

Sermon Notes, October 1, 2017

The Christian Lifestyle: Boast in the Cross, Galatians 6:11-14

When Paul gets to the end of Galatians he says, “There’s one thing I want you to know. There’s one thing I want you to see. If there’s one thing I can leave you with, it’s this: the cross.”

We learn 3 things.

First of all, we learn *the central importance of understanding the cross*. There is nothing more important in history. There is nothing more important in your life.

The second thing we learn is *how you can know you do understand the cross*. If understanding the cross is of central importance to Paul, then how do you know if you do? How do you know you understand it? There’s a test here.

Thirdly, we learn *how to turn your understanding of the cross into a real power that changes your life*, a living power.

1. The central importance of understanding the cross

There’s a Greek construction that is very hard to translate that Paul uses at the beginning of verse 14. It’s an incredibly strong, intensively strong negative. What Paul says is, “I absolutely, under no circumstances, ever, ever, ever will do anything but this.” *Me genoito (the Greek)*, “may it never be, that I boast in anything else but the cross of Jesus Christ.”

There’s a place where Paul actually says in 1 Corinthians, “Remember when I first came to you, Corinthian Christians? When I came to Corinth, I was determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified.”

Look at the apostles. Virtually half, to a third of each of the Gospels, are about Jesus’ death. Why? Because they gloried in the cross. They boasted in the cross. The world doesn’t need a set of ethics; the world needs something that would crucify, to smash, something to destroy the things that bind us. We need a power. We need a new nature. So, Paul is saying here at the very end of Galatians, “The one thing you need to know is the cross.”

So, if you’re *not* a Christian, this is what you have to understand to *become* one.

If you *are* a Christian, this is what you mainly have to understand in order to grow *into* a mature one.

If you don’t know whether you’re a Christian or not, this is the main thing you have to understand in order to figure out if you *are* one.

2. How you can know you understand the cross

Here’s a test. Look at the verse or two right before, where Paul starts talking about these false teachers he has been fighting with all through the book of Galatians. They don’t want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Paul said to the Galatians, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, and as a result, you’ll obey the law.” The false teachers came along and said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and obey the law of God, and as a result, you’ll be saved.”

There’s an enormous difference between the two! Paul said, “No. I have this wonderful teaching that as soon as you believe you’re accepted. You don’t have to clean yourself up. You’re accepted, and you’re saved, and you’re welcomed by God, and you’re adopted, and *then* you obey.” Look. It says here in verse 12, “They don’t want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” Why does the cross always bring persecution? The only way you’ll ever get to the sweetness of the grace of God and the beauty and the wonder of the cross, is first you have to go through the offensiveness of the cross.

The cross is offensive. These false teachers were afraid or were repulsed by it. There are theologians and philosophes, and even clergy today that say the Christian doctrine of the atonement on the cross is intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous, that it is primitive. In fact, Glasgow University is giving theology students what the Daily Mail calls “trigger warnings” about potentially upsetting images of the crucifixion. It is found to be cruel and offensive.

The first reason why the cross is so offensive is it is the greatest monument to our impotence and wickedness. People will tell you, "Any good person anywhere can just come to God. You don't have to know about Christ or about the cross or any of those things. As long as you really seek God, if you're really a good person, you can find God." But here's what we need to consider. Either there's no other way to God except through Christ and his death then makes sense, or if there's any other way, then his death is repugnant.

It's only with the cross anyone can be received completely and accepted.

What does the cross mean? The cross, though it is exclusive ... it's an incredibly inclusive exclusivity. It receives the proud, the humble and weak and dependent, the bad, the moral failures, as well as the good and the wise. Romans 3: "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned ..." The cross means there is no difference.

The cross is hated because it is against all schemes of self-salvation. It is against all schemes of pride. You can't be a Christian through trying; you can only be a Christian through dying. You can only be a Christian through Jesus dying for you and then you dying to self-salvation and self-righteousness.

3. Once you understand it, how do you make it a power in your life?

This is the most amazing thing. Paul says right here, "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."

The world is crucified to me. Paul is saying the world is killed to *you*. It's not that the world is dead; the world is dead to *you*. It's not so much even that *you're* dead, but you're dead to *it*. Donald Guthrie in his commentary on Galatians says (this is a brief quote, but it helps) it means "the natural world as such has ceased to have any claims on us." The world will not have this power if the cross has the place in your life it should have. It can't phase you. It can't upset you. It means it can't worry you. It can't scare you. It can't embitter you.

If the world is controlling you in any way, it's because you're boasting or trusting in something besides the cross. There is something you're boasting in, which means, "This is my glory. This is my joy. This is my honor. This is what I defend myself with. This is what if I don't have, what good am I? I'm nothing."

Paul is trying to say, "If you're boasting in the cross, the world has no power over you. If the world has a power over you, you have to ask yourself, 'What am I boasting in besides the cross of Jesus Christ? What am I looking to, to save me besides Jesus Christ?'" If I am boasting in the cross, I am utterly free. How do you do it?

First, you *intellectually* glory and boast in the cross.

The second thing is you have to *personally* glory in it. As I said, ask that question. Ask that question this morning. "What am I boasting in besides the cross?" Whatever I'm angry about, whatever I'm tempted by, whatever is getting me down, look at what it is that you're trusting in because it is what you're boasting in. I'll look at that thing and say, "That will never die for me. That will never save me. That will never make me beautiful. Never."

Only through the cross will you be reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20-22). Only through the cross will your debt of sin be canceled (Colossians 2:14-15). Only through the cross can you die to sin and live for righteousness (1 Peter 2:24). Only through the cross (through Jesus's blood shed on the cross) can you be redeemed (Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 9:12). Only through the cross are you justified with God (Romans 5:9). The cross has freed us from our sins (Revelation 1:5).

Only the cross will save you.