

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works

Part twenty-four - Teaching #2177

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THE ONLY THING THAT COUNTS - IS YOUR LIFE A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST JESUS?

Galatians 6:11-18 - "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. {12} Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. {13} For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. {14} But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. {15} For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. {16} And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. {17} From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. {18} The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen."

It was fairly common practice with Paul to have someone else record his words - like a secretary - when he put together long letters. Then, as the letter was coming to a close, he would take the pen into his own hand to help establish the authority and authenticity of the whole letter:

IPAD TEXTS - 2 Thessalonians 3:17 - "I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand, which is an authenticating mark in every letter; this is how I write."

1 Corinthians 16:21 - "This greeting is in my own hand — Paul."

What *is* unique about the Galatian letter is the *kind* of closing Paul seals the letter with. There are no warm, personal greetings as in other letters. No particular individuals are named as friends or fellow servants. There is not even a prayer - which was a very common way for Paul to wrap up his letters. So important is the issue of the Galatian heresy and the danger it presents to the church that Paul seems to have a hard time letting go of it.

Paul's closing words form a kind of *test*. He offers a practical measuring stick to see if the message of the letter has reached home in his hearers' minds. We've been studying Galatians together as a church family for well over half a year. Not many churches do that anymore.

Has the message of Galatians taken root in our hearts here at Cedarview? How will we know? Like any good pastor/teacher, Paul can't rest content with the mere impartation of data. He is after their hearts and wants to give a test to see whether the truth has been taken up into their lives.

The test involves the contrasting of *two mindsets*. There is a mind-set Paul wants to see disappear entirely from the church of Christ. He wants to see it shrivel up and evaporate in our hearts. Then there is a mindset that is so abundantly fruitful to a spirit-empowered, Christ exalting life that Paul actually calls it a "*rule*" of sound Christian living - **Galatians 6:16 - "May peace come to all those who follow this standard, and mercy even to the Israel of God!" - IPAD TEXT**

This is a mindset that Paul wants to see dominating and gaining influence as the Holy Spirit forms us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ.

- 1) THE FIRST MINDSET EQUATES A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WITH EXTERNAL RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES AND OBSERVANCES, WHILE SHUNNING THE CENTRALITY, GLORY AND COST OF THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:12-13 - “Those who *want to make a good impression* in the flesh are the ones who would compel you to be circumcised — but *only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ*. [13] For even the circumcised don’t keep the law themselves, and yet they want you to be circumcised in order to boast about your flesh.”

Here we find the genesis of every spiritual failure and hypocrisy. There are ***two birthmarks*** of worldliness in these verses - ***two cancers*** that will eat up the marrow of all that the Holy Spirit would desire to do in our lives. The first is the ***love of praise*** and the second is the ***fear of rejection***.

- a) ***The love of praise*** - This comes out in two phrases - “***....who want to make a good impression....***”(12), and, “***....in order to boast about your flesh***” - (having them circumcised as an act of works righteousness) - (13b).

Paul uses the example of circumcision to expose the motives of these false teachers. Their main concern was to achieve success in their religion with no regard to the transformation of the hearts of their followers. Nothing would make them more highly esteemed by the Jewish leaders than the winning over of the Gentile converts to the laws of ethnic Judaism. And these false teachers desperately wanted to appear successful.

Now we need to understand, there is nothing wrong with **being** successful in any ministry. There is nothing wrong with **winning converts** - lots of converts - to the cause of Christ. This is not an argument from Paul against successful ministries.

There is, however, something desperately wrong when the **desire** for success overrides the desire to **remain true to the cross of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit.**

We need to learn well from the picture Paul paints of these Judaisers that it is dreadfully possible to strive to maintain devotion to successful religion with no devotion whatsoever to **glorifying Christ** and no passion at all for a **new heart.**

So, has half a year in the book of Galatians had an effect on your life? ***Question #1 - Are you measuring your relationship to God, not by external forms, but by a genuine transformation of your heart with its affections and desires?***

Now on to the ***second cancer*** of bad religion:

- b) ***The fear of cultural rejection*** - Again, you can see where this is rooted in our text - **Galatians 6:12-13** - **“Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh are the ones who would compel you to be circumcised — but only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. [13] For even the circumcised don’t keep the law themselves, and yet they want you to be circumcised in order to boast about your flesh.” - IPAD TEXT**

“....to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ”(12b).

There has come a growing reticence in the user friendly, North American church to be dogmatically specific about Jesus Christ, God the Son, and the gospel message of the New Testament. Churches are feeling increasing pressure to lighten up about Jesus Christ. Our culture has made the Lordship of Jesus appear intolerant and bigotted.

There really is a fresh relevance in those descriptive words from Paul. It is becoming a much more common inward reflex to want to ***“avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ”*** (12b).

Back to our text. Because the motive of these Judaisers ***wasn’t*** Christ Jesus, they were driven by ***two terrible, selfish ambitions***. These Jewish false teachers launched their crusade to reach into the pool of these Gentile Galatian converts, ***first*** of all, because they wanted to ***win the approval of those who had sent them***. Then ***second***, and perhaps even more importantly, they chose their message carefully to ***avoid the persecution that comes from a passionate commitment to Jesus Christ, God the Son***.

So universal and sustained is this rejection by the world of Christ that, in this very letter, Paul, when he holds up his ***ID*** - his ***passport*** - as an apostle of Christ, chooses, not his miracles, nor his sermons, nor the number of churches he planted, but the ***bruises, burns, scars and sores he bears from being beaten and branded for proclaiming Christ*** -

Galatians 6:17 - “From now on, let no one cause me trouble, because I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” -

IPAD TEXT

So, has half a year in the book of Galatians had an effect on your life? I said there were two questions to ask. Here's the second - ***Question #2 - Are you persistent in your devotion to, and proclamation of Jesus Christ, God the Son, as the only hope for a redemptive relationship with Father God, even in a world that persistently presses other religions as equally valid means to reaching God?***

I said there were ***two*** mind-sets held up in this letter by Paul as a final test of the effect of the cross of Christ on our hearts. ***We've looked at the first - the cross of Christ has been bypassed entirely by the mind-set that equates a living relationship with God with external religious observances.***

Now we move on to the second - the one Paul calls the ***"rule of peace and mercy"***(6:16).

- 2) **THE PEACE AND MERCY OF GOD RULE IN THE LIFE THAT BOASTS IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF A TOTALLY NEW HEART - A NEW CREATION OF BEING THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:14-16 - "But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world. [15] For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation. [16] *May peace come to all those who follow this standard, and mercy even to the Israel of God!*"

Paul intends for us to see the contrast between his boast in the cross and the Judaisers' craving - boasting - in the applause of man. Also, we're meant to see the contrast between Paul's glory, even in the suffering he has experienced due to his proclamation of the cross (17), and the flight from persecution manifested by the Judaisers (12b).

Obviously, something totally different is happening in these two mind-sets. And all of it finds its root in Paul's profound words in **verse 14 - "But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world."**

The mind-set of the Judaisers - the mind-set dominated by the **love of applause** and the **fear of rejection** - came to an end for Paul when he encountered the cross of Christ in all its power. His way of thinking was so changed by the Holy Spirit that his only boast - his only ground of joy and purpose - the very reason for his living - was to manifest and proclaim the power of the cross of Christ.

But we really need to be careful here. There are many different ways of looking at the cross. And we need to fully take in and digest what Paul is saying in **verse 14**. Most Christians see only **one aspect of the cross**. They see God forgiving sins. And this is gloriously true. God **does** offer forgiveness through, and **only** through the cross of Christ.

But please notice that this is **not** the forgiving power of the cross that Paul even **mentions**. Look again at **Galatians 6:14 - "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."** - IPAD TEXT

Forgiveness isn't even **mentioned** in this verse. God's forgiveness isn't what changed Paul's mind-set from that of the Judaisers. Instead of **forgiveness** through the cross, Paul describes **two deaths** through the cross.

And there's another surprise - Christ's death isn't even one of the two Paul mentions. He deals with **two other deaths** that were just as real as Christ's death. And until we get this verse straight our lives will never experience the kind of transformation by the Holy Spirit Paul expresses.

- a) **"....the world has been crucified to me through the cross...."**(14) - Have you ever considered this? This is not a **person** being crucified. If I am going to proclaim my faith in the cross of Christ - if I am going to make my **"boast"** in the cross of Christ - I must come to terms with the fact that the **whole system of this world** was crucified when Jesus was crucified.

Paul doesn't mean he doesn't love the world in terms of **reaching** the world with the love and pardon of Jesus Christ. He said he - and we - are **"ambassadors for Christ"** to this world.

But the **values** of the world - the world as a **life-style** - the **system** of the world - the world and its attitude toward sex and marriage - the world and its attitude toward wealth and the purpose of wealth - the world and its prioritizing of pleasure - **that world**, Paul says, becomes a **corpse** through the cross of Christ for all who understand it.

Have you ever been to a funeral? Have you seen the body - the shell of the person who is now gone - just lying there, cold and white? Most people don't get real close to the corpse, even loved ones. I've never seen anyone pick up a corpse and hug and kiss it at a funeral.

Or have you even seen a dead animal on the road - a squirrel or a skunk? Have you ever heard of anyone stopping his car, getting out and scraping up the dead animal and taking it home to put it on the mantel of the fireplace?

No. We don't do that with dead things. We either bury them or clean them up, but we put them forever out of reach from this earthly scene.

Paul says the world is a dead corpse. It's been **crucified**. You don't cozy up to it. You don't relate to a corpse. If you want to encounter the power of the cross in your life, not just as a point of religious doctrine but a center of power and joy and holiness, you must recognize the death of the world's values and affections as far as you are concerned. ***This is the most universally neglected truth in the North American body of Christ and no revival will ever come until it is rediscovered.***

- b) “....and I (*have been crucified*) to the world....”(14) - Again, these are words many of us have heard all our lives, so often, in fact, that we don’t think of their meaning as we ought. We know we aren’t **dead** right now because we’re sitting here listening to this teaching. Dead people don’t do that. How can Paul say he was crucified while he was writing a letter to the Galatians?

Perhaps the best explanation of 6:14 is **Galatians 2:20 - “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”- IPAD TEXT**

Here is the same idea again. Paul starts off stating he’s been killed - executed - crucified with Christ. There was an “**I**” part of Paul that was alive once, but it isn’t anymore. But certainly Paul’s not totally dead - “....**the life which I now live....**” Paul still lives, but it’s not the same person living at all. The life Paul now lives is a life dominated by **faith in the Son of God**.

What does that mean? What does it mean to live by “**faith in the Son of God**” - not just to **have** faith in the Son of God, but to **live by faith** in the Son of God? And how is this life of faith the **death** of the old life?

A life of faith in the Son of God is a life **motivated by the promises given through the Son of God**. Everyone lives life on the basis of what they **believe** about life. Everyone lives life with certain beliefs about where **joy** is to be found. Everyone lives life with certain beliefs about how **security** is to be attained. Everyone lives life with certain beliefs about what kind of **relationships** are the most satisfying.

Paul says he came to the place where he truly **encountered** the cross of Christ **as it was set forth and explained in the Scriptures**. He had a plan for how life was to be fulfilled. But then he realized this plan was all an empty lie. He learned his plan for life couldn't deliver what it was supposed to deliver.

Then he put his faith in the cross of Jesus Christ. He says he actually came to “**boast in the cross of Jesus Christ**”(14) because it, and it alone, could deliver on the promise of eternal life and joy and the inward power of the Holy Spirit to make Paul into a new creation.

So Paul ***lived his life*** by that faith in the cross of Christ. This is the only way the cross works. Paul ***died*** to his former life system. Paul ***died*** to the idea that the world could provide more satisfaction, or better answers to life, or any hope for eternity. He died to all he had put his faith in previously.

There are many professing Christians (whether they are saved or not we have to leave with God) who miss what Paul is saying here. They think to believe in the cross is to believe that the event of the cross actually happened - that Jesus really died on it about 2000 years ago. This kind of faith in the cross is an ***empty faith***. The power of the cross only becomes effective for ***me*** when I ***die to what I had been putting my faith in before I came to acknowledge the cross of Christ.***

So, has half a year in the book of Galatians had an effect on your life? ***Question #3 - As you think of the cross of Christ, do you think in terms of the world dying to you as a source of influence? And do you think of yourself as dying to the things you put your faith in before coming to Christ?***

The cross must always be considered as a time of **three deaths**. **Christ** died for our sins. This is an accomplished fact. The **world** has been crucified to me as a source of influence. And **I** have been crucified with Christ. And like a stool with three legs, the whole thing collapses if you remove any one.