

Text: Galatians 6:11-18 – Glorifying in the Cross

Exegetical Big Idea: The false religion of the false teachers is exposed as selfish and prideful. Paul's gospel however is one of embracing the so-called foolishness of the cross, but receiving for it eternal life in Christ.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The cross is foolishness and shame to the world, but it is the glory of the Church.**

Fallen Condition Focus: The cross calls us to surrender ourselves, and come empty handed to receive the grace of Christ. Our sinful nature despises that reality.

Intro:

When I was 16 I immediately got my license. And as soon as was possible I booked by test so that I could drive by myself. It was so freeing to be able to go anywhere I wanted all on my own! But I still had to ask to borrow my parents' car, and the answer wasn't always yes. But then one day something magical happened. I don't remember why, or even talking about it, but my dad bought a car off my uncle. It was a black 1992 Ford Escort GT.

This car was awesome! It had seatbelts that were automatic and moved when you closed the door. It had a spoiler in the back that made it look super cool. It had a super cool looking engine compartment. And the best part of this car? It was a standard. Not only was that super cool to drive as a teenager, but what made that special was that my younger brother did not have his license yet, and my older brother had no interest in learning how to drive standard! Which meant, the car was all mine.

And I loved that car.

Back then you'd probably look at it and think that it's an old rusty hunk of junk. It was slow, the front bumper was cracked. It had no A/C and the list could go on and on. But what you might see as garbage, I knew as a treasure.

Paul is closing off his letter to the Galatians and I think his closing remarks show us exactly this. He's getting back to the false teachers, and he's now revealing *why* they are trying to lead the Galatians astray. It's because they despise the cross of Christ.

The world despises the cross of Christ as something to be mocked, avoided, or as shameful. But to us, who are saved by it, it's our everything. It's our glory.

When Paul uses the term "cross" here, he is not merely meaning Christ's death. He does in fact mean that, but he means more than that. The term "cross" as Paul uses it means all of Christ's obedient life that is given to you in faith, his death that takes the wrath of the Father on your sins and pays for them all, and his resurrection unto life that guarantees your resurrection unto eternal life with him. That's what Paul means by "cross". This message, is often considered foolishness and shameful to the world. But to us it is our glory.

The cross is foolishness and shame to the world, but it is the glory of the Church.

(11-13) The world hates the cross because it calls us to surrender to it

Paul begins these verses by writing something that at first seems a bit odd to us. He says in verse 11 that he is writing in large letters, and with his own hand. Wait, has Paul not been writing this letter himself this whole time? In actuality, probably not. That does not mean that it's not genuinely Paul's letter. It is. But it wasn't unusual in those times to have a secretary physically write out the letter as a person is dictating it. In this case, Paul would tell the secretary what to write and Paul would make sure it is exactly as he wanted it.

So if that's normal, why would Paul even mention that it is he himself that has picked up the quill and is finishing the letter? Probably that's what is happening. These last verses are probably Paul's own handwriting on the original parchment. So why? Well he doesn't tell us directly, but many scholars think it's to add some emphasis and personal touch. They weren't using computers, and so they didn't have bold or italics to add emphasis as we do. Paul is likely highlighting these last few verses and showing them a personal touch. Paul loves these Galatians. This is one practical way of reminding them of that.

That's important because of what he writes in the next few verses. If Paul is showing his personal affection for the Galatians, he doing so in contrast to the false teachers that have come to them. Paul has in detail shown us the error of the false teachers, but he now comes right out and reveals their motives.

The first motive of the false teachers, is simply to build themselves up and make good numbers. Paul says in verse 12 that they "want to make a good showing in the flesh". What does Paul mean by that? Well it is certainly tied to the idea that we previously talked about in other sermons about the flesh being the part of the human that wants to rebel against God. In this case, making a good showing of the flesh has the meaning of making yourself look good! It is simply pride in yourself, rather than glorying in God. The false teachers are motivated by pride.

[Think of it as a pushy salesperson. I don't know if you've had this experience, and I apologize if you're a sales person (and I hope the following is not true for you!). Sales people have a reputation for selling you things you don't need! Why would they do that you might ask? Because they get rewarded for it. They may convince you that you need certain things or to add certain things that you don't actually need, but they do so because it benefits them. They get paid more, or they get a reward or something like that.]

That's what the false teachers are like! Look at how Paul describes it as they "force you to be circumcised". There's a scare tactic here! They are convincing the Galatians that if they are not obedient to the Mosaic Law, as well as trust in Jesus, then they are not really saved and will sent to hell! Except that it's not true. And they are in that way forcing the Galatians into slavery. All so that they may make a good showing in the flesh. They are seeking pride.

And if they are walking *towards* pride, they are also walking *away* from something else. Namely, pain.

In this same verse Paul says that they are working "in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ." What kind of persecution are we talking about here? When we think of early church persecution, we think of Roman persecution. We think of evil emperors who are throwing Christians in jail or having them fight in the gladiator arenas. But that's actually not what Paul has in mind. The persecution that the false teachers are afraid of is the persecution that will come from their own people, the fellow Jews.

At this point in church history, the Romans haven't caught on yet that Christians are totally different than Jews. The gospel is spreading without hindrance from the Romans. The persecution is coming from the Pharisees themselves. And Paul knows this all too well. Paul was a persecutor of Jews who believed in Jesus. Remember that Paul was given letters from the priests for permission to lock up any Jews who had become Christians. Being a Jew who believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus meant you were kicked out of the synagogue, told that you were denying the faith, and even could be locked up.

See the problem was not faith in Jesus, it was faith in Jesus *alone*. Believing that Jesus was a prophet or good teacher wasn't a problem! It was believing that Jesus died and rose again, and salvation from sin and righteousness before God is found solely on the grounds of grace, received through faith. That was the issue! And it's exactly this that the false teachers could not do. They could not give up their precious works-based salvation. They could not get over their own self-righteousness, which is no righteousness at all.

The cross confronts us with that reality. The cross of Christ shows us the penalty of sin, and the necessity for it to be paid for by someone other than ourselves. But that calls for surrender to it.

The false teachers could not (or would not) surrender to the truth of the cross, and as a result they just drove deeper into their hypocrisy. In verse 13 Paul points out that they themselves who were forcing people to be circumcised, were not obeying the law! And so since they were not (and could not) obey the law, they found their righteousness in the number of people that they convinced to follow them.

Where do you find your righteousness this morning if not in Christ? Are you avoiding the cross because it calls you to surrender to it and instead find your righteousness in church attendance? It's a false righteousness. What about being a good person? It's a false righteousness. The gospel calls us to surrender our own righteousness, and put on Christ's by faith.

[I have a suit jacket. It's a black suit jacket so whenever I need a black one it's my go-to. I purchased this suit jacket when I was finishing high-school. This jacket is more than 20 years old! My wife over the years has strongly encouraged me to get a new one. The problem is, I don't see anything wrong with the old one. Sure, it doesn't fit anymore. It's out of style. I don't have any pants that match it. But I just can't bring myself to get a new one because I don't see anything wrong with the old one]

That's exactly the way we tend to see our own righteousness. Sure, I haven't obeyed the whole law. Sure, I've done some bad things but not *that* bad. I go to church and read my Bible don't I? I even serve at the church! We fail to see that all of those things are filthy rags in God's sight. We want to hang out to our own self-righteousness.

But the gospel calls us to surrender to it. The gospel calls us to get rid of our own righteousness like an old jacket, and put on Christ's righteousness like a new one. The cross calls us to surrender our pride, surrender our self-righteousness, and even to surrender our comfort.

This is why the world cannot stand the message of the cross, because it is a message of surrender. But for those who will surrender, we gain everything.

The cross is foolishness and shame to the world, but it is the glory of the Church.

(Vv. 14-15) The church loves the cross because it is our salvation and glory

These verses now stand in stark contrast to the verses that we just read. If the previous verses were a picture of what it means to reject the cross, then these verses show what it means to surrender to it.

Paul offers his own life as an example of someone who has surrendered to the cross. He doesn't despise it, he loves it. Paul says in verse 14 that he will boast in nothing else but the cross. He uses some very strong language here and claims that he most certainly will not boast in anything except the cross of Christ. But didn't Paul just tell the Galatians to keep their eyes on their own work so that they may boast in themselves and not their neighbor? Is Paul saying he is the exception to this rule? Not at all.

The meaning of boast here is the idea of having an all-encompassing obsession with something. It's not just being proud of something, although that is certainly part of it, but it's the idea of being consumed with something.

[A few years ago I came down with a very weird obsession. For a period of a few days I couldn't stop thinking of this one thing. I would plan over and over again in my mind making this one thing. I would watch videos on Youtube about making this. The obsession was Mac and Cheese. I became obsessed with figuring out how to make the most delicious and luxurious extreme mac and cheese. I remember watching one video of this guy boiling the elbow noodles in a pot over an open flame, and grating different kinds of exotic cheeses to melt into it. Eventually I got over it, but for a few days it was all I could think about!]

Admittedly that is very odd! I admit that. But take that idea and multiply it by a million and you start to see what Paul is talking about. He's not just proud of the cross, he's obsessed with it! It's all he can think about. In another letter to another church Paul says that he endeavored to know nothing while he was with them except Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

Paul did not care about his reputation, his fame, his appearance, money, or anything else like that. His life was lived to glorify his Lord and proclaim the saving power of the cross.

And in Paul's time, the cross would have been a very weird thing to be obsessed about! We put crosses everywhere and it's a symbol for us that has no negative connotations connected to it. But in Paul's day, it was not a thing polite people talked about. One commentator pointed out that back in Paul's day they had a way of talking about the cross that did not mention the cross. People would call it the "unlucky tree" just to avoid saying the word "cross"! It was a place of shame. It was so shameful that it was a law that a Roman citizen was not allowed to be crucified on a cross. It was a punishment saved for only the vilest and worst of criminals. It was not only an execution, it was a humiliation.

That's why it would have been shocking for the Galatians to read this. But Paul doesn't care. His world saw a shameful and humiliating symbol, Paul saw salvation. Our world scorns the cross, but for those of us who have surrendered to the cross, we see reconciliation to God and union with Christ!

That's why Paul can say in the second half of verse 14 that the result of the cross is that he is crucified to the world, and the world to him. What does he mean? Paul is saying that because of the crucifixion of Christ, Paul has died to the world! All that the world holds dear has now lost its grip on him. The world can offer him all the riches and splendor and fame and pleasure, but he doesn't need it and he won't take it. Because he has Christ. And if he has Christ, then there is nothing that can be more valuable than that.

Compare this with the false teachers. They do not have Christ! And so they chase after comfort and fame. But what exactly causes this change? Paul was remember just like them.

At the Cross, Paul died. All that was the old Paul died at the cross with Christ, and he became a new creation. Which is what he tells us in verse 15. It is not anything that Paul has done, or any of his works that matter. It is being a new creation in Christ Jesus. And Paul has already told us this much back in chapter 2 verse 20. He has been crucified with Christ. He no longer lives, but Christ in him. And the life he does now live in the flesh he lives by faith in the Son of God.

This is true of every believer. And it is true only by faith. Paul here makes that very clear when he says neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything at all! Circumcision cannot make you more appealing to God. Circumcision cannot save you. And if someone is circumcised, it won't make God love them any more than he already does in Christ Jesus. What counts is being a new creation in Christ, by grace alone, through faith alone.

[My kids love to make crafts. They are very creative kids and can do wonderful things with just some paper and markers, scissors and glue. They will often make me things. Sometimes it's a picture, or beads, or whatever it is. I have a bunch of things in my office that my kids have made me. They also like doing special things like make my wife and I breakfast in bed when it's our birthdays or mothers'/fathers' day. Do you think that they are competing to see who gets the privilege to be our children? Do you think that at the end of the year my wife and I make the decision who gets to be (or remain) our children based on how many things they have done for us? Of course not! Similarly, do you think my wife and I love our kids more when they make us things, and love them less when they don't make us crafts? That's ridiculous.]

But that's often how we think of God. He will love me more when I obey, and he will love me less when I mess up. Falling into this thinking is a temptation for Christians! This is why the cross is central for the Christian. When we go back to the cross we are reminded that we come empty-handed. Our works do not save us, and they do make God love us any more than he already does in Christ Jesus. What matter is being a new creation.

Do I want to obey? Absolutely, but *out of* my new nature of being in Christ. That's why the cross is the salvation and glory for the Christian.

The cross is foolishness and shame to the world, but it is the glory of the Church.

(Vv. 16-18) The cross is our glory together with all the saints

Paul has given attention to the false teachers, and he has spoken about himself, and now as he closes off his letter he is drawing out attention to the reality that the Galatians are not an island unto themselves. All their struggles and hardships, as well as their hope in Christ are not unique to them. They are in Christ together with all the saints who are also in Christ.

In verse 16 Paul speaks of "all who walk by this rule". The word that Paul uses for "rule" here has the idea of a standard. What standard could Paul be talking about? The standard of the gospel of course! He's referring to all those who have placed their faith in Christ. But Paul also says "walk" by this rule. These are those who have placed their faith in Christ, and so they are walking with the Spirit, and

showing signs of the Fruit of the Spirit. In other words, the Church! And he's not only talking about the Galatian church, but the *whole* Church!

And what do they have? Peace and mercy. I think Paul is meaning this more than just a wish, I think he is reminding them of what they already currently have in Christ Jesus. Paul is reminding them what they have as a reality of being in Christ, but also to walk in that truth and reality.

The Christian has peace. Yes, this means peace in all areas of life, and peace amidst every storm that comes. Like the hymn we sing goes "Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say 'it is well with my soul'". But this peace in the circumstance of life stems from our peace with God! Once we were enemies of God, despising him and rejecting him. His judgement and wrath were rightfully coming to us. But because Christ took the wrath and punishment for our sins when he hung on the cross, he reconciled us to God. We are no longer enemies, but friends with God. We have peace with God, and therefore the promise of eternal life. From this peace, comes the peace in life no matter what.

And this piece also comes because we have mercy. Mercy simply means that we are *not* getting what we deserve. We don't deserve peace with God. We deserve his wrath. But because of God's great mercy shown to us in Christ, we do not receive his wrath, we receive his grace, which Paul also mentions here. This is yet another reminder that we cannot purchase or earn our peace with God, but it comes as a gift. Otherwise it would not be called mercy, because we would deserve it!

This is the reality for every Christian in Christ.

And this peace and mercy is to be on "the Israel of God". It's a bit hard to understand what Paul means by this. One possibility is that Paul wishes for the nation of Israel, what the Christian already possesses. In other words, it could be a wish that his own people will come to faith in Christ, instead of relying on the law of Moses for their salvation, and their heritage in Abraham. Paul does this same thing in Romans when he hypothetically says he would trade his own salvation for the sake of his own Jewish people coming to know Christ. It's possible that's what Paul is doing, but it's also possible that Paul has another meaning of "Israel" here. It's possible that Paul is again making the statement that all those who have put their faith in Christ are now true descendants of Abraham, by faith and not by birth. It is just as reasonable to translate this sentence as "peace and mercy be upon them, *which is*, the Israel of God."

I think that's what's going on here. Paul is making the statement that all the saints, who have trusted in the promises of God throughout all of history, have peace and mercy from God.

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross that saves us today, reaches back into all of history and together with us saves everyone who has come to God in faith. We glory in the cross along with all the saints, and together we are in Christ.

And Paul is a walking talking billboard for the glory of the cross!

He says in verse 17 "from now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Christ". I don't think we need to read too much into this about exactly what these marks are. The most straightforward way to understand what Paul is saying is remembering all that Paul has gone through up until this point in his ministry, and even what he has yet to go through.

He has been (or will be) beaten, stoned, mocked, flogged, ridiculed, thrown in jail, just to name a few! He has mirrored even with his own body what Christ went through on the cross. Why is Paul pointing

this out? Simply put, why would anyone go through that kind of treatment for something that he didn't glory in? There is no doubt to anyone who would but look at Paul, that the cross is his glory.

I am in no way saying that we ought to look for pain. But it is simply a reality that church history is full of saints who have endured so much for the glory of the cross. Whenever we bear something for the sake of the glory of Christ, we stand in the company of all the saints that have come before us, and we share that with them. The cross is the glory of all the saints!

As Paul ends his letter, it is tempting to read this as a standard way to end a letter. It's little more than if we were to say "goodbye" to each other. The words themselves have meaning if we think about it. When we say "goodbye" we are wishing that person good in our parting. But we never actually think about that! It has become just a word the end a conversation. Paul will routinely end his letters with a similar statement that we see in verse 18. But we simply cannot conclude that these words are without any deep meaning. They are in the Word of God! They are Holy Scripture!

When Paul ends his letter by saying that "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" he means it! Grace gets the final word!

And to whom does this grace come? Interestingly enough, the word for "your" is plural, meaning the entire audience he is writing to. It includes the Galatians, but also includes the other churches who will read this letter. And it's not a stretch to say that this also includes us today. But, the word for "spirit" is singular. In other words, many people, share a common spirit. We today, together with the Galatians of thousands of years ago, and together with all the saints in Christ Jesus, are bonded together by our common glory in the cross of Christ. That's amazing!

And it's a fitting way to end the letter and this sermon series. As one commentator puts it, to understand the grace of Christ given to us at the cross, and the glory that is shared among all believers throughout all of time in the cross, is to understand the letter to the Galatians. But more than that, it is to understand the gospel.

The cross is foolishness and shame to the world, but it is the glory of the Church.