

No other gospel

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[0:00] Please do turn in your copy of God's Word if you have a Bible with you.! There should be a blue one, hopefully, in the seat in front of you, if you're able to grab one to Galatians chapter 6.

Galatians chapter 6, we're going to read verses 11 to 18 as we finish up and wrap up our evening series in the book of Galatians. If you do have one of the blue church Bibles, that can be found on page 975.

Page 975. Galatians chapter 6, starting at verse 11.

Paul writes, See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 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.

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.

[1:13] 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.

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers.

Amen. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we come to his word. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would speak to us now.

We long to hear your voice. Where our hearts are hardened, would you be glad to soften them?

Where our ears are blocked, would you be glad to unblock them?

[2:25] Where our eyes are covered in scales, would you please remove them? Yes, give us soft and tender hearts and minds to receive your word. Lord, where we need challenged and be glad to do so.

Where we need encouraged and built up, be glad to encourage and build us up. But in all things, for all of us we pray, we ask that by your spirit we would behold the wonder of Christ crucified for us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Friends, what do you boast in? What do you boast about? Everyone boasts, don't they?

Even though we were probably told as a child we shouldn't brag or boast. We all glory in something. Grandparents glory in their grandchildren. Maybe less so their children, but oh, when the grandchildren come, we can't get the phones away.

Sports fans glory in their team. People boast in their hometown. Where I'm from? Sarah will tell you I spent a lot of time boasting in Edinburgh when I moved up here to Aberdeen.

[3:42] The question for all of us is not do I boast, for we all boast our glory in something. The question is where is our boast? Let me ask the question another way.

What does Bon Accord boast in? What do we boast in? What do we put out there and say, look how great this is?

Well, I would like to suggest to us this evening that we should be a boasting church. That we should be a boasting church.

Now, maybe that's surprising. Even as I say it, it doesn't kind of roll off the tongue. I think we're often thinking, yeah, we shouldn't brag or boast or whatever. But I think this evening as we finish Galatians, we're going to see that we should be a church.

We should be Christians, believers who follow the Lord Jesus, who are glad to boast. As we've studied this book of Galatians, this letter over these last number of weeks, we've been studying a church and we've got up close in a church where there is boasting going on.

[4:50] Perhaps it's on a Sunday over tea and coffee after the service. Maybe it's in their life groups, wherever it would be. There's boasting going on. Now, as we've seen through this letter, there's kind of two groups or there's a, in this church, yeah, two groups.

There's the circumcision party, verse 13. Those who want to boast in the flesh, Paul says. And all the way through this letter, we've heard them teach that faith in Christ isn't enough to put anyone right with God.

They've said, for this church, for these believers, for Christians, we need to keep all the Old Testament commands, all the Old Testament ceremonial laws, as well as Christ to be right with God.

We need Jesus plus our law-keeping to be right with God. They've claimed, in other words, that these Christians need to sort of become Jewish to become Christians.

And they want to boast what? In the flesh, in law-keeping. But Paul says very clearly, verse 14, and this is what he's been trying to show all the way through this letter, where his boast is, where the boast of any church should be, in the cross of Christ.

[6:09] In the cross of Christ alone. Not in old covenant outward ceremonial laws. Not in circumcision. No, our boast is in the cross of Christ.

Where alone we are put right with God as we receive Jesus by faith. He does it all. I'll tell you a little confession this evening.

I can't remember quite where I was when Joe said we were going to preach through Galatians. It was probably a little staff team meeting. Maybe him, me, Donald, JT. Joe says we're going to preach through Galatians.

And I was pretty daunted. I probably was breaking out in a bit of a sweat. I've always thought it's complicated. It's a kind of complex letter. And I thought, how would I ever preach it?

But getting to the end of this letter this evening, I've kind of changed my mind. Two reasons why. One, well, Joe maybe saw on my face what I was thinking about it. So thankfully him and Donald and JT took on the bulk of the preaching.

[7:11] So I'm very grateful for that. They took on the heavier, more complex passages in this wonderful letter. For which I'm very grateful. But second, because as they preach so helpfully and clearly.

Secondly, I've seen, I've been reminded that this letter really is all about the cross of Christ. The utter sufficiency of Christ and receiving him by faith to put us right with God.

He has done it all. And yes, Paul weaves sometimes dense and detailed arguments about the law. But why is he doing that?

Well, he's writing actually just to kind of clear out the weeds of those who would say we need Jesus plus works of the flesh. Our own efforts in law keeping. And he writes, Paul does, to give confidence and surety to this church.

That to be right with God we need Christ alone. That our boast is in the cross of Christ. This letter is all about the cross of Christ. There are at least five references up to now.

[8:17] Galatians 2.20. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, says Paul. Galatians 3.1. You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

Galatians 3.13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it's written, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree on a cross. Galatians 5.11.

Brothers and sisters, if I'm still preaching circumcision, why am I being persecuted? In that case, the offense of the cross has been abolished. Galatians 5.24.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. And then we get all the references tonight as well. And you've been with me here over these past weeks.

Wouldn't you agree that as God's word has been opened, Christ Jesus has publicly portrayed as crucified before us, has he not? Right at the start of this letter, I think maybe week two, Joel said, I hope as we go through this letter, we hear the word, relax, relax.

[9:29] And there was me sitting there in one of the seats thinking, relax, really sweating over all these passages that are to come. But he's exactly right. That is exactly what I have felt as we have gone through this.

Why? Because we've been reminded week after week that Jesus has done it all to justify his people before God the Father. Friends, I pray you've had a sense of that over these weeks.

Relax. Jesus has done it all. And therefore, Paul, this evening, tells us and rounds off this letter by saying, therefore, Christ alone is our boast.

Christ crucified alone is our boast. So this evening, all we're going to do is examine, if you like, the boasting that's going on in this church.

Examine the boast of the circumcision party, those who preach another gospel, which is no gospel at all. See its futility and folly. Why that should never be our boast.

[10 : 32] And then look at Paul's boast, which is to be our boast as well. So firstly, then, our first point there, the points are on the back of the service sheet, or they should appear up there to help us as we go.

So first, don't boast in the cross of Christ plus the flesh. Don't boast in the cross of Christ plus the flesh. Verse 11, See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

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. 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.

Now, fair enough. Paul doesn't say the words here, don't boast in the flesh, but it's very clear that the Galatian Christians are not to do so. He starts the next section, the next sentence, with the word but.

So he's obviously going to contrast his boast. But he's also spent the last five and a half chapters arguing against needing to make a good showing in the flesh, against circumcision as a reason to boast.

[11 : 39] No, making a good showing in the flesh, outward law-keeping, to get right with God, is not the lyrics that we should be putting into hymns as they worship. It's not the tune to the song they sing.

It's not the doctrine of their confession. No, boasting in the flesh is the wrong boast. When we were living out in America, North Carolina, we went on a retreat with some others that were training for ministry.

We went to the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina, and the place we were standing, looking at these beautiful hills, it was autumn there, all the colours that you get over there was lovely. And there was mountains on either side of us.

And the people that had taken up there to this retreat started pointing at one of the mountains in the distance and saying, look at that mountain. That mountain is Mount Mitchell. It's the highest peak in North Carolina.

Over there is Mount Mitchell. We were all sitting there gaping, wow, isn't that amazing? 6,000 feet, whatever beautiful, how great it was. Now, I am generally a trusting person, and I don't actually quite remember why I did it, but I got out my phone to just check.

[12 : 41] And it's not really that I didn't believe them, they were very trustworthy people, but I got out my phone and checked. They were 180 degrees off. Mount Mitchell was not over there. It was over here. It was right behind us.

They were boasting in completely the wrong direction. Friends, Paul is saying that this group who came up to this church after him and have unsettled them are boasting in completely the wrong direction.

They have redesigned, remapped, tried to rework this cross-shaped gospel, the word that they've received, this world they live in, and they are trying to do what? Get these Galatians to look in the wrong direction.

They're boasting in the wrong direction, in the wrong thing. That's why he writes there at the start of verse 11, look with what large letters I write.

Do you see that? Verse 11, it's a strange kind of verse. Now, Paul hasn't got bad handwriting, or at least I don't think so. Maybe he did have bad handwriting. I'm not sure. But what he's done at this point in verse 11 is take the pen from the scribe, and what he's saying is this.

[13 : 47] It's his way of saying, I want to underline all this. They maybe didn't have highlighter pens 2,000 years ago. So verse 11 is his highlighter pen. He's putting it in large. Look how foolish they are being.

There is no boast there. There is no good showing in the flesh. So I just want us to ask two questions of that. Why is it so wrong? We've seen it really all the way through, but he reminds us

here.

Why is it so wrong to boast in the flesh? And what motivates them to do so? Well, why is it so wrong? Why is it to boast a wrong that way? Well, answer, because it counts for nothing.

It counts for nothing. Verse 15, for neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Paul is saying, and has told us all the way through, that circumcision, if we can put it this way, belongs to the old world order, the old creation.

It's not part of the new creation here, the new world order that arrives through the death and resurrection of Christ. And the outward sign of belonging to God's people through the cutting away of the flesh, that has passed away.

[14:54] In other words, Paul is saying these Judaizers, they can't tell the time. They can't tell the time. They're sitting with their diaries open. They got their watches on, but they can't tell the time.

Now, I don't mean they can't look and see it's, what, 6.40 on a Sunday evening. But they can't tell that they're in a new age, a new epoch, a new season of salvation history, that in Christ, a new creation has come.

The cross of Christ marks a new beginning, a new turn, the dawn of a new world. And in that dawn, the outward mark of circumcision, that outward ceremonial law, no longer needs to be observed.

But interestingly, Paul doesn't elevate uncircumcision either. What does he say about that? It counts for nothing. What he wants to say is in this new creation that since the cross of Christ, what counts is that?

The cross does, Christ does, and having all our hope there. It's where the cross takes us.

[16:03] That is what's central, what Jesus has done for us there. So what do we do with all this? Not many of us, I guess, this evening are thinking of becoming Jewish to live our life as a Christian.

Although if you are, please come and speak to me after. But what do we do with this? Well, I think it means we never for ourselves, nor ask of anyone else, verse 12, to place their confidence of rightness, of righteousness, of being justified before God in anything else alongside the cross of Christ.

We never ourselves or ask of anyone else to place their confidence in rightness before God in anything else alongside the cross of Christ. No, it is the cross alone.

I must be right with God because of the cross, plus I have this kind of identity, where I'm from, the home I grew up in, the language I speak, the rules I've kept, the kind of life I've lived.

We must never believe that. And we must never lead others to think that, to be in Christ and justified before God. One does not need the cross, plus middle classness, working classness, upper classness, Scottishness, Britishness, whatever it is, whatever it is you want to add in there.

[17:30] No justification is received by faith in Christ because of all that Jesus has done alone.

And naturally then, if those things count for nothing, then trusting or boasting in the flesh counts for nothing.

Verse 16, the blessing only belongs to those who walk, who live, according to what Paul is going to go on and say in verse 14 and 15, where the cross lies at the center of it all.

So friends, let me ask the question this way. If you were to die this evening and you meet the Lord Jesus, what would you say to him?

What would you say to him about why you should be in heaven, be with him forever? If it's, well, yes, thank you for the cross, but I sort of deserve heaven and your love and kind of rubber stamp of approval because of what I've done.

Look at these outward works or meritorious things that I've done to earn it. That's why you should let me in the cross plus something. Dear friend, flee such foolish thinking.

[18:40] It is another gospel. The gospel of Paul, of Christ, is we are justified by faith in Christ alone. One through his death on the cross.

But I want to ask one more question of these Judaizers. What's motivating them? Why have they got this such wrong thinking of the cross plus? Why come along after Paul and unsettle these Galatians anyway?

To say, I'm really pleased you got circumcised is not a sentence we would really be wanting to say. So why are they wanting to boast in that? What's driving them? Well, verse 12, Paul tells us they want to avoid persecution.

They want to avoid suffering for the cross of Christ. If they take on the cross plus outward human effort and law keeping, they will not suffer.

They want to avoid the outward cost of Christianity and the message the cross preaches. What message does the cross preach? Galatians 3.13, that Christ had to become a curse on a tree to save sinners like us.

[19:48] John Stott says, the cross of Christ shrinks us to our true size. As sinners in utter need of a savior who cannot help ourselves but need Christ to do it for us.

Whereas the cross plus law keeping puffs us up. It makes us much bigger than our actual size or true size. It's kind of like one of those optical illusions at Camera Obscura in Edinburgh. With those kind of outward law keeping, have you ever seen those awkward illusions? Someone stands in this corner, someone in this corner and the way that the room's set up, they look much bigger than they are. With outward law keeping, we look so much bigger than we really are, so much less sinful than we really are.

And so it bigs us up, shrinks down our sin and show does what? Shrinks down the cross. We can't be that bad, we can't be that sinful. If we can do things that put us right with God, it's always going to be an easier message to preach, some kind of message that holds out Christ plus some kind of work.

But that message says Christ isn't fully sufficient and really that's what this is all about, the sufficiency of Christ. Christ. We'll always get an easier time by preaching to this world, Jesus plus some sort of niceness.

[21:08] Yes, you need Jesus, but you know what? You're a standout, community-loving person too. So have some faith and confidence and boast there and you'll be fine. When someone has spent their whole life building a worldview and reputation that carries weight in the community and workplace, and we come and say that's all built on sinking sand, that is not popular.

But it's what we preach because it's the message of the cross. Do notice these Judaizers, we've seen it all the way through, they're not looking to get rid of the cross. This isn't no cross, but it's a lot less cross, the cross plus.

And so dear, dear brothers and sisters, this is a good reminder for us to be on the watch for forgetting, for not remembering the implications that we follow a crucified Christ.

A reminder that the desire to be a people pleaser, to have an easy time is tempting, at least it is for me. But when we let that temptation grow and sprout up, before we know it, we can be knowing and teaching another gospel.

Dear friends, don't boast in the cross of Christ plus the flesh. It counts for nothing, it does not bring God's blessing. Instead, dear brothers and sisters, Bonacore Church family, boast in the cross of Christ alone.

[22:28] Boast in the cross of Christ alone. When I said right at the start, we should be a boasting church, of course there are wrong kinds of boasts, aren't there? But there is one glorious right one, boast in the cross of Christ alone.

Verse 14, but far be it from me, says Paul, 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 now draws a huge contrast.

Those who have come after Paul boast in the flesh, Paul's boast is only in the cross of Christ. Well, why? Because there, the world has been crucified to him and him to the world.

His sinful self, his old self, the passions and desires of this world have died. He has died to them and they have died to him. We read earlier, didn't we, Philippians 3, how Paul used to have a list longer than the boast of, the list was longer than a kind of seven-year-old's Christmas list, isn't it? A list of boasts longer than his arm. He's done so much, but that was no longer his boast. Why did he change? Why did he count them as rubbish?

[23:39] Doesn't that word strike you, as Alistair was reading? He counts them as rubbish. Why rubbish? Something he threw in the bin. Why? The cross of Christ. The cross of Christ. On Friday, I went to the funeral of my minister from my church growing up in Edinburgh and it was the funeral of the former minister that I had up until I left school at 18 and it was shared at the funeral that my former minister, Victor Laidlaw, had written his own eulogy.

Knowing he was close to death a few weeks before, he wrote out his own eulogy. The person that was leading the service said it was two sides of A4 and it was around 400 words.

And as he recorded through his life, this is what he wrote about his time as a minister. He wrote this, I was called to St. Catherine's Argyle, which is a church in Edinburgh.

I was called to St. Catherine's Argyle in Edinburgh in 1975 and stayed there until 2008. So that's about 33 years there. It was his only charge as a minister.

He was there for 33 years. And that is all he said. It was one sentence. I was called 1975. I left in 2008 and he moved on to the next thing.

[24 : 58] And the person who was taking the funeral said then, someone asked Victor, asked this man, he said, 33 years. Think of all you've done. You've put it in one sentence.

Why? Like, why not say more? Is there not so much more to say? And he said, his reply was this. It was never about me. It was only and always about Jesus.

Only and always about Jesus. And that is what Paul is saying here. That is what Paul is saying to these Galatians. Our boast is only in the Lord Jesus, the cross of Christ, because it's there and in him that all my sin and alienation from God is dealt with.

And this kind of dovetails this little bit beautifully with the opening of the letter. Galatians 1.13, Paul writes this, grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age.

That is what Christ has done. That is why he alone is our boast, our confidence. He's delivered us from this evil age. Now I think I've put three implications there on the service sheets and they're really just the kind of inverse of what we saw at the start, the opposite of what the false gospel brings.

[26 : 18] The false gospel had no life but in Christ alone we have life. Our boast is only in the cross of Christ because there, verse 15, we have life.

Old creation, priorities have gone. All history, all the cosmos centres on Christ. In him we have life. Friends, have you trusted this Christ?

Only he can save you from this present evil age. Call to him and be saved. Relax. Put your confidence in him and he can deliver you from this present evil age.

So friends, if this evening you are clinging on to anything but Christ, come to him. but also, verse friends, from the challenge of verse 15 there is also this, what does Paul say, 14 and 15?

He says what? He has been there at the cross of Christ, crucified to the world and the world crucified to him. And so friends, if this evening you are still clinging to the world to things from this present evil age which Christ has delivered us from, from things in that list in chapter 5, those works of the flesh, free from them, Christ has crucified them, they do not belong to us now.

[27 : 35] The things of the world, they are not things that belong to Christ, people now flee from them. Second implication then why we boast in Christ alone is because there it's where we experience God's blessing.

It's there we experience God's blessing, verse 16. It's those who walk, who live in Christ where peace and mercy comes upon them. When Paul there in verse 16 speaks about the Israel of God, who's he speaking of?

He's speaking of the church. Now many a PhD has been written and spilled over all that ink but I think we can say it is the church. He's connecting the Old Testament people, the New Testament people saying there's one people of God who are all blessed in Christ.

Don't we all long this evening for peace and mercy? Surely the longing of every human heart, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God, says Augustine.

And that peace is on offer and you can find it in Christ, in Jesus alone. And what is Paul saying to the church kind of together there in Galatia? He's saying that peace and mercy are only found in the church where it preaches and lives according to the gospel.

[28 : 50] Abandon the gospel that is, and go to the gospel that is no gospel and then what? There is no peace and mercy and we don't need to look very far on this island to have seen that happen, do we, in recent times.

Thirdly then, and lastly, we boast in the cross because it brings new life. It's where we experience God's blessing and thirdly, we boast in the cross even when it brings persecution, verse 17.

Even when it brings persecution, Paul says, he bears on his body the marks of Christ, unlike the Judaizers who want to escape from the cross of Christ.

He doesn't want to be bothered anymore with news of marks on the flesh coming from the law. No, he's bearing marks in his body of suffering for Christ. Suffering Savior means suffering disciples.

Friends, do we remember that this evening? When people oppose the message of the gospel, it's hard, but it should not surprise us. Those of you who are students here heading out onto your

campus this week, as you invite people to lunch bars, as you speak to new flatmates, as you tell them what all Christ has done, we can expect it to be hard sometimes for opposition, for people not to like it.

[30 : 17] And we need to remember that, not be surprised, but to count the cost to take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus. As we close, a little over 300 years ago, a man called Isaac Watts read Galatians 6.14 and he paraphrased them into these words, when I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God, all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood. Friends, for 2,000 years, Christians have made their boast the cross of Christ, for all history turned there, our redemption was won there, atonement was made there, and all hope of life with God flows from there.

And so may it be true of all of us today and for the church of Christ for all eternity that we look to the cross and there and there alone is our boast this day and evermore.

Let's pray. Forbid it, Lords, that we should boast, save in the death of Christ our God, all the vain things that charm us most, we sacrifice them to his blood.

Oh yes, Lord, keep us from boasting, keep us from trusting, keep us from glorifying in the vain things of this world that charm us most, things that belong to the age that is gone and is passing away.

[32 : 07] May for each and every one of us here our boast be in the death of Christ our God, in the cross of Christ, in the one who came to save us.

May that be our boast because that is the boast of your people both now and forevermore. We thank you that the songs we sing today and that the songs we sing in glory will be of the Lamb who was slain and so we lift our eyes to you and pray that that would be our boast forever.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.