

Galatians 6:12-18, “12Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. 14May 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. 15Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. 17Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. 18The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.”

. Throughout this letter Paul has developed a contrast between two mindsets. The one is what he has been trying to drive out of the Galatian churches. The other is what he seeks to establish.

. He calls this second mindset a “canon” or a “rule” and says that those who are in sync with this rule receive God.s mercy and enjoy God.s peace.

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. When all is said and done and with the pen is in his own hand, the two things he wants to warn us against most are these:

1. the fear of human opposition and
2. the love of human praise.

. Why are these so dangerous? Because if your mindset is governed by the fear of being rejected and the love of being praised, you cannot embrace Christ crucified.

. Legalists substitute morality for the cross of Christ because the cross puts an end to all pride and lays you open to persecution.

. BUT, there are a host of other ways that these two things will come out in a person.s life!

. But there is another reason legalists reject the cross: it not only humbles us

before God; it also humbles us before men.

. You cannot cherish the Christ of Calvary and at the same time fear what others think of you.

. The Calvary road, though, is where people jeer and spit and laugh at you.

. The result is that no one who is enslaved to the praise of men will join Christ on the Calvary road.

. Carson: “It is possible to „build the church. with such shoddy materials that at the last day you have nothing to show for your labor. People may come, feel „helped,. join in corporate worship, serve on committees, teach Sunday school classes, bring their friends, enjoy „fellowship,. raise funds, participate in counseling sessions and self-help groups, but still not really know the Lord. If the church is being built with large portions of charm, personality, easy oratory, positive thinking, managerial skills, powerful and emotional experiences, and people smarts, but without the repeated, passionate, Spirit-anointed proclamation of „Jesus Christ and him crucified,. we may be winning more adherents than converts...the fundamental nonnegotiable, that without which the church is no longer the church, is the gospel, God’s ‘folly,’ Jesus Christ and him crucified.”¹

. Proverbs 29:25, “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”

. Prior: “For people...who are concerned for their own status, reputation and popularity, authentic [Christianity] is immensely difficult to accept, let alone embrace. The truth that God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness gets through to us very slowly. To be a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men goes against the grain, because it means being constrained to live our life under the critical, often scornful, scrutiny of all and sundry. We tend, in our natural inclinations, to erect a screen around our privacy and our real selves, allowing only those whom we choose to penetrate and see us as we really are.”²

¹ Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, 80.

² David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 66.

14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,

. Exultation in the cross of Christ. That is very strange. Like: exultation in the electric chair. Exultation in the gas chamber. Exultation in the lethal injection. Exultation in the lynching rope.

. The cross is not one essential thing you boast in alongside others. No! There is no boasting except in the cross of Jesus. Nothing alongside it.

. Why is this the case? Because for redeemed sinners, every good thing -indeed every bad thing that God turns for good - was obtained for us by the cross of Christ. Apart from the death of Christ, sinners get nothing but judgment. Apart from the cross of Christ, there is only condemnation.

. Every blessing in life is meant to magnify the cross of Christ.

. Piper, “For redeemed sinners, every good thing—indeed every bad thing that God turns for good—was obtained for us by the cross of Christ. Apart from the

death of Christ, sinners get nothing but judgment. Apart from the cross of Christ, there is only condemnation... Therefore every enjoyment in this life and

the next... is a tribute to the infinite value of the cross of Christ—the burning center of the glory of God. And thus a cross-centered, cross-exalting, cross-saturated life is a God-glorifying life—the only God-glorifying life. All others are wasted.”³

. Mahaney, “Before we can talk about how to live a cross centered life, we have to identify what our life is centered on right now. We’re all living lives centered on something. But is it the right thing? So think about this for a moment. What is the main thing in your life? Let me put it another way. What are you most passionate about? What do you think about when you can think about whatever you want? What do you love to talk about? What defines you? Is it your career? A relationship you’re in? Your hobby? Your political affiliation? A fascination with the latest electronic gadgets? Or maybe your main thing is something that’s clearly others centered. Maybe it’s your ministry, your family. Maybe it’s homeschooling, or a cause like the prolife movement. Good things, all, but not the one thing God says should be the most important—the matter of first importance. „I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you,„ Paul wrote. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:1, 3).⁴

. The mindset of the new creation does not just agree that Christ died for sinners; it glories in the cross. It boasts in the wonder of the cross. It cherishes the benefits of the cross. The cross is the pride and joy of the new creation.

. Piper, “Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain.”⁵

³ John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 51, 55, 59.

⁴ C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2002), 19-20.

⁵ Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 40.

through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

. Since you met Christ, the world has come to look like a despised, worthless, cursed thing. When a thing is crucified, it is rejected and scorned. That’s what became of the world when Paul met Christ.

. But he says it another way, too. He says, “I am crucified to the world.”

. When the world looks at you, it should see nothing very attractive, either. The Christian is to be like a corpse as far as the world is concerned. Christians who believe in self-denial for Christ’s sake appear utterly crazy.

. As far as the world is concerned, a life devoted to a crucified Christ is a throw-away life.

. But don’t miss the main point.

. The only reason Paul mentions his rejection of the world and the world's rejection of him is to accent the value of Christ crucified.

. So when you put your trust in Christ your bondage to the world is broken, and the overpowering lure of the world is broken.

15Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

. What is this “new creation” that counts for everything? The new creation is what exists when the old mindset is crucified with Christ. To use a biblical expression, it is “new birth” (John 3:3), or “newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

. Verse 16 becomes a big freeway sign to tell us how to leave the road of foolishness and get on the road of God's mercy and peace, and stay on it.

. If you are hear this morning and your desire is to absolutely love Christ Jesus with all of your heart and serve him for the rest of your life then it would seem that you have experienced this new creation. The desire to die to self and please God are no longer innate to the human race.

16Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

. The word “rule” is the Greek word “canon”—a measuring stick.

. Paul states that those that follow his lead in this letter (i.e., “this rule”) will receive peace and mercy. If you reject this gospel, you will not receive them.

17Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

. What does Paul mean by “the marks of Jesus”?

o The word marks is literally stigmata.

. 2 Corinthians 11:23-25, “...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea....”

. The “Marks of Jesus” are the wounds and scars he received while in the service of Jesus.

. 2 Corinthians 1:6 says, “If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you

patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.”

o He implies that there is a design and purpose in his sufferings. But whose design? Whose purpose is he making reference to? Satan.s? The men that are persecuting him? No. He is referencing God.s purpose, God.s plan.

18The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.”

. The apostle had begun the Epistle with his customary greeting of Grace (Gal.1:3) and went on to express his astonishment that the Galatians were “so

quickly deserting” the God who had called them “in the grace of Christ” (1:6), and he concludes the letter on the same note.

. So what does the cross look like in today.s world?

She was what psychologists call a „cutter.--and a friend of mine (who.s a pastor) wrote me a letter in which he described an unforgettable counseling session with this troubled young woman.

It was her mother who had asked for the meeting, as my friend explained to me: „She related how her oldest daughter had been in the emergency room four times so far that year. Three times she had cut herself so deeply that stitches were required. Another time she had taken a bottle of pills, survived, and was detained in a psychiatric ward for teenagers. Now back at home, her daughter had cut herself again.. The pastor agreed to meet with the daughter.

The next day, the woman.s daughter walked into his office. My friend.s letter explains how the session developed:

She wore an oversized turtleneck with sleeves that went down almost completely over her hands. After a time of gentle questions and listening, the conversation turned to „cutting.. She said that when she was upset with herself, or upset over the offenses of other people, she cut herself. It seemed to relieve the tension. Cleaning up from the bloody wounds distracted her from the other problems.

She pulled up her sleeve and showed me her arm, and I don.t think I will ever forget the sight. That image stayed in my mind for days and was painful every time I recalled it.

What could I do? All I really knew about biblical counseling was to pray for people and to tell them about the gospel. Very small errors in a person.s understanding of the gospel seemed to result in very big problems in that person.s life.

The pastor pulled out a pad of paper and drew out for the young woman a diagram of the gospel. He agreed with her that blood can indeed „solve the problem.—but pointed out that the blood „did not have to be her own, and that the cutting had already been done on her behalf.. The Spirit brought illumination, and she prayer to [receive Christ].⁶

John Newton

In evil long I took delight, Unawed by shame or fear,
Till a new object struck my sight, And stopp.d my wild career:
I saw One hanging on a Tree In agonies and blood,
Who fix.d His languid eyes on me. As near His Cross I stood.
Sure never till my latest breath, Can I forget that look:
It seem.d to charge me with His death, Though not a word He spoke:
My conscience felt and own.d the guilt, And plunged me in despair:
I saw my sins His Blood had spilt, And help.d to nail Him there.
Alas! I knew not what I did! But now my tears are vain:
Where shall my trembling soul be hid? For I the Lord have slain!

⁶ C.J. Mahaney, *Christ our Mediator: Finding Passion at the Cross* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2004), 40-41.

--A second look He gave, which said, „I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid; I die that thou may.st live..
Thus, while His death my sin displays In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace,It seals my pardon too.
With pleasing grief, and mournful joy, My spirit now is fill.d,
That I should such a life destroy, Yet live by Him I kill.d!

. Carson, “It is at least possible that we are the generation of believers who will destroy much of historic Christianity from within--not, in the first instance, by rancid unbelief, but by raising relatively peripheral questions to the place where, functionally, they displace what is central. And what shall the end of this drift be?”⁷

. Barrett: “We never move on from the cross of Christ—only into a more profound understanding of the cross. Paul does not have a simple gospel of the cross for babes, and a different wisdom-gospel for the mature.”⁸

. Carson: “Part of the reason why Paul.s stance seems alien to many of us is that we have unwittingly become more like Corinthian Christians [or the Galatian Judaizers] than like Pauline (that is, biblical!) Christians. Many of us are well-to-do and comfortable, with little incentive to live in vibrant anticipation of Christ.s return. Our desire for the approval of the world often outstrips our desire for Jesus. „Well done!. on the last day. The proper place to begin to change this deep betrayal of the gospel is at the cross—in repentance, contrition, and renewed passion not only to make the gospel of the crucified Messiah central in all our preaching and teaching, but in our lives and the lives of our leaders as well.”⁹

⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages From 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 25-26.

⁸ C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 69.

⁹ Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, 108.

Application

. Do you “glory” in the cross of Christ?

. Thanksgiving in and for all things?

. Do you fear what others think? At work, do you talk about the gospel? No church, but Christ? If not, why not? Is it fear of others? A desire for the praise of men?

. Question: How can we tell if the message of Galatians is bearing fruit in our lives?

. Answer: The legalistic mindset that uses morality as an expression of pride and fears human rejection will be on the wane.¹⁰

. I will attempt to summarize some of this with three contrasts between one mindset I'll refer to as "self-exaltation" (whether legalist or libertine) and the other the mindset of "Christ-exaltation."

. First, the self-exalters desire to make a good show in religious things (6:12) because they crave the applause of key people.

. But Christ-exalters regard the pleasure of human applause as a pile of garbage compared to the pleasure of knowing Christ; and so they are not men-pleasers (Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 6:6).

. Second, self-exalters fear persecution and rejection from men more than they cherish the cross of Christ (6:12).

. But Christ-exalters expect and accept persecution from a world that crucified Christ (5:11).¹¹ Christ-exalters don't fear men. Christ is their refuge and shield and great reward.

. Third, self-exalters regard outward forms (like circumcision or other religious activities) as the essence of religious life (6:13). Self-exalters can manage to clean up the outside while leaving the root of pride untouched, and so religion and morality are useful outlets for their uncrucified self-reliance.

. But Christ-exalters regard an inner new creation as the essence of religious life. They know that for Christ to be king, they must die and a brand new creation of humility has to replace pride and self-reliance.

¹⁰ See John Piper, "Christ Crucified, Our Boast: Education for Exultation: In the Cross," February 13, 2000, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/7_Christ_Crucified_Our_Boast/.

¹¹ In fact, they say with Paul, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

