been dealing with throughout this letter.

We can see these two things contrasted one more final time. Verses 11 to 13, we see boasting in the flesh; and Verses 14 to 16, we see boasting in the cross.

We can see the distinction here in just some very interesting ways.

Boasting in the flesh.

Paul refers to it in verses 11 to 13.

V11, *See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!*

Very unusual for Paul to write a letter with his own hand, didn't normally do that. Normally his letters were written by a scribe, somebody who took down dictation. The Word of God was coming from him, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it was passed along to a scribe who would write it down.

Now very often Paul would sign his name at the end, as you would do in a letter that you may dictate, have someone type or write down, and then sign your name at the end.

That is what Paul did.

The end of 1 Corinthians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Paul says, "I am signing off with my own hand." So, this was a typical thing for him to do.

Now remember, this is the first letter of all his letters. Paul is fired up he doesn't start this letter with any kind of words that are gracious, kind, loving, and embracing.

He just blasts them with fury over the false gospel. He is not about to go find a scribe somewhere. He didn't want any delay.

Once the influences of the Holy Spirit pour into his soul, he launches in this thing and he begins to write. He is not a scribe and the professional scribes used cursive, because it was an economy of ink.

So, he is writing in a language that is not his normal language, although he certainly was raised in the Gentile-Greek world. But he writes large letters.

There may be another reason he writes large letters.

Galatians 4:13, *You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.*

Some physical infirmity.

What is the physical infirmity?

Galatians 4:15, *What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.*

Why does he say that?

Why is he referring to his eyes?

In the ancient world, when your eyes went bad, there was no way to correct that.

So, it may well be that not only is he not a professional scribe, not only is he writing out of urgency, perhaps, those large

letters show that he may got eye problems, which is another reason he writes largely.

Paul is pointing out to them that it is not professionally written. It doesn't look like something a hired scribe would do. It looks very amateurish.

V12, *As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ*

Concern about the looks of something, concern about the professional character of it never is Paul's issue.

1 Corinthians 2:1, *And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.*

2 Corinthians 10:10-11, *“For his letters,” they say, “are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”* ¹¹ *Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present.*

In a world that prized oration they said, he was a low life. He wasn't a professional scribe. He wasn't a high-sounding orator. He didn't come with men's wisdom.

Unlike the Judaizers who would care about the looks of something. Paul was saying to them that I have never tried to impress you with my scholarship, my personal skills, and superficial formalities. When I came to you, you accepted my message with gladness, although my bodily presence was unattractive.

This letter is not written in an attractive way either, but it is the truth, and it is the gospel, and it is from God.

There were a lot of dangers in the ancient world. One of them was forgery, and Paul in his first letter may also have had that in mind.

2 Thessalonians 2:2, *not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.*

For all those reasons, he writes his own letter, and he couldn't care less about the show.

The Judaizers boasting in the flesh.

This reminds me of them, those who preach the false gospel.

This is a fatal blow at the Judaizers.

Paul refuted their doctrine and dismantled it. Now he wants to say a few things about their motives.

Why do they do what they do?

1. Pride:

“to make a good showing in the flesh.”

That’s what legalists do; they show off.

The more stuff they wear, the more they declare their hypocrisy. They make a good showing in the flesh. They want to make an outward impression of being holy and virtuous.

This was a way of life for legalistic Jews. It’s a way of life for pious people in false religion.

Jesus spoke about false religion on giving, praying and and fasting.

Matthew 6:2, *Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

Matthew 6:5, *“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

Matthew 6:16, *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their*

faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Several passages in Luke speak directly to these Jewish people who were caught up in proud religion.

Luke 16:14-15, *Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. ¹⁵ And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

You are proud, self-promotion is detestable to God.

Luke 18:9-12, *Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’*

Luke 20:45-47, *Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁶ “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”*

The greater your spiritual pride, the greater your eternal condemnation. You had better off to be irreligious than to be proudly religious.

Jesus said, "You have substituted the traditions of men for the commandments of God." Paul in Galatians refers to this kind of religion as being engaged with weak and worthless elemental things.

2. Fear

V 12, As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ

They were Jewish had come from Jerusalem, Israel. For some reason they had acknowledge, at least superficially, that Jesus was the Messiah.

They had gained some entrance into the church. They are now showing up as if they represent the apostles to the Galatian churches, and they are telling all these believers who have already begun in the Spirit that they are not really believers and they are not really God's children, because they haven't been circumcised.

"You need to be circumcised."

Why were they doing that?

Because they didn't want to be persecuted by the Jews for the cross of Christ.

Jews who would have tolerated if you believed in Jesus but held onto Judaism.

But to believe in Jesus and let go of Moses would be to become persecuted.

When it talks about persecution it's not talking probably about personal or family persecution. The Jews in Jerusalem and Israel persecuted the believers in Jesus Christ they wound up slaughtering them.

There was a huge price to declare yourself a follower of Jesus Christ and not following the traditions of Moses.

So, what they did was to try to find some middle ground. They decided that they could follow Christ. They were compelled by the realities of His miracles and His resurrection. But they didn't want to let go of the traditions completely and come all the way to Jesus Christ. They were in that equally damning position of trying to hold on to law and works, and faith and grace.

What offended them?

The cross.

A dead Messiah.

But what offended them probably more was that the cross declares that you are a sinner.

- The cross declares that you deserve to die.
- The cross declares that you cannot please God, whoever you are.
- The cross declares that you deserve to be punished.
- The cross declares that you deserve to be punished, but God has punished Christ in your place.
- The cross declares you are a sinner, you are a sinner who is both unwilling and unable to please God.

Isaiah 64:6, But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

The cross declares that you are helpless. Represents the whole doctrine of substitutionary atonement by the perfect sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe in the cross genuinely encompasses a repentance.

These Judaizers had lined up with the church somehow, accepting Jesus and something about Jesus, but were still tares sown among the wheat.

They were emissaries of Satan. They were attempting to escape persecution from the Jews who had rejected Jesus by kind of hanging on. By outwardly identifying with a visible church they had become resented by their Jewish family and friends.

But if they hung on to Moses and hung on to the law, maybe they could survive.

The Romans had legalized Judaism. So, if they continued to hang on to Judaism, they wouldn't get persecuted by the Romans.

Whereas the Romans saw Christianity as a threat to Caesar, because all Romans knew that Caesar was lord. If you said Jesus is Lord, you were a rebel. Christians were burned like torches in garden parties for Caesar.

3. Hypocrisy

V13, For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

They want to show you off like some kind of convert when they can't even keep the law themselves. They are phonies.

They may be super-zealous, they may go through the rituals and the rites, wear all the costume and the garments and never miss an assembly of people gathered for some ceremony.

They want you to keep the law, but they can't keep the law. Nobody can keep the law.

That's why our Lord in Matthew 23 said they are painted white like a tomb on the outside but inside they are full of dead men's bones.

Romans 2:17-24, *Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,¹⁸ and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law,¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.²¹ You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?²² You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?²³ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law?²⁴ For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.*

This is characteristic of all false religionists. They parade their superficial morality, and God knows they are lawbreakers. So, Pride, Fear, and hypocrisy come together to define people in false religion.

Paul's saying to the Galatians, "You don't want to be a part of that. You don't want anything to do with that."

They don't want the cross, because nothing in the history of the world cuts down human pride like the cross.

Boast on the cross

V 14, But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

This is the religion of grace.

- He will be broken at the foot of the cross.
- He will be made small at the foot of the cross.
- He will be cut down by the cross.

- ❖ The cross says, “You can’t save yourself.”
- ❖ The cross says, “God had to save you by offering His own Son, placing your sins on Him, punishing Him in your place. You deserve hell. the Father gave that hell to Christ in three hours of darkness.”

Paul says in very strong way that,

- I can’t boast about myself.
- I can’t boast about my righteousness.
- I can’t boast about my morality.
- I can’t boast about my goodness.

I can simply boast that God graciously, mercifully loved me enough to put my sins on His Son who died in my place.

The cross is everything to us!

- ❖ The cross is where we see the glorious attributes of God!
- ❖ The cross is the means of our redemption.
- ❖ The cross is part of our fellowship, the fellowship of suffering. The cross is our message.

Why did he surrender to the cross?

The cross frees us from the world's bondage.

V 14, *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

I was bound to the system. I was bound to the world.

Judaism, which started out as a revelation from God, in the Old Testament had become a false religion.

The Devil is no longer my master. The god of this world is no longer my God. The world belongs to the Devil. The whole world lies in the lap of Evil One.

V 15, *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.*

"has made me a new creation"

Neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision.
All that religion is gone, it's meaningless.

The cross not only has caused me to die to the world and the world to me. Not only that, I am a new creation. The power of the cross to separate me from the world. The power of the cross to enable me to do what the flesh cannot do.

2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

The power of the cross separated me from the world.
The power of the cross separated me from the flesh.
The power of the cross brought me the blessings of salvation.

V16, *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*

What happens is when you leave the law behind and works and you come to the cross, all of a sudden, your life is flooded with peace.

Peace with God and the peace of God!

Peace is God giving you what you don't deserve.
Mercy is holding back from you what you do deserve.

Philippians 3:3, *For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,*

The Israel of God are believing Jews, saved Jews, who are the true Jews. So those of us who are the true Jews have been flooded with all heavenly blessing.

Paul makes this final contrast:

- ✓ They boast in the flesh,
- ✓ Paul boasts in the cross.

Final words.

V17, *From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*

Who's he talking to?

Everybody.

Talking to the people in the church who are making his life miserable because they are listening to the false teachers. Paul is talking to the false teachers who are attacking him.

Why should they leave Paul alone?

“For I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.”

What does that mean?

“I have the scars for my service to Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 11:22-33)

When he was defending his apostleship, he defends it by saying, all the troubles he had gone through.

Colossians 1:24, *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,*

What do you mean?

They can't hit Christ, He's not here, so they hit me in His place.

So, I bear in my body the marks of Jesus. The reason I am beaten, the reason I am abused is not because of something I have done, it's because of who I represent.

These are my apostolic credentials.

Don't question my authority, I have the marks of Jesus.

In the ancient world slaves were branded. In the ancient world criminals were branded as a mark of identification for life.

In the ancient world soldiers were branded to demonstrate their allegiance.

Religious devotees were branded.

Conclusion:

Cross is the symbol of Christianity.

The cross has been the symbol of Christianity since our Lord's death. It stands atop churches around the world.

There are massive crosses around the globe that have in recent years become an offense, more of them than public view being removed.

The cross descends from the top of churches all the way down to people's necks. Beautiful little crosses become jewelry, and we wear them because we believe they symbolize beauty.

There is no other torture instrument that has ever been invented by man that someone wears as jewelry or as adornment or conceives to be beautiful. But that's what happens with the cross.

The cross may be the most horrendous and horrific of all torture instruments ever devised by man. Should be a symbol of shame, but it has become a symbol of love, and joy, and peace, and beauty, and grace, and eternal salvation.

Crucifixion was originally designed by the Persians who became skillful at using it as a way to execute people in a very long, drawn out, torturous way. It was really perfected by the Romans, who crucified tens of thousands of people.

In fact, some historians tell us that as many as thirty thousand people were crucified by the Romans in and around the land of Israel around the time of our Lord. So, the Jewish people were used to seeing people hanging on crosses in some part of the process of excruciating, bleeding, and suffocation.

Cross was not only an instrument of physical torture, but it was also a tool of degradation. To be suspended on high along a public highway totally naked, nailed by hand and foot, and left to bake in the sun. The Romans basically crushed potential revolt by making sure the roads were lined with crucified victims.

We see the wisdom of God at the cross, He put our punishment on the suffering Saviour.

If God wanted to have a people in heaven,

if God wanted a bride for His Son,

if God wanted to bring to glory a redeemed humanity who would forever praise Him,

He had to get them to heaven.

They weren't going to ever be able to get there on their own, their sins had to be dealt with, and so He punished His Son for them. Imputed His Son's righteousness to us, put our sins on Him, His righteousness on us.

In the cross, Jesus died our death, that we might live His eternal life.

The cross is the determiner of all destiny for everyone.

Philippians 3:17-19, *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.* ¹⁸ For

many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

What you do at the cross determines your eternal destiny. Embrace the cross and the death of Christ for sin, embrace Him as your Lord and Saviour, and you have eternal life.

Reject the cross, reject the One who paid for the sins of all who would believe, and your end is eternal, unending destruction. The cross is the determiner of destiny.

Galatians 6:18, *Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*