

My Only Boast
Galatians 6:11-18
Series: No Other Gospel #27

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Take your copy of the Scriptures and join me in Galatians 6 – Galatians chapter 6.

We come to the end this morning of the Magna Carta or the Declaration of Independence of the New Testament. The book of Galatians has the liberty of the sinner through the work of Christ on the Cross as its theme. The cross or the idea of crucifixion is mentioned in this short letter a total of 7 different times. You could say that the crux of the letter is the crux of Jesus Christ. This was the theme from the earliest words of greeting in chapter 1, and this is the repeated and rehearsed theme in these closing verses which are the text for this morning. This is true because the Galatians needed this corrective of Gospel truth. They were in danger. A theological F-5 tornado was barreling toward them, and they were still mindlessly playing in the rain. They were toying with another gospel, which was no gospel at all. And so, one verse built upon another the argument has been carefully and forcefully crafted – the only hope for the lost sinner is that they might be justified before God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. What we see in our text this morning is that if you know and believe that Gospel you cannot help but boast in the Cross of Christ alone. This is what justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone produces – boasting in the Cross of Christ alone. And so that is what we seek to do this morning – to boast in the Cross of Christ alone.

As Paul ends his letter to these theologically wavering churches he gives them one more clear contrast between flesh-dependent, man-centered, law-keeping religion and Christ-dependent, Cross-centered, salvation by faith alone. He shows them one more time what it looks like to boast in the flesh – and what it produces. And he shows them the superior reality of boasting in the Cross of Christ Jesus our Lord. And so I seek to do the same this morning. To expose the absurdity of boasting in the flesh and the eternal joy of boasting in the Cross. Paul ends his letter with these words – starting in verse 11.

Did you notice how personal this final section is? Paul begins with a personal validation by drawing their attention to the large letters which he is using to write with. It is hard to know, since we don't have the original letter in front of us, if Paul was just writing this final section in large letters or if he had written the whole letter that way. The verb could mean either, but it was a common practice for Paul to use a secretary to write his letters while he dictated them, and then to put his signature at the end in the form of a personal greeting which was in much larger handwriting. I personally think that is what is happening here. Paul has used an amanuensis, or a personal secretary, to write down the rest of the letter, and here at the end he addresses them with the pen in his own hand. His writing is larger for the purpose of emphasis and authenticity. He wanted them to know that this letter was from him – which was important

because there were many people traveling throughout the churches claiming to speak for Paul. These churches needed to know that this letter came from him – and so these final words are the proof. Notice its personal nature as well in the contrast between himself and the false teachers. This has been the neon thread which has stuck out throughout the letter. In every passage he is refuting them by expositing the truth of the one and only Gospel of Jesus Christ. This continues here in his final words. One last time, a few more words, one last distinction is drawn. The false teachers – these law-toting, law-preaching false teachers – were glorying or boasting in the flesh. But Paul – he was not boasting in the flesh – but in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. I wonder – where is your boast this morning? By this I simply mean – what is your obsession? What provides your confidence? What puts wind in your sails? What lifts your body out of bed in the morning? What compels your obedience? What fuels your sacrifice? What dominates your thoughts, your actions, your words? What permeates your thinking at every level and saturates your every belief and informs your every hope? What is your obsession? What is your boast?

There are only two options really. You either boast in the flesh or you boast in the Cross. This is obviously pertaining to the spiritual realm in which you stand before the thrice holy God. What is your boast there? But beyond that, it filters its way down from the highest and most important part of your life to the very smallest aspect. When pricked by the pressures of this life – do you bleed fleshly blood, or crossly blood? If we could smell your spiritual breath would it wreek of self-dependent flesh-enabled religion, or would it have the sweet aroma of the freedom and forgiveness of the Cross of Christ? How would you know? Well, of the many things this text does, it points us to the great contrast between boasting in the flesh and boasting in the Cross. So, let's look at them both with an eye to discern which one we are. We have a lot of ground to cover for both of them as well, so take a deep breath and get ready to sprint.

I. Boasting in the Flesh

a. *Seeks to Save Face* – vs. 12a & 12c

- i. Boasting in the flesh first evidences itself in that it seeks to save face. This is what Paul describes right away in verse 12. He speaks ambiguously of his opponents as “those” and “they” and “those who are circumcised” in verse 13. He is speaking of the Judaizers – the law-preachers who were telling these Gentile believers that they needed to add some law-keeping to their Gospel faith. Jesus was good, but he wasn't enough. They obviously weren't that bold and in your face about it, but that was the essence of their message.
- ii. They were preaching a man-centered, flesh-empowered, Law-saturated message. They were doing this Paul says to save face. That is the idea of that first phrase. They want to make a good showing. They have others in their mind as they gaze upon their spiritual man in the mirror. They apply their spiritual makeup in just the right way so they can save face because they are ultimately concerned with how they appear before others. When you are boasting in the flesh you don't care so much about truth as you do about respectability. Flesh boasting has as its goal being presentable and

applauded by others. This is why it is impossible to boast both in the flesh and in the cross. The Cross will not allow you to be applauded by others. The message of salvation being necessary because of our great sinfulness, and of salvation being possible only through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is not a message which is going to win us friends in the world – either the religious world or the atheistic world. Mankind hates the Cross of Jesus – not because it belittles and demeans Jesus, but because it belittles and demeans us. The truth of the Cross demands that we own our sinful depravity and our complete condemnation before God. The truth of the Cross demands that we own our inability to save ourselves, and our need for a Savior outside of us.

- iii. This is not now and has never been a popular and appreciated message. So, if you are boasting in the flesh, you will either abandon, or modify this message. The false teachers in Galatia modified the message by adding flesh dependent law-keeping to the work of Christ upon the Cross. This makes the Cross palatable to the human psyche because it takes away our inability. Therefore – it saves face. It keeps our human pride intact while still keeping some semblance of the Gospel.
- iv. Listen – this is what all religion in the world is today – it is man-centered, man dependent, and man-pleasing. It is seeking to save face and make a good showing of mankind's work to save himself. Whether it is a cult which abandons any mention of Christ, or it is atheism, which is the pinnacle of Gospel-denying face-saving, or it is so many churches who gather this morning and sing songs and read Scriptures which point to Gospel truth while then preaching a man-dependent system of works righteousness.
- v. Notice that this saving of face, or this putting forth a good showing is coupled at the end of verse 12 with avoiding persecution. These Judaizers were taking the expedient route. They were being culturally sensitive and they were contextualizing the Gospel by robbing it of its powerful truth. They were more consumed with pleasing the crowds and being affirmed by those they deemed important than they were concerned with being truthful no matter the cost. This is what boasting in the flesh looks like. This is what it means to be consumed with flesh-oriented realities. It looks like abandoning truth to save face and avoid persecution.

b. Forces Law on Others – vs. 12b

- i. It also looks like someone who forces law on others. That is the middle part of verse 12. These flesh-boasters were law-promoters. They were not content to be law-dependent themselves – they had to go to great lengths to force that law on others. Because they are flesh-dependent and flesh-oriented they demand that others keep the same law they are seeking to keep.
- ii. This is what we saw in chapter 2 when Paul retells how he refused to have Titus circumcised even though he was a Gentile. And then he

recounts how Peter removed himself from eating with Gentiles when he saw the circumcision party – essentially saying to the Gentiles that they needed to be circumcised in order to have full and true fellowship. Legalism demands company. Boasting in the flesh demands that we have others who can applaud our efforts and put a stamp of approval on our law-keeping. It also desires to do that for others – to tell them whether or not they have achieved enough of their own righteousness to be a part of in-crowd. This is boasting in the flesh.

c. *Produces Hypocrisy – vs. 13a*

- i. Boasting in the flesh also produces hypocrisy. The first part of verse 13 tells us that the legalists were themselves lawless. They touted the law and they pushed that law on others, but they themselves were not full law keepers. This is because they cannot be full law keepers. This is one of the central truths of this book. Legalism is so deadly because for legalism to actually make us righteous we must keep the whole law, not just certain points of the law. If you accept circumcision as grounds for justification before God, then you are bound by the whole rest of the law – as Paul has said in 5:3.
- ii. This automatically produces hypocrites. It puts us in a position which is impossible. We are not capable of full law-keeping, therefore we are not capable of justification by the law. So, if you are going to boast in the flesh and act like there is hope in fleshly efforts to win God's justifying judgment, you are set up for failure. This is exactly what Jesus denounced in the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. He pronounced 7 woes upon them all the tune of this statement – “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” This is the essence of Pharisee life – the exaltation of self, and in the end it will lead to their humbling. This is what the boaster in the flesh is all about as well. They are inherently hypocritical as they exalt themselves to the supposed keeping of a standard they have no hope of attaining!
- iii. Notice how this flows out of the first characteristic of boasting in the flesh. If you are seeking to save face with others, then you will immediately cross the road on the crosswalk of hypocrisy. It will not matter anymore what you truly are, but only what other perceive you to be. That is boasting in the flesh!

d. *Boasts in Fleshly Converts – vs. 13b*

- i. This boasting in the flesh is also seen in that it boasts in fleshly converts. As they force their legalism on others, they themselves rejoice when they win someone over to their miserable system. So, the end of verse 13 says that these Judaizers are seeking to boast in the flesh of others. This is a pretty graphic picture when it is rightly linked to circumcision. They were seeking to perform the rite of circumcision so that they could boast in the flesh of another who had been brought into their legalistic system.

ii. Because their system is dependent upon outward religious works it is a system which is to the praise of men. It was outward and external, therefore it was men who accomplished it and men who should be praised for it. This is all that flesh-oriented, man-centered, works-based religion can do. It can't offer any true boasting in God because God has had nothing to do with it. If legalism works then the Cross of Jesus is completely unnecessary. If one can be justified before God through flesh-dependent law keeping then there was no true reason for the cross of Christ. This means that those who rely upon flesh-dependent law keeping are those who only have the option of boasting in themselves. They may hedge that boasting in with empty platitudes about God, but in reality they can only boast in themselves. And in boasting in themselves, they will relish all the more another person to affirm their own greatness. As Jesus said to the Pharisees – “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.” (Mt. 23:15).

c. *Ends in Absurdity – vs. 15a*

- i. The last characteristic of boasting in the flesh is that it ends in absurdity. It is ridiculous in its genesis, in its process, and in its conclusion. Look down at verse 15. These legalists can keep up the shame of works-based righteousness, but Paul is going to take the fast lane to the truth. Here is the unalterable, undeniable, eternally relevant and eternally unchangeable truth – For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision. The word “counts” is not in the original. The phrase literally reads – For neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision. In other words – it doesn't matter before God. Your eternal salvation is not determined by whether or not you have met this initiatory requirement of the Law of Moses.
- ii. If you are going to make it something, and thereby boast in what the flesh can accomplish – then you must know that it all ends in absurdity. What you think you are accomplishing you are actually not accomplishing at all. Like the many who will stand before the Lord on Judgment Day and say – but Lord – I cast out demons in your name, and I did great things in your name, and I followed the Law in your name – and He will say – depart from me – I never knew you!
- iii. Is there anything more hopeless or more truly absurd than placing your hope in something to save you, only to find out in the end of it all that it cannot save you?
- iv. Fitness guru, Jack LaLanne was a pioneer of healthy living and regular daily exercise long before it was a national obsession. Famous not only for his television exercise programs, chain of fitness studios, and sponsorship of the Jack LaLanne Power Juicer, he also gained notoriety for some pretty memorable fitness stunts. At the age of 43, he performed more than 1,000

push-ups in 23 minutes on the "You Asked For It" television show. At 60, he swam from Alcatraz Island to Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco while handcuffed, shackled and towing a boat. At 70, he performed a similar stunt in Long Beach harbor. As late as 2006, he was still keeping up his own personal exercise regimen, making television appearances and granting interviews. Notably, he remarked, "I can't afford to die. It would wreck my image." Similarly, he stated, "If I died, people would say 'Oh look, Jack LaLanne died. He didn't practice what he preached.'" Well, in 2011, the reality he had vested so much confidence in as his savior from death turned out to be an absurd trust. At the age of 96 his body did what every other human body has done – it wilted under the power of sin and was overtaken in death. I'm guessing in the weakness of his final moments he wondered about whether or not he had given his life to an absurd thing, because in the end it didn't really save him. This is the end of legalism to the one who boasts in the flesh. In the end it proves unable to save and thereby becomes completely and eternally vain!

- v. So, do you see any of this boasting in the flesh in you? Are you obsessed with saving face in front of others – particularly in the religion category? Is your presence here this morning nothing more than an attempt at staying in the good opinion of others? Is your sacrificial service infused with the purpose of showing off to others how righteous you really are? Are you forcing this law of yours on others? Remember that this can come out as either legalism or license. You can force the rule of legalism on someone, or what seems to be the new norm for the church of the 21st Century you can force your license on them. You can presume yourself to be more spiritual because you are free to live however you please and others are not – and you can do it all in the name of Christ. This is boasting in the flesh just as much as legalism is. Does your life display hypocrisy at every turn? We are all hypocrites in some way because we are sinners saved by grace and in process of change. But is hypocrisy your address? Is this the defining quality of your life?
- vi. Thankfully there is another option. We can be like Paul and not like the Judaizers. We can glory in the Cross rather than in the flesh.

II. Boasting in the Cross

a. *Rejoices in Exclusivity – vs. 14a*

- i. Boasting in the Cross is what this epistle has been about. Paul exalts the exclusivity of Christ at every turn in contrast to the legalists. This is the first mark of one who is boasting in the Cross – they rejoice in exclusivity. That is what Paul does in verse 14. He refuses to boast or glory or rejoice in anything else. He of all people could boast of his religious background, his perfect record as it pertains to the Law, even his unique pedigree as a Hebrew of the Hebrews. But he refuses to boast in any accomplishment of the flesh because he knows the outcome of that business. He knows that

there is but one hope before the thrice Holy God of Heaven – and it is not found in man-centered, flesh-driven effort. It is Jesus Christ alone!

- ii. And because this answer to our sin-problem is found fully in God, then our boasting will be fully in God. We will boast only in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an incredibly strange statement that Paul is making here. We are desensitized to it because for the last 16 or 17 hundred years the Church has been using the Cross as its main symbol of recognition. But in Paul's day, it was taboo to even say the word in polite company in Roman culture. Instead of speaking of the "crux" or the "cross", they would use a euphemism to describe this execution stake and they would say "hang him on the unlucky tree." And unlucky it was indeed. But it was completely necessary because there was no other way to secure our temptation. Christ had to be condemned for us so that he who knew no sin could be made sin for us, and we could then be made the righteousness of God in Him.
- iii. There is the constant temptation in the church to take the Cross and add to it. We add our own good works, or we add some religious ritual, or we add some moral stand, or we add some freedom of expression of our liberty, or we add some theological understanding – we are constantly wanting to put support beams up underneath our Savior's cross. But this cross is eternally sturdy. It needs no supporting arms of our own good works. Jesus willingly and fully bore the weight of the sin of all who would believe in Him. No other payment needs to be made.
- iv. The exclusivity of the Cross is not just in its singularity of salvation – there is no other way. But it is also in its boast. You cannot boast truly in the Cross and in some other human dependent thing. It is the cross alone or the works of mankind alone – you cannot boast in them both. The second you boast in something other than the Cross, you have negated your need for the Cross. So, you will know if you are boasting in the cross if you are rejoicing in its exclusivity, or if that exclusivity causes you heartburn because it means that others have it wrong. Paul makes it clear – he will boast in nothing else.

b. *Realizes Substitution – vs. 14b*

- i. Boasting in the cross also realizes substitution. At the center of Christ's cross work is the reality that He is dying for us – in our place – as our substitute. This has also been apparent every time that Paul has talked about the cross work of Christ, and it is also entirely obvious here in verse 14. So Paul boasts in the exclusivity of the Cross, and then he follows that immediately with the substitution – or you might say – the identification of the Cross. This Cross work of Christ was so significantly in Paul's place that Paul can say in verse 15 he is crucified to the world and the world to him. Christ on the Cross is not merely some example for us to follow of a loving self-sacrificial life. His death is not just the expression of God forgiving us – as some would like to say. No, the Cross work of Christ is a

work in which He so much takes our place that we can say, as Paul does here, that we have been crucified with Him. Do you get that? Jesus' death on the cross is so entirely in our place that it can be said in eternally true words that we are crucified with Him.

- ii. It's kind of like in your school days when you had a substitute teacher standing in for your real and regular teacher. Their authority was to be the same as the normal teacher and the assignments given were as though they were from the normal teacher. The Substitute was completely identified with the real teacher. So too, and eternally more so – Christ is our substitute on that Cross to such an extent that we can say we have been crucified with Him.
- iii. You will know you are realizing and operating with this truth in mind if you, like Paul, are no longer bound by the world. This world he is talking about in verse 14 is the kosmos – the system run by the devil which enslaves mankind to sin. It is a man-centered system in which the individual is king and sinful rebellion is championed. This sinful rebellion in Galatia looked like religious order and flesh-dependent works. Paul was free from this. It had no power over him. It had lost its sway in his heart because he realized his co-crucifixion with Christ – and he was walking in this freedom.

c. *Rests in Regeneration – vs. 15*

- i. This correlates to verse 15 in which we see that boasting in the cross looks like resting in redemption. This is a clear and unalterable truth in Paul's heart and mind – circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. What matters is the new creation. This is the regeneration – the new birth which happens through being identified with Jesus through the powerful work of His Holy Spirit.
- ii. Coming to the Cross and boasting in that Cross work of Christ means that we will recognize our deadness and our need to be born again. We will see our complete inability to cause our own re-birth, and we will look to God who raises the dead and we will put our faith completely in Him. What this continues to look like is a complete dependence upon God's regenerating work in us. Our salvation is settled in that we have been born again through the mysterious and glorious work of the Spirit to bring new life to our dead soul. Our sanctification – our growth in grace – is then fueled by this reality. He who caused us to be born again will also empower us to be more holy like He is holy. We will make efforts to grow in godliness, but they will be dependent upon this regenerating grace, and they will be fueled by deep joy in God's powerful work in us. Boasting in the Cross looks like resting in regeneration in such a way that we can say with Paul – circumcision is nothing, neither uncircumcision – only being a new creation in Christ – that is everything!

d. *Results in Peace & Mercy – vs. 16*

- i. And then in verse 16 we see that this boasting in the Cross results in peace and mercy. This is such a unique statement here for the end of one of Paul's letters. Usually he is offering a benediction of grace to all of his hearers because he has unhindered confidence in their connection to Christ. But here in the churches in Galatia the verdict is apparently still out because he gives a qualified benediction in verse 16. He will wish for grace upon the brothers in verse 18, so Paul is confident at least in some who cling to and boast in the Cross alone. But here in verse 16 he gives a conditional statement of blessing. This peace and mercy are for those who walk according to the rule he has just explained. This "rule" is a measuring stick or canon. It is like a spiritual yard stick which can be held up to a person's spiritual life. Are they trusting in something other than the cross-work of Christ? Are they boasting in some work of the flesh? Then they will not know the peace and mercy of God. But if they are looking to Christ alone and resting in the regeneration made possible at the Cross alone – then they will possess this peace and mercy. The terrors of the Cross lead to the peace filled mercy of life in Christ. The horrors of Christ's sufferings yield unending and unremitting peace in the soul of the one who has been born again. The punishment of the Cross placed upon the head of our Savior is the only pathway to eternal mercy in which our condemnation is remitted and recused. God is a God of complete justice and a God of eternal mercy. This is only possible because of and in and through the Cross of Christ!
 - ii. There are two groups of people in this verse – not one. Many would like to say that the Israel of God and the pronoun "them" are referring to the same people. We are actually going to come back to this tonight because of how theologically significant this point is. But the short version is that the Church – or the them here in this verse – is still distinct in the mind of Paul from the Israel of God. They are not one and the same. The Church is not the new Israel who now takes upon herself all the blessings and covenant promises which were given to God's chosen people. And in that statement I just disagreed with a large portion of commentators and theologians in our world today, but we will come back tonight and investigate that further. The point of the verse is that the only path to peace and mercy for both Jew and Gentile is the Cross of Christ. There is no other gateway.
- e. *Validated by Suffering – vs. 17*
- i. This boasting in the Cross is also validated by suffering. So in verse 17 Paul says that he bears on his body the marks - or the branding or the tattoos of suffering for Jesus. This suffering happened at the hand of legalists who hated his message of mercy and peace found only in and through the cross work of Christ. They hated his God-centered message because they couldn't glory in their own accomplishments and religious good deeds and in Christ. And because of this exclusivity they stoned Paul and left him for

dead. This happened in Lystra, one of the cities of Galatia. Can you imagine now – those very people who saw Paul get stoned for boasting in the Cross, are now reading this for the very first time. As they hear verse 18 they remember seeing him bloodied and bruised and left for dead. Why – because he boasted in the Cross of Christ alone.

- ii. This is the course for all who will boast in the Cross. You will know that you are doing something right if you are being opposed by man-centered legalists who are calling you a grace-dripping antinomian – or anti-law. Paul was so clear and constant in his message of salvation alone by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that it nearly cost him his life. We will most likely not face the same sufferings Paul did, but really, this is what often keeps us from sharing the Gospel with others. We are afraid of offending their self-dependent spiritual psyche. They seem just fine trusting in their own works to save them. Who are we to come along and upset the apple cart by showing them Jesus Christ – who is the way, the truth, and the life? We cannot boast in the Cross and shrink away from proclaiming that Cross at the same time. If we are internally captured by the Cross work of Christ, we will not be able to help calling others to look to Jesus and live.

f. *Longs for Grace for Others – vs. 18*

- i. The last thing about boasting in the Cross is found in verse 18. If we are truly resting in and rejoicing in Christ's cross, then we will long for this grace to extend to others. It is not just the legalist who has a desire to see others influenced and impacted. The one who boasts in the grace of the Cross longs for others to know this grace as well. Paul is praying in the form of a benediction for his brothers in the churches in Galatia to know and rejoice in and live in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that this is the same way the Cross is talked about. It is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in verse 14, and here it is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. They go together and are inseparable. One comes with the other, and each are found in each other.
- ii. This has been the theme of this great book – the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have de-merited our standing before God. We have sinned and deserve condemnation. But in this situation of demerit – God sent his Son and placed on Him the iniquity of us all. There is no other way to merit before God. It cannot be earned. It cannot be won. It cannot be bought. It can only be given through the Cross work of Christ.

Conclusion: Does your spirit know that grace? Do you boast only in the Cross of Christ? Is the Cross your obsession? Does it permeate and infiltrate every part of your life? Let's pray.