

***The cross of Christ: stumbling block or boast?* (Galatians 6:11–18)**

Crucifixion was a tortuous, humiliating execution. A cross represented pain, disgrace, and death. Therefore, a crucified Christ was a stumbling block to Jews and seemed foolishness to Gentiles. But the cross of Christ was Paul's message, his boast, and the only true gospel. As Paul brings his letter to the Galatians to a conclusion, he focuses once again on these truths.

I. *The cross of Christ: an authentic and emphatic focus (6:11)*

1. *Personal closings in his own handwriting showed authenticity.* See 2 Thess 3:17; 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18. It implied Paul's awareness of his apostolic authority and the divine inspiration of these letters (cf. 2 Peter 3:15–16).
2. *This personal closing in his own handwriting also showed emphasis.* Perhaps the "large letters" was a way of giving emphasis. But the placement of this statement prior to verses 12–18 give them special weight

II. *The cross of Christ: a stumbling block to Judaizers (6:12–13)*

1. *The Judaizers insisted on circumcision to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ.* The cross of Christ is an affront to man-centered religion and so those who preach Christ-crucified will be opposed and even persecuted. Requiring circumcision appeased offended, legalistic Jews and thus removed the threat of persecution.
2. *The Judaizers insisted on circumcision to impress people rather than honor God.* Motivated by their sinful nature they wanted to make an outward show that would please people, thinking that the circumcision of Gentiles would gain them honor from fellow Jews.
3. *The Judaizers insisted on circumcision to put others under the law which they themselves could not keep.* Paul, even when outwardly blameless, failed inwardly (Phil 3:6; Rom 7:7–8) and Peter declared that keeping the law was an unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10). Hence, the Judaizers were being inconsistent and hypocritical to insist on law-keeping, when Jews couldn't keep it.

III. *The cross of Christ: the only worthy boast (6:14–17)*

1. *The cross of Christ: the only worthy "obsession":* To boast is more than bragging, it implies at least a reliance upon the boast (cf. Jer 9:23–24). A person's boast is their life focus, demanding energy and time, giving a sense of significance; in the words of John Stott, an "obsession." Only the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is a worthy focus of life, because the message of the cross declares that God became man to deliver man from sin.
2. *The cross of Christ: the only true disconnect from the world:* Through the cross the world became as something dead and disgraceful to Paul (cf. Phil 3:8), nothing the world offered was worthy of boasting. Similarly, to the world Paul became of no importance and even something despicable. The cross alienates the world and the Christian.
3. *The cross of Christ: the only basis for new life:* Outward rituals like circumcision (or not being circumcised) do not count for anything. The new birth by which one becomes a new creation in Christ is essential, and becoming a new creation is only possible in Christ through His death (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).
4. *The cross of Christ: the only basis to receive peace and mercy:* Only those who place their trust in Christ-crucified and keep in step with His Spirit receive God's peace and mercy. This extends to Jew and Gentile alike, uncircumcised and circumcised. (Though strong differences exist, it appears best to me to consider the "Israel of God" as the believing remnant within ethnic Israel.)
5. *The cross of Christ: the only 'brand' with authority:* Persecution left physical marks on Paul, like the brand on a slave, showing Paul's dedication to Christ. They revealed his genuineness and underscored his appeal to the Galatians to get back on track and stop their troubling missteps.

IV. *The cross of Christ: the demonstration of God's grace to believers (6:18)*

As Paul began, he closes wishing God's grace for them. God's grace in saving sinners is inextricably tied to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1:4; 6:14). And he softens the tone of the letter, reminding them that he considers them brothers, despite their need to hear some hard words.

Like Paul the cross of Christ should be your only boast. Avoid the pitfalls and temptations to which the Judaizers succumbed: seek to honor God, not people, stand firm even if persecuted, reject any thought that your own efforts will save you. Instead live and proclaim Christ crucified.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What false thinking and teaching today has the same errors as that of the Judaizers?
- What "boast" in your life might endanger having the cross of Christ as your only "boast"?
- What can be inferred from this passage to help withstand persecution for Christ?