

**THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE
EXALTS THE CROSS OF CHRIST ALONE
Galatians 6:11-18**

Please review this week's catechism question.

Did you meet anyone new after Sunday worship?

INTRODUCTION

How would you define or describe boasting? Why do people boast? What kinds of things do you boast about?

All humans boast. This is without exception. Boasting begins early in life. It's not something that you are taught to do. It is something you just naturally do. Whether it's a toddler boasting about her newfound ability to jump on her bed ("Daddy, daddy, look what I can do!") or the 50 year old father boasting to his 18 year old son that he can run farther than his son, all people boast. We boast in the things and people that give us pleasure, like the food at a favorite restaurant or the accomplishments of our children and grandchildren. We boast in the things and people who give us security like a fully funded pension plan or the U.S. Armed Forces. We boast in the things that we do and have that gain the admiration and affection of others like athletic or academic or career achievements or a restored 1959 Chevy. The things we boast in or about reveal what it is that we love and trust and hope in. Boasting is merely the outward expression of an inward affection and trust. Boasting reveals what we believe makes us great and makes life great. The apostle Paul, declares that he will boast in nothing except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the cross of Christ that is to be the center of our affections and of our faith and of our hope so that what we love to talk about and what makes our hearts fill with joy and our mouths overflow with praise is the bloody cross of Christ. This morning we are going to see why it is that Paul views the cross alone as the object of our boasting.

STUDY

1. In vv. 13-14 how does Paul summarize the teaching objective of the false teachers?

Paul again uses the false teachers' insistence that the Gentile Christians be circumcised to stand for their more general insistence that God only accepts into heaven those who obey his law. The message of the false teachers is that God accepts as righteous those who actually are righteous by their obedience to the law. All religion that is not focused upon the cross of Christ is out to compel people to perform certain acts or rituals that will win the favor of the god or gods. There really are only two religions in the world: Christianity which teaches that God accepts men as righteous based upon the righteousness of Christ and all other religions which teach that God accepts as righteous those who are righteous by obeying some law.

2. According to v. 13, why is circumcision or the keeping of any other law not adequate to gain acceptance with God? (cf. 3:10 & 5:3)

They talk about law keeping all the time but they never do what they command. The point here again is that if you are going to try to approach God on the basis of human law keeping you must obey all of it all the time. Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. Therefore, what they command they do not fulfill. If you do not obey all the law, then the law will condemn you as a lawbreaker.

3. What does Paul say is motivating the false teachers in vv. 13-14?

First he says about them that those who compel men to be circumcised want to make a good impression outwardly. The word that is used here means to make yourself appear handsome or beautiful. It is the word we might use to describe what motivates a person to go on one of those shows on the Style Network like "How do I look?" or "Fashion Court." The reason these teachers are seeking to coerce the Galatians into submitting to circumcision is so

that they, the teachers, will appear attractive to others. And just like a teenager who wants others to think they are dressing cool cannot bear to have another teenager mock them for dressing like a dweeb, so these false teachers cannot bear to be ignored, mocked or mistreated for teaching that Christ's death on the cross is the only reason that God will accept anyone into heaven. They want others to approve of them and they do not want others to mistreat or persecute them. They are looking for praise from men, not God (John 5:41-44).

Paul reveals in the last half of v. 13 the ultimate motivation that drives these exponents of human strength. These men were motivated by the high octane thrill of power and influence. Their boast was in the numbers of people they were able to convince to be circumcised. What they loved and what they depended upon and thus what they boasted in was that other men listened to them and joined their club. They were motivated by what motivates entrepreneurs: a growing business. The exhilaration of seeing others converted to their way of thinking and living was what drove these men to do what they did. For all their talk about God and his glory, they were only concerned for their own glory as reflected in growing congregations.

4. Have you ever boasted in your own moral performance? Have you ever boasted in your influence over another person?

5. In contrast to the false teachers boasting in their converts what does Paul boast in? Are there any other statements in Galatians that appear synonymous with this one?

He only boasts in the cross of Christ. Gal 2:20—The life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me. This is another way of saying what Paul has said throughout his letter that the focus of his faith and of his hope and of his affections is Christ alone. Christ did what he could never do, obey God's law and bear the wrath of God against him for breaking the God's law.

6. In v. 14 what reason does Paul give for why he boasts in the cross of Christ alone?

It was through the cross that Paul was crucified to the world and the world was crucified to him.

7. Paul uses this term “world” 46 times in his letters. Review these uses of the term and then summarize what Paul means by it: Romans 3:6 & 19, 5:12-13, 1 Corinthians 1:20-31, 2:12-16, 11:32, Gal 4:3, Ephesians 2:1-3 & 1 Timothy 1:15.

The world is the society of men in their natural condition, gratifying the desires of their flesh and following the flesh's desires and thoughts. It is the place where sin and death and Satan dominate human beings. It is the world of human beings who are the object of God's wrath. It is a world of men who do not know the true and living God and who have no ability to know God. It is a community of human beings united in their disdain for the cross of Christ and their conviction that human thinking and human effort is more than adequate to please god and gain heaven. The society of men who teach one another that God can be appeased and pleased by obedience to religious laws. It is the association of people who delight in human achievement and human goodness. It is this world of human beings that Jesus entered in order to save sinners who comprise it.

8. What does it mean to say that the world has been crucified to me and I to the world through or by means of the cross of Christ? (See Romans 6:1-14 & 7:1-6)

Paul means that the world has as much attraction to him as a corpse would have to any of us. There is not person in this room who would like to live with a corpse. Dead people don't speak to us, nor do they have power over us. Corpses do not fascinate us and they do not influence us. In the same way, the world with its sin and death and lust and ignorance of God and pride in human achievement holds no power over Christians. We are not interested in the world and it has no influence over us. The world of human achievement and human

recognition and human acclaim holds no real interest for us. In the same way we are dead to the world. The world has no interest in hanging out with us. We are as attractive to the world as a corpse. The world is as opposed to us as all people are to corpses. All Christians by virtue of their union with Christ in his death are cut off from the world of human lust and pride and moral performance. We are dead to sin and dead to death and dead to Satan and dead to law keeping as the ground of acceptance with God and as the focus of our new life because we died with Christ. We are not taken up with what the world is taken up with but we are taken up with Christ and his salvation and our new life with him.

Paul did not escape the world, nor does he remain free from the world by his own law keeping. The focus of Paul's attention is not upon what he is doing or not doing, but upon Christ and what he has accomplished by his death. His growth in holiness as a Christian is not due to his paying attention to laws or to his performance but his paying attention to the cross of Christ. He is not free from the control of the world and does not remain free from the world because of anything he did but because of Christ's dying on the cross. He does not boast in the law. He does not boast in himself. He does not boast in anything, except the cross of Christ because it is this cross that has permanently destroyed his ties to this world so that he now lives for the world to come.

9. Think back over the last 24 hours of your life. What have you done in the past 24 hours that you could use when standing before God to prove that he should allow you into heaven? What can you boast in before God your judge?

10. God commanded Abraham and all his descendants to be circumcised in Genesis 17 and then he repeated that command to all Israel in Leviticus 12:3. According to v. 15 why does God not now care about circumcision? What does God care about? Compare to Gen. 17:11-14, Exodus 19:5-6, Gal. 3:10, Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 9:25-26, Romans 2:28-29 & Gal. 5:5-6.

Circumcision stands for the OT law, which promised God's blessing on the condition of perfect obedience and threatened eternal destruction on any deviation from perfect obedience. This law was given for the purpose of revealing the sinfulness of human beings, showing our helplessness to save ourselves and then to reveal the glory of Christ and his salvation. Circumcision was never meant as the condition of entering into God's kingdom but always as a physical symbol of that cutting away of our flesh, our sinful nature that would be accomplished by the death of Christ purchasing the promised Holy Spirit. Or as Paul says it here, the physical act of circumcision is nothing but the new creation to which it points is everything.

Circumcision and all law keeping belong to the old order of things. Now, with the coming of Christ, the new creation has broken into the world in individual lives being made new by the Spirit and by a new community, the church, being established on the earth. The true meaning of the entire OT is being lived out by us now and will be fully experienced at the return of Christ as we boast in the cross of Christ. The law of God has been written on our hearts and so we do not live by external command but by inward desire. We delight to love others and thus fulfill the law by an inward desire, a new creation desire planted in us by the Spirit. We want to do the will of God not because we fear being rejected by God for failure to obey or because we think he will love us more if we do obey. We are a community that is characterized by holiness of life and love towards all men, not by our focusing upon law but by our focusing on the cross of Christ. At the end of all things we will live in the fullness of the glory of Christ and we will always do right and will perfectly love God and one another. We are beginning to experience what that life will be like now while we wait for its fullness. What matters is not whether or not we've been circumcised, or obeyed any law, but whether or not we've been made part of the new creation. We know we are part of that new creation by our faith in Christ or as Paul says here, by our boasting in the cross of Christ.

11. What does it mean to say that a person is the recipient of God's mercy and peace? See Galatians 3:7, 14, 26.

To be a recipient of God's mercy and peace is another way of saying that we have become sons of God and heirs of the promises he made to Abraham and his seed. It is another way of saying we have been justified before God and will be warmly welcomed into his eternal kingdom rather than thrown out into the outer darkness.

12. To whom does God give his mercy and peace?

God gives his mercy and peace to "all who follow this rule" that is, "to the Israel of God." These two clauses identify the same group of people.

13. What rule is he talking about?

It is the rule of not seeking to obey the law but rather the rule of the new creation, which is to have faith in Christ. It is to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, to live by the Spirit and thus not fulfill the desire of the flesh but rather to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. It is to live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.

14. Who then are the people who have always made up the Israel that belongs to God? See Galatians 3:16, 26-29 & Romans 9 & 11:1-6.

Therefore, all who are in Christ, all who follow the rule of the new creation, these and these alone are the Israel of God, the ones to whom all the promises were addressed. The peace and mercy promised by God throughout the OT to his people Israel are only true for all those who are members of God's Israel. God's Israel is compromised of all who are united to Christ by faith. This includes all those who lived prior to Christ who trusted in the Messiah who was to come and all those who live after Christ and trust in the Messiah who has come. The promises of the OT were not made to national, racial Israel but to elect, believing Israel. The OT is a Christian book because Christ fulfilled all that it commands and obtained all that it promises by his cross.

15. According to v. 17 how does Paul view the scars he bears as a result of being persecuted for preaching the gospel?

He calls his scars the "brand-mark" of being owned by Jesus. Like cattle are branded with the sign of the ranch that owns them, so the scars of persecution brand Paul as belonging to Christ. He is boasting in his scars by calling them the brand mark of Christ, the proof that he is part of that new creation and blessed by God along with the Israel of God.

16. How is it possible to boast in these scars? See Romans 5:1-4, 8:18 & 35 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Paul knows that by the death of Christ he has escaped the worst thing that could ever happen to him, eternal torment in hell. And he knows that he has gained the best and greatest thing that could ever be given to a human being, eternal life with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth. The cross at one and the same time shows him what he deserves, death and hell and promises him freedom from what he deserves. Nothing can separate him from the love of Christ but rather all the suffering enables him to glory in the grace and mercy of God in deeper ways. It is not something to be ashamed of or grieve over but what proves that he belongs to Christ and is an heir of heaven. It is the cross of Christ that enables us to not only endure but also to rejoice in our sufferings

17. Have you experienced an ability to boast in your sufferings as a result of your boasting in the cross of Christ?

Christians and Christian churches boast in the cross of Jesus Christ alone because...

- **The cross alone exposes human pride**
- **The cross alone conquers sin and death**
- **The cross alone fulfills what God has promised since the beginning**
- **The cross alone gives power to endure and boast in suffering**