

Bold in the Cross of Jesus

Galatians 6:12-18

Introduction

We are very familiar with the image of the cross. We have crosses in our churches, on steeples, on our Bibles, around our necks, in logos—crosses everywhere. And, this is fitting since the cross is a key part of the story of our redemption and salvation. But, with crosses around us all the time, we are often numbed to what all the cross implies. And in some ways, it's the most obvious thing that we quickly forget. Consider the phrase, "my cross to bear". We apply this to all kinds of things, but we forget that those who bore crosses were convicted criminals on their way to a tortuous death. To bear a cross, to pick up your cross means to die. And this is what Jesus calls you to if you want to follow Him (Luke 9:23).

A Good Showing in the Flesh

The main focus of Paul's letter to the Galatians is to defend the gospel against false teachers who claimed circumcision and other works of the law were necessary in order to be a Christian. Paul emphatically argues that man is only justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16).

At the end of the letter, Paul exposes the heart of these false teachers. They "make a good showing in the flesh" and "compel you [Galatians] to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12). The Judaizers were willing to maim themselves so that they would not be maimed by the world. They would cut off their foreskin and the foreskins of others to save their skin (Galatians 6:13). But Jesus said that he who seeks to save his life would lose it (Luke 9:23-27).

In contrast, Paul's body proved his commitment to Christ and was one of his greatest testimonies for the grace of God. This is his closing argument against the Judaizers in Galatians (Galatians 6:14-15, 17). He was willing to suffer greatly for the name of Jesus. He joyfully picked up his cross, unlike his opponents. When Paul was persecuted, he rejoiced because of the hope he had in his Savior, as Jesus calls all His disciples to do (Matthew 5:11-12).

The Only Grounds for Boasting

Paul says that the cross of Jesus is the only grounds for his boasting, as opposed to the false teachers. Through the cross of Jesus, the world is crucified to Paul, and vice versa. To the world, the Christian is despised, separated, shamed, and executed. And to the Christian, the world (its demands for loyalty) is likewise cut off. There is a gulf, a chasm, a fundamental break between the Christian and the world (James 4:1-4). One of the goals of crucifixion was, by the disfiguring and shaming of the body, to sever the relationship between the one crucified and the onlookers. A body hanging on a cross was made to look almost like some other twisted animal, a different species.

Note that the world that Paul is talking about in the immediate context is a world characterized by very religious people. "The world" is essentially any teaching that says you can be saved (or ultimately happy or at peace) through anything other than the death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone. You can be of the world by religious legalism or secular looseness. Both are worldliness, disobedience, and rebellion.

New Creation

The only thing that counts is the new creation (Galatians 6:15, 2 Corinthians 5:17). Salvation and life are not found in what you do or don't do. Salvation and life are found in what Christ has done for you. And this is why Jesus' call to pick up your cross, to lose your life, and Paul's exhortation to be crucified are part of a culture of life. The death we are called to has a purpose. Death leads to new life (John 12:24). And if you die with Christ, you are raised with him. This is of course true first of all when a person is saved and baptized (Romans 6:4-7). Sin no longer is your master. But then, you are called to acknowledge this and live like it.

"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts...For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:11-12, 14).

Part of this reckoning is obeying Jesus call to pick up your cross daily. You must die to the world and to your sin daily. And this may mean a complete physical death or a dying to your selfish sin. But through death comes much fruit. God exalts the humble (1 Peter 5:5-7).

Peace, Mercy, and Grace

Paul says the only thing to boast in is the cross of Christ. His body bearing the marks of Christ are his closing argument in defense of the gospel (Galatians 6:17). In fact, the apostles all sealed their testimony with their blood. Those who want to follow Christ must follow Him into death. But Paul pronounces over these dead people Peace, Mercy, and Grace.

Part of what this peace, mercy, and grace looks like is the ability to follow more, to die more, to move on to the next level. As you follow Jesus, what is your cross today? Where does Jesus call you to die? Wherever that may be, whatever it is in which you need to die to yourself and the world, do so looking for God to raise you up. He lifts up the humble. Pick up your cross and die daily. Be raised daily.