

## THE BELIEVER'S ONLY BOAST

### Galatians 6:11-18

We've experienced a lot of contrast in Galatians between Law and grace, works and faith, and the flesh and Spirit. The whole book it seems has been one giant contrast from beginning to end. But where is distinction made? At what point do we draw the line between each contrast or at what place in time historically was the shift made from the Law to the New Covenant blessing? Well, in Galatians 4:4 we saw the shift was made at the cross, at just the right time, as God the Father ordained it. At the cross, is where we were redeemed and it's to the cross that we keep looking back to. In fact, the words "**cross**" and "**crucified**" come up more in Galatians than any other New Testament epistle. To the new believers who had been distracted by the Judaizers and were focusing back on works of the Law, Paul said, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?" (Gal. 3:1). He directs their attention back to the cross! It's like he grabs them by chin and says look up! It was on the cross, publicly portrayed, lifted high for all men to see, that Christ was crucified. Does that mean anything to you anymore? Do you understand the cross?

In 3:13 we learn that, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us," but where did He become that curse? By being hung on the tree that is the cross. "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree," (Dt. 21:23). In Colossians 2:14 we learn that it was on the cross where He nailed that hostile document of the Law too. Where was power of the sin nature with its passion and desires broken? It was crucified with Christ and its power broken on the cross; it's where we died to the Law (Gal. 5:24; 2:20; Rom. 7): "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." How did Paul see himself? "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Where did He give himself up for us? On the cross. Paul even considered his gospel message 'the message of the cross' (1 Cor. 1:18). And by faith in Him and His sacrifice not only did Paul understand one was saved but is also the way to live. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ and we primarily live by grace through in Christ based on the cross and our union with Him.

You see, the cross is **central**. The cross is also **exclusive**. You either accept it or reject it. There is no straddling the fence – certainly many try like the Judaizers – but they don't understand it because the Bible won't allow you to partially accept it for your salvation. **It is either nothing to you or it is everything to you.** You either think it totally sufficient or not. Either you're a critic of it or a claimer of it. An enemy of it or a friend of it. You either boast in it or you boast in your works. The question we're left with is: **Which side of the cross are you on? What do you boast in?** Do you accept that Jesus died for your sins, was buried and rose again so that whosoever believes has everlasting life? Do you trust His work? Or do you still trust your own goodness, own works. One of the reasons why I chose this letter to study is because it should establish us in the gospel and free us from slavery to works. Has it done that? Have you accepted or been reassured of the sufficiency of the cross and your freedom from the Law? A lot of folks today want to blend the two, but you can't. **Which side of the cross are you on?**

By living by the works of the Law, the Judaizers were rejecting the cross and were condemned for it. Paul said let them be accursed if they want to distort the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul exposes these guys.

#### **I. THE BOASTERS OF WORKS: JUDAIZERS (VV. 11-13)**

These guys were boasting in the flesh of their own works and ministry but...

❖ **Paul wants us to make sure we're boasting in the right thing! Paul's personal handwriting for emphasis and authenticity. (v. 11)**

Back when Paul wrote this it was common for people to use a scribe or secretary (the big word is *amanuensis*) to write their letters. That was typical. Paul used men like *Sosthenes* (1 Corinthians), *Timothy* (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon) *Silvanus* (and *Timothy* for 1 and 2 Thessalonians) and *Tertius* (Romans)<sup>1</sup> to write the majority of the letters he would send but would conclude the letters himself or have some sort of greeting with his own handwriting. And in verse 11, I think what we see here, is Paul taking the “pen” from the secretary who was likely writing for him and writes himself. He wants to add a **personal** touch to the letter to **authenticate** it and to **emphasize** what he is saying here so he takes the pen.

**As for the largeness of letters** he's writing with: **One**, it could be true that he had an eye problem or impaired vision and he couldn't see very well so what do you do when you can't see very well? You write larger, naturally. Galatians 4:15 is often used of proof of that along with how he talked about some thorn in the flesh. But it could also be that his handwriting just isn't as good or neat as the secretary's writing. He could also be using a large, capital letters to add emphasis like how we do when we want something to stand out. WE ALSO USE **bold** and *italics*. Whatever it is, we know he is emphasizing importance of what he's about to say, getting their attention again with this abrupt change in writing if they've drifted off. I see him saying to his secretary, “Just let me see that thing,” and taking the pen, sitting down and writing himself with a little wore-out agitation, not caring about how neat his handwriting is and maybe even using capital letters and he's saying look: make sure you're boasting in the right thing.

**A. Work-Boaster's Misplaced Concern (v. 12, 13)**

They were concerned about all the wrong things. They don't really care about the truth or the believers. It's just a religious show for them. To put on a good showing is to put on a “good face”. They're pretenders, making a show of their religion. They're about numbers and money. They want reason to boast. They care more about fleecing the flock than they do feeding it – all worldly desires of the flesh. These guys are driven by their flesh. And you sense Paul's sarcasm here because the thing they're concerned about, pleasing the flesh, is exactly what Paul has been teaching against! Paul hasn't said anything nice about the flesh. There's nothing good or positive or profitable about it. And yet, they're so deceived that their main concern is nurturing it. We need to remember to be concerned about the things of the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 26).

**B. The Work-Boaster's Cowardice (v. 12)**

The reason for their insistence and constant compulsion for these new believers to be circumcised is so that they won't be persecuted for the cross of Christ. As long as these Judaizers compromise by teaching grace AND circumcision or works of the Law, they won't be persecuted by the Jewish Zealots. They fear men more than they fear God and so they're willing to alter the message to make it please men in the religious world. They're man pleasers, which we looked at in chapter 1:10. Paul made it clear he isn't a man pleaser but these false teachers are and they care more about their physical life and comfort than they do the purity of the gospel and getting the message right. You can preach legalism all day long in most churches today and not get in trouble, but the moment you start preaching that man can't earn salvation and that the cross is the only way to eternal life – **that Jesus Christ is the only name given among men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12) – then you'd better watch out! The religious world **can handle** other religious competitors but if you come along and say faith in Christ is the only way, you're in hot water with them. The religious world likes the idea that

“all roads lead to Heaven” and “we all just worship the same God” and we all need to work our way there with a variety of works. As long as you altar the message so that its ecumenical like that, accepting some legalism or desires of the flesh, they’re happy. The world and religious world will tolerate a watered-down Christianity like that! And society’s constantly putting pressure on Christianity to water down the purity and exclusivity of the gospel. If the pressure tactics don’t work and you don’t water it down, then what do they do? They take you to court and sue you. Paul reveals that these Judaizers are cowards, preaching legalistic works out of fear of being persecuted for preaching pure grace. A lot of folks today are the same way. They won’t come to Christ or leave their religious systems because they don’t want to be ridiculed by their religious friends and family or they’d lose their business. **But if you’re going to follow Christ, let’s remember from chapter 1, you can’t be a man-pleaser.**

### C. **The Work-Boaster’s Hypocrisy (v. 13)**

Paul says those who are circumcised and are trying to compel you to be circumcised in accordance with the Law, don’t even keep the Law themselves! They’re hypocrites. Just like the Pharisees, Jesus said, “have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men.” You know, we studied hypocrisy a bit in this book, looking at Peter’s rebuke in chapter 2 and in chapter 3 we saw how everyone who lives by the works of the Law is under a curse and must live 100% totally by the Law. Law-keepers always end up as hypocrites because no one keeps the Law perfectly. Let’s remember from this book what we learned in chapter 3, that you can’t cherry-pick the Law. If you want to be justified by the works of the Law you have to do it all perfectly from birth until death like Christ. The whole purpose of it was to humble men and point them to Christ. James said, “Whoever keeps the whole Law, and yet stumbles at one point is guilty of breaking it all,” (Jas 2:10). **Don’t cherry-pick the Law. Let’s remember that the purpose of it is to direct men to Christ when they realize they can’t keep it.**

These Judaizers were boasting in things that appealed to the pride of man but had little or no concern for what Christ did on the cross. But authentic Christianity majors in the cross and boasts in it.

### II. **THE BOASTERS IN THE CROSS: TRUE BELIEVERS (VV. 14-18)**

True believers only boast in the cross. They don’t believe in themselves and their ability to save themselves. They believe in Christ. “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The cross was everything to Paul and I hope it is to you too. It’s where we go every time we doubt our salvation, are tempted to sin and need reminded we’re dead to sin. It’s where we go for grace, hope and rejoicing. Where we go to find boldness to approach God through prayer; where we go when we doubt His love; where we go to learn how to be generous and live sacrificially for others. It is Christ on the cross that we put our faith in (and the resurrection that convinces us). I mean, if you understand the message of the cross and what God is saying through it to man, you cannot boast in anything else. **The cross humbles a man’s pride as he sees he can’t offer a better sacrifice.** Romans 3:27 says, “Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” **It softens his heart at the same time as he sees God’s sacrificial love for him.** Eph. 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” The cross removes boasting in anything but it. Nothing else matters. Nothing else holds any merit before God. Why would you try and earn His love anymore when it’s clear that

He loves you more than anyone else ever could? He died for you. Circumcision, uncircumcision – they hold no value. No importance. What matters is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Paul says, “When people think of me, I want them to think of me as a man who refuses to boast in anything but the cross.” Our only hope and only standing before God is based on that work on the cross.

**A. The Cross-Boaster’s Position (vv. 14, 15)**

The cross also gives us a new position to understand in regards to our relationship with the world. “The world has been crucified to me and I to the world.”

**1. The believer is crucified to the world.**

What he’s talking about when he says world **the fallen, Satanic world system that is constantly seeking to alienate men from Christ.**<sup>2</sup> And that includes fancy looking religious systems. Just because something looks sacred and fancy, does mean it’s drawing people closer to God. It’s probably alienating them from Him. Satan and the other fallen angels disguise themselves as angels of light. They have a lot of religious attractions that they use to alienate men from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11). Many of us grew up in churches where men are drawn more to the smells and bells and trinkets and traditions than they are to Christ and the cross. Those churches are world system churches. When you understand the cross, those smells and bells lose their luster. What once seemed so comforting and so worthwhile, are now just dead works to you. Many of the world’s attractions also lose their significance. The things that world tends to hold so dear, like fame and fortune, tend to lose power in your life once you understand you have everything you need in Christ. What you used to be deeply interested in, you may no longer care about, and if you do, you have a whole new motivation for doing them. F.F. Bruce wrote, “For the one who makes the cross his supreme, indeed his solitary, ground of boasting all the accepted standards of social life are necessarily turned upside down; a total ‘transvaluation of values’ has taken place. Not only does he no longer know any one by ‘worldly standards’; he has made a radical reassessment of everything in light of the cross.”<sup>3</sup> Everything is reassessed. It changes your values and you no longer live for the world and its acceptance, but for the Lord.

**2. The believer is new creation.**

Circumcision and uncircumcision don’t matter. What matters is whether or not you’re born again and have received the Spirit of God in your life and been changed on the inside. He’s not interested in external conformity but a inward renewal and transformation of the heart by the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” He’s got a new nature, the a divine nature to live by, and a new perfectly justified position before God. A new worldview.

**B. The Cross-Boaster’s Peace (v. 16)**

And Paul says, “And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

**1. The ‘rule’ in verse 16:**

What is this “rule”? The word is actually the word “kanon” from where we get the term canon of Scripture. The 66 books are considered the canon. The 66 books are considered the complete standard measurement for faith and practice. So by rule, he’s referring to a certain standard or measuring rod – kind of like a yardstick or ruler. Well, the Judaizers were busying measuring everyone up by their standard of the Law and law-keeping but Paul is saying that the new standard we look to is the new creation standard which pretty much sums up everything he’s been teaching. We’re saved by

grace through faith in Christ and walk by the Spirit – it’s an overall appeal to living by faith and that which is genuinely spiritual; opposed to works.

**2. The ‘them’ in verse 16:**

To those who will walk by the new rule and order their lives around it, Paul says that’s a life that will know God’s peace and mercy, which are things hard to come by under the Law. But then he also makes a distinction here between two groups. Them and the Israel of God. “And” or “even” is the word ‘kai’ which is translated the great majority of the time as ‘and’. “Peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” or “even upon the Israel of God.” And this is where we get into the most disputed verse in Galatians.

**3. The ‘Israel of God’ in verse 16:**

Who is the ‘Israel of God’? Many take this to mean that the Church is the true Israel of God or spiritual Israel – basically saying the Church is the new Israel and has replaced Israel – known as *Replacement Theology*. As a new believer, I originally had that mindset because I had an NIV study Bible that militated against any other view. Actually the latest translation of the NIV (2011) removed *and* or *even* and said “*to*” the Israel of God. And that’s definitely biased. Their not translating anymore, but interpreting. But I will be honest and say that in light of the context of Galatians I understand why many take such a view with the talk about believers being sons of Abraham. But I would say that, if you start spiritualizing (allegorizing) the Church being Israel and the sole recipients of the covenant promises, it really messes things up. You can really make a mess of God’s future faithfulness to Israel. If that’s what Paul means by this, this is literally the only place the word Israel means anything other than Israel. And what really changed my mind was just studying OT prophecy and covenants seeing how much is yet to take place with the nation of Israel and how incredibly **detailed** it is – I mean, you would have to be out of your mind to try and spiritualize those prophecies for the Church or even the New Heaven and Earth. So I’ll just say this: if you believe the Church is the “Israel of God” in or take this as a title for the Church, please just leave room in your eschatology for a future restoration of Israel.

God’s not done with Israel and has a future plan for them. He is still working with them even now. God has been preserving them since their dispersion and has always been saving a remnant of Jews even to this day (Rom. 11:5) and as of May 14, 1948 they’re even back in the land as a nation and that’s an unheard of miracle in itself. Romans reveals that when the fullness of Gentiles has come in, God is going to show them **mercy** next. That’s their greatest need right now, is mercy, because right now they’ve been hardened by Him in judgment for rejecting the Messiah. Actually the literal translation of this verse seems to be “peace upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” It’s a little awkward but peace seems more directed as going to “them” who walk the rule and the “mercy” more directed to Israel. And that makes sense. It lines right up with Romans 11:28-32 says, “From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of their fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are **irrevocable**. For just as you were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.” So mercy is coming for Israel. If you just read the Bible literally, it lines right up. If every time you see the word Israel in the NT, and you take it as meaning Israel, it works. So *I don’t believe he’s equating the Church with Israel here* or even using it as a Church title but with all the covenant and Gentile talks he’s **addressing “the elephant in the room” like he does in Romans 9-11**: the elephant is Israel. “What about Israel? Is God done with Israel? How can we trust God to be faithful to us if He’s given up on Israel?” And since this book is like a mini book of Romans, it’s helpful to keep turning to Romans to get more fully-developed explanations of the teachings here.

In Romans 9-11 we learn He’s not done with them, He’s even saving a remnant of Jews now, but it’s only the Jews who accept the Messiah and boast in the cross. I take it that **the Israel of God are those Jews**

**who accept Christ and boast in the cross**, who have been shown mercy by God despite the hardening judgment. But I also see it hinting at the nation as a whole when the future restoration comes. When is that? Well, Jesus said for now their house is desolate until something happens. “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me **until** you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Mt. 23:39) – so until they acknowledge Him as their Messiah during the Great Tribulation, which is also known as what? **Jacob’s Trouble**. Israel’s Trouble.

So Paul’s reference to Israel here in Galatians is referring to believing Jews in the Church but has a prophetic touch to it for future ethnic Israel in the Millennial Kingdom at Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. I think Paul is revealing his intense desire to see mercy come to his kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:3). It also helps to do away with any potential Anti-Semitism (Jewish hatred) that could arise from this letter because let’s face it: this hasn’t exactly been the most pro-Jewish, pro-Israeli book. But I think Paul wants us to know **with all this talk of the Gentiles partaking of the covenant blessings in Galatians, that God’s still faithful to his covenant with Israel even though their fulfillment in the covenant has been put on hold** mainly until the Second Coming and Millennial Kingdom age (Rev. 20). I can almost picture Paul here holding out a natural olive branch<sup>4</sup> to them saying, “Come, get connected back into the root of the promise of Abraham. Accept Christ as your Messiah.” He’s still holding out a lifeline for them. Romans 11:11 says, “I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? **May it never be!** But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, **how much more will their fulfillment be!**” He is faithful to them and to us.

For more information on the Israel of God subject I recommend S. Lewis Johnson’s work called “**PAUL AND “THE ISRAEL OF GOD”: AN EXEGETICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL CASE-STUDY**” which is available at The Master’s Seminary Website url: <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj20c.pdf>.

### **C. The Cross-Boaster as Persecuted Preacher (vv. 17-18)**

Paul says, “From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.” What marks is he talking about? All of the welted scars he’s is covered in from being persecuted for preaching the gospel. He said in 2 Corinthians 11: 23 “[I was] beaten time without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was stoned.” Paul was covered in scars for preaching Christ. This word for marks, ‘stigmata’ could be used of cattle brands or slave brands. His scars are more like brand marks giving evidence that he belongs to Christ, he is genuine, he’s not a coward and is not lying. The real proof of a genuine preacher of the gospel isn’t the mark of circumcision but the scars of persecution. But notice his persecution hasn’t made him bitter. Again I think he’s still holds out the branch for the Jews who beat him just like Christ died for those who did the same to He. Paul began the letter with, “**Grace** to you.” He explains **grace** throughout the letter. And he ends the letter with grace: “The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.”

Have you accepted His grace?

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<sup>1</sup> David A. DeSilva, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), 502.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Woods, *Two Contrasting Motives (Gal. 6:11-18)*, [www.spiritandtruth.org](http://www.spiritandtruth.org), accessed 3 October 2019.

<sup>3</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament: Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 271.

<sup>4</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, *PAUL AND “THE ISRAEL OF GOD”: AN EXEGETICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL CASE-STUDY*, page 47, <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj20c.pdf>