

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

When I was about 12 or 13 my parents finally started letting me stay home alone. I can still remember the weird feeling of being the only person in the house. No parents. No one to check on us. No one to see if I was pouring my soda into a glass or just drinking straight from the bottle!

But, nearly every single time my parents left me home alone my mom would always leave a note on the fridge. My parents all ways had one of those notepads with the magnet on it that stuck to the fridge. Mom would tell my she loved me, she would always leave a bullet list of instructions:

- Feed and walk the dog.
- Fold the clothes
- Clean your room – that one was standard.

And at the bottom of that list she would sign in big letters, “Mom.”

And that signature meant a few things. But above all it meant, “I’m serious about this list. It’s critical that you pay attention to this, so I’m signing it with my own name.”

And now Paul comes to the end of his letter and he has taken the quill from his scribe and he begins to close out this epistle in his own hand.

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

Do not miss this final message. I’m summarizing and charging you with what is of utmost importance!

And at the center of Paul’s close is a scandalous, costly, and all consuming message:

14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Paul’s final words, written in his own hands Paul leaves us with the cross of Jesus Christ—and says—this is to be your boast. The cross should be your singular focus, your highest exultation, it should encompass your horizons.

What does it mean to “boast only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”?

And according to this passage it means at least three things:

Boasting only in the cross means:

1. REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CROSS
2. SEEING THE CROSS AS THE GOOD THROUGH WHICH ALL OTHER GOODS ARE BESTOWED
3. DIE TO THE APPROVAL OF OTHERS

1. REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CROSS

14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ

Here's what should strike you:

Paul does not say, "I make my obedience to God's commands my boast." He doesn't even say, "I boast in Jesus!" He says, "I boast in the **cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

He could have boasted in the incarnation—when the Son of God entered human history and angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest."

He could have said, "I boast in the ethical teachings of Jesus, which show us how to love and serve one another."

He could have said, "I boast in the resurrection! Christ came up out of the grave and because he lives we will live also!"

He could have said, "I make my boast in the glorious return of Jesus—he's going to come back and judge with righteousness."

But, instead of all of those moments of glory—Paul chooses the cross. He chose the most inglorious moment.

Why? Why would he chose that moment? To pass over the incarnation, the teaching ministry of Jesus—to choose the cross over the resurrection, the cross must be of greatest importance.

Let me give you a little evidence for this—You remember back in John's Gospel when Peter has his one shining moment? Jesus asks all the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter finally had a correct answer.

"You are the Christ!" And John tells us that from that moment on Jesus began to explain to them how he must suffer and die. He had to go to the cross. And Peter has no place for this. He's utterly scandalized that Jesus would be crucified.

He takes Jesus to the side and rebukes Jesus—"You can't be crucified!" And what does Jesus say? "Get behind me Satan."

If you are here today, and you don't follow Christ you need to know that:

Jesus didn't just understand himself to be a prophet sent from God—as his birth would suggest.

Jesus didn't understand himself to merely be a good teacher as his teaching might suggest.

On multiple occasions, in several accounts of his life those who knew Jesus recorded when he said that his life's aim, his central mission, the most important reason for his coming was that he would suffer and die!

Jesus understood himself to be more than a teacher, more than a prophet, more than a political rebel. Jesus understood and proclaimed himself to be God's sacrifice for sin—offered up to die.

Over the past 15 years a number of bestsellers have made the claim that Jesus was simply a teacher, or that he was a prophet, or that he was a mere political rebel who was killed for his insurrection.

But you must grapple with the fact that 4 separate books, dating back to within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses of Jesus life and death make the claim that Jesus understood and proclaimed himself to be God—and that his mission was more than teaching, more than healing—the reason he came was to be hung upon a tree and bear God's curse against man's sin.

Imagine for a moment that your house was on fire. You've gotten out of the house, you've gotten all your best possessions out and you've gotten your children out, and your dogs. So you're standing there watching the flames tear apart the home.

Now suppose a neighbor walks up to you and says, "Hey, I want to show you how much I love you." And he runs into the house, throws himself screaming into the fumes and the flames and dies.

And, do you look at him and say, "Oh, how wonderful! How he loved us!"

No! You say, "What an idiot."

But, if on the other hand as you are standing there you realize you have a child who is still in the home. One of your children is in there, and no one can get in and the fire department says, "It's hopeless." And, your neighbor comes by and says, "Let me show you how much I love you."

And your neighbor runs into the flames, and saves your child, but at the cost of his own life. Then you say it.

Listen—if you and I are not really cut off from God because of sin. If we are not waiting on God's judgement. If we do not stand condemned—then the cross is utter foolishness.

But if the scriptures are true, and you and I are separated from God by our own choice and waiting the just penalty for our choice to give weight and preference to ourselves over our creator—then the importance of the Son of God running into the flames of our own making to rescue us at the cost of his own life is the most important thing that has happened in history.

To boast only in the cross means we recognize the magnitude and importance of the cross.

Boasting only in the cross also means that we:

2. SEE THE CROSS AS THE GOOD THROUGH WHICH ALL OTHER GOODS ARE BESTOWED

Paul says in verse 14:

*14 But far be it from me to boast **except** in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Now, when I read this one of the first thoughts I had was, "Is Paul saying I can't have joy in anything else?" "Can I not praise my daughter when she learns something new?" "Can I not brag about a big fish I've caught?"

When Paul says I make the cross my only boast—was he not excited that other churches had been planted? Did he not find happiness from the converts, and the new preachers he was training?

Well, I don't think Paul is saying that you can't brag, in a healthy way, on your kids. I don't think he's restricting our joy to only when we are thinking about the cross.

In fact, what I think Paul is doing is instead of restricting the borders of our joy—he's trying to broaden those borders. And here's why:

John Piper puts it best when he writes, "Why is this the case? For this reason: 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 everything that you enjoy in Christ — as a Christian, as a person who trusts Christ — is owing to the death of Christ."

Christians are people who understand that all we have earned

from God is judgement, and punishment. And without the grace of God—seen most clearly in the cross of Christ—nothing good would come to us.

No children, no success, no money, no power, no influence, no love, no future, no meaning. Without God's grace we are hopeless

It's the cross of Christ that secures every other blessing we enjoy.

And therefore, boasting only in the cross doesn't mean you refuse to be joyous at your child's wedding, or at the birth of a grandchild—it means you are someone who recognizes that this moment of goodness was purchased for you through Christ's suffering.

You aren't saying, "God forbid that I have joy except when I'm thinking about the cross."

It means you say, "God forbid that joy in the birth of this child and allow that joy stop here without rolling past and up this moment into joy at what purchased this moment for me! The grace of God!

The goodness of the Cross solidifies and legitimizes the goodness of every other perceived good.

So thank God for every good gift. Be proud when your child excels. Be happy when you enjoy a good meal. But don't let those things take a central place.

Lewis said that you should take joy in the sunbeam but you should also follow the sunbeam up so that you see the sun.

Boasting only in the cross means you see the cross as the good through which you receive all other goods.

3. DIE TO THE APPROVAL OF OTHERS

There are two kinds of approval you have to die to. The first approval you have to die to is the approval of religious people.

Look with me at verse 12:

12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

If you'll remember, the reason that Paul wrote this letter is because when he planted the church in Galatia he had taught them the true gospel which is:

1. Trust in what Christ has done. 2. Be accepted by God. 3. Follow Jesus into obedience.

But after Paul had planted the church and left, false teachers had come in and taught a different gospel which was this:

1. Trust Jesus. 2. Obey the law. 3. Then God will accept you.

Specifically, these false teachers were focused on the laws of the OT. They were saying that before you could become a Christian you first had to become a Jew.

And in this passage Paul tells the Galatia believers that when you come to the cross of Jesus and you make it your only boast you die to the approval of the religious crowd.

The religious crowd are those who don't really love God—but the use obedience to his law to either avoid persecution, or to gain temporal pleasure.

Did you see in v. 12

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they

may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

In other words—there was nothing wrong with the OT Jewish custom of circumcision. The custom was a reminder of the promise God made to Abraham. It was a good promise. But obedience to law of God should never be dangled as an escape from suffering.

No one should ever say, “If you obey God, you won’t suffer.”

And so on the one end, the religious crowd was using the law as a means to avoid pain—but God doesn’t work that way. You shouldn’t listen to any voice that says obedience to the law will get you out of painful circumstances—and we know that’s true because no one was more obedient than Jesus and he was crucified.

Secondly—religious people use God’s law not because they love God—but because they love man’s approval.

13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

Their true joy is not that others obey the law—but that they get the glory for making people conform to their standard. Religious people get outward, temporal, man-centered praise. But God sees right through this.

When you make the cross your only boast you are rejecting the approval of the religious crowd because you are saying—it took the death of God’s Son to save me—not my own works.

The Cross is Costly to the Religious Person because it says:

You who have honored your parents, and have loved your children and always given them respect—you are on the same level as those who have disobeyed, disrespected and abused their

family name.

You who have kept yourself with integrity at work. You’ve arrived early, worked late, always been honest on your accounts and ledgers—you are on the same level as the one who embezzles from the company.

You who have kept your wedding vows—you are just as in need of a bloody sacrifice to offer God as those who have followed their adulterous temptations every day.

No amount of good deeds---nothing in my hands I bring, only to thy cross I cling. The cross of Christ rejects the religion of works.

Listen—I love my son Lincoln, and if I gave my son up for you and he died in your place so that you could come to me then nothing would offend me more than you dishonoring what he did by trying to weasel your way in with good works.

If there was any other way into heaven, then the cross is the blunder of the ages.

Therefore, when you make the cross your boast you die to the approval of the religious crowd in this world who are trying to get to God through their own devices.

But you don’t just die to the approval of the religious crowd. When you make the cross your only boast you die to the approval of the world.

Look at verse 14 again with me:

14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Now notice, he doesn’t say that the world has died. He says, “The world has died to me.”

When you make the cross your only boast you are saying, “What now animates my life is no longer anything that is found in this world.”

A Christian is someone who loves getting a raise, but it doesn’t change their life.

A Christian is someone who loves finding a spouse, but it doesn’t change their life.

A Christian is someone who loves building a new home, but it doesn’t change their life.

Getting the approval of your boss is wonderful—but it doesn’t define you.

I guess it was back around 2004. At the time my dad was chairman of the board at Southeastern Seminary and he was there for an annual board meeting.

He called me because the next morning, Dr. Adrian Rogers was going to be preaching in chapel. Now—in case you don’t know Dr. Rogers was a giant of a figure in Baptist life. He was president of the SBC. He led the conservative resurgence—and led Baptists back to the Bible. He’s my dad’s all-time favorite preacher.

Dad was calling me because another board member had offered to fly his plane down to Concord, pick me up and get me to Southeastern in time to hear Dr. Rogers preach. At this time Dr. Rogers was close to the end of his life so there wouldn’t be many more chances like this.

So I flew up to Raleigh, got there in time for chapel, heard Dr. Rogers preach and at the end of the chapel service we stood in a line to greet Dr. Rogers.

And I’ll never forget walking up those steps and taking the hand of Dr. Adrian Rogers and he said, “I’d buy stock in this young man.”

Now—in that moment—it didn’t matter to me what my grades in school looked like. I didn’t care what anyone else in the room might think of me. I was through the roof.

But, you know what? As wonderful as that complement was, Dr. Rogers didn’t know the real me. He didn’t know my sin. He didn’t know what lies beneath the veneer of my outward self.

But—there is one who knows me to the core. He knows every sin. He knows every fault. Every evil deed I’ve performed was done in his sight—He knows me through and through—and in spite of all that he knows he chose to give himself up for me!

And when I know the he knows me and loves me and died for me—the world dies to me!

And it will die to you as well when you boast only in the Cross of Jesus Christ our Lord.