

The Gospel in Galatians
Boasting in the Cross

Lesson #14 for December 31, 2011

Scriptures: Galatians 6:11-18; Romans 6:1-6; 12:1-8; 2 Corinthians 4:10; 5:17; 11:23-29.

1. Boasting in the cross! Can you imagine anything that would seem crazier to a person living in Paul's day? Crucifixion was the most ignominious way in which one could die. It was reserved for traitors. So, why was Paul boasting in the cross? What would be an equivalent today? Boasting about the electric chair? Or, the gas chamber? About prison? Jail? The rack? Or, even the guillotine? Wouldn't you need to be dead to the world in order to boast about a cross?
2. In Romans 1:16, Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." How does that relate to boasting in the cross? Jeremiah 9:23,24 tells us that we should boast only in knowing and understanding God because His love is constant and what He does is just and right. How does this relate to boasting in the cross? Was Paul boasting about understanding and knowing God? Aren't money, might, and wisdom of some value? Why would Jeremiah tell us not to boast of wisdom, riches, or might? Aren't those things of value? Not when it comes to salvation!
3. The books of Romans and Galatians are the very essence of Paul. In these books, Paul spelled out as clearly as he could what the gospel meant to him. (Compare Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20)
4. What do you think Paul looked like? Paul was likely covered with scars from his multiple beatings, attacks, shipwrecks, etc. (2 Corinthians 11:23-29.) We know nothing about most of these experiences. Most of them happened before the history which we know. Did Paul look like someone who had been a slave for years and had been beaten multiple times by his master? Read 2 Corinthians 11:30. Why would one boast about something that shows how weak he is? Was Paul comparing scars? Why would he do that?
5. Read Galatians 6:11-18. Paul was ready to close his letter to the Galatians. But, he still felt so strongly about the issues he had talked about that he could hardly stop! In many ways, Paul's letter to the Galatians was similar to other letters he wrote. Most of Paul's letters include greetings to specific individuals, a final doxology, a personal signature, and some words of exhortation.
6. But, in Galatians there are no personal greetings. Why do you think that is? At the beginning, this letter also lacks the words of thankfulness for the people to whom he was writing. Furthermore, as he was closing this book, he took the pen in hand and wrote with large letters to make sure they understood that these words came from him personally. (Galatians 6:11) Some have suggested that Paul wrote with large letters because of his poor eyesight. Others have suggested that he wrote that way because of the many injuries he had sustained to his arms and hands, perhaps from being beaten or even from making tents. But, it may be that he wrote with large letters just for emphasis. In any case, Paul was incredibly moved by what was happening in Galatia. He could not sit quietly by and ignore it. How much do we care about the gospel? About the church?
7. Paul's "home church" was in Antioch. It was in Antioch that "followers of the Way" were first called Christians. (Acts 11:26) It was not intended to be a complimentary term. Imagine worshiping Someone who had died on a cross! In Paul's day, crosses were certainly not

jewelry! To a Jew the idea that their Messiah could have been crucified as a criminal was unthinkable!

8. Why do you think Paul mentioned his many scars and even boasted in the cross? The Judaizers seemed to be very impressed by appearances. They wanted it to be apparent that they were successful in convincing people of the truthfulness of their ideas. They wanted to boast of converts, not to the gospel, but to circumcision! Paul responded by saying, "I boast of the cross and of my scars." He regarded the work of the Judaizers as nothing more than a Hollywood act! (Galatians 6:12,13)
9. Why did Paul keep on pressing forward in his work when he knew that every new step had the possibility of more persecution? And, if there was not physical persecution, there was harassment, ridicule, and exclusion from the synagogue, etc. Paul had a fire burning in his bones, and he could not keep quiet about the gospel, despite the cross! He had to press forward even when he recognized it could cost his life. He was a slave to Jesus Christ! (Romans 1:1) Traditional Jews do not have a big problem with Jesus. Their big problem is with Paul. And he had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees.
10. Unfortunately, the truths he spoke about so forcefully in the book of Galatians (see especially Galatians 3:28) finally did cost him his freedom because the believers—the Christians—back in Jerusalem were not comfortable with the free ways in which he interacted with the Gentiles. His fellow Christians asked him to take that vow which led to his arrest. (Acts 21:20-26) Does being circumcised make one a better Christian? A better Jew?
11. About 10 years later, just before he was beheaded for his faith, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:12, *GNB*, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Do you think that is still true?
12. Try to imagine yourself as one of the Judaizers. Do you think they had good, logical reasons for what they were doing? Didn't they have many Old Testament verses to support their views? Have you ever done the wrong thing for the right reason? Or, the right thing for the wrong reason?
13. We have said a lot about boasting. Should Christians be boasting at all? Is boasting about Christ a good thing? Or, a bad thing? Isn't the good news about God and about Jesus Christ? Certainly, the good news is not about us! (Romans 1-3) Is there anything wrong with bragging about God?
14. Once again, try to imagine the shock of someone boasting about a cross to a person living in the 1st century. To the Jews who were looking for a Messiah to rescue them from Roman oppression, the idea of a crucified Messiah was totally offensive. And, to Romans, anyone who was crucified was a non-entity—someone not even to be mentioned by name.
15. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, December 27, suggests that there are two fundamental tenets that Paul was proposing in the book of Galatians: 1) The centrality of the Cross, (Galatians 6:14) and 2) The doctrine of justification. (Galatians 6:15) How does that relate to the new birth in John 3? Do we use the word *justification* in ordinary life?
16. Notice the following comment from our *Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, December 27:

The contempt with which the ancient world looked upon the cross of Christ is clearly seen in the earliest drawing of the crucifixion on record. Dating back

to the early second century, a piece of ancient graffiti depicts the crucifixion of a man with the head of a donkey. Below the cross and adjacent to a drawing of a man with his hands raised in worship, an inscription reads, "Alexander worships his god."

17. Read Galatians 6:14; Romans 6:1-6; 12:1-8; and Philippians 3:8. Paul seems to be clear in these passages. To boast of the cross means to be dead to the world. All the old selfish ways must die, and we must become new "living sacrifices." We become part of a larger body—the body of Christ. We are no longer slaves to old ways. We are now sons and daughters of God, and He is challenging us to become His friends. Is it true that in order to live a Christian life, one must die to the world?
18. What has the cross done to affect your relationship to the world? Who has priority in your life? Is your life changing slowly, bit-by-bit into becoming more and more like Jesus?
19. Review what you know about the history of Paul. He was a young man who had the very best education available to a Jewish man of his day. He almost immediately climbed to the highest political positions in the nation, becoming a member of the ruling body of the nation, the Sanhedrin. He was given great responsibility in dealing with the Christian uprising, the "heretics." But, Paul said that all of that he counted as nothing but rubbish in light of the cross.
20. Paul seemed to make it clear that the outside world no longer mattered. Circumcision was not a big deal. It did not really matter whether one was circumcised or not. It was only a big deal if it affected one's inmost thoughts and the way one lived. Paul is challenging us to become new creatures in Christ. Would being a new creature mean giving up selfishness and living by love?
21. Paul went on to discuss what it meant to be a new creature. What did Paul mean when he said we are to become new creatures? Is a new creature someone who has experienced the new birth? (John 3:5-8) What actually happens when someone experiences the new birth and becomes a new creature? Does the Holy Spirit enter him? Is there a word in theological jargon for this change? Is this what we call *justification*? Notice these comments in our *Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, December 28, "Paul explains that becoming a new creation means far more than just a change in our status in the books of heaven; it brings about a change in our lives today." Does the new birth signal that justification has taken place? Or, are these separate issues and separate processes?
22. Is there a real change that takes place with justification? (Matthew 5:16) Or, is the process of salvation—the process of becoming a new creature—a total transformation? We need to recognize that this is not something we can do ourselves. We must allow the Holy Spirit into our lives to do it for and with us.
23. What is the "rule" that Paul talked about in Galatians 6:16-18? Does this refer to the books of the New Testament or the Old Testament? Remember that when the book of Galatians was written, there were probably no books in the New Testament that had been written yet except for Paul's earlier books.
24. What are "the marks of the Lord Jesus" that Paul bore on his body? (Galatians 6:17; 2 Corinthians 4:10; 11:23-29) The word *mark* comes from the Greek word, *stigma*. Did Paul have many scars on his body from the times he had been beaten, etc.? Do we have any marks on our bodies because of our contentions for Jesus Christ?

Those who in the strength of Christ overcome the great enemy of God and man, will occupy a position in the heavenly courts above angels who have never fallen. (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 1, 1899, par. 2,3; 6BC 1113; LHU 230; SD 242)

25. How are we as Christians supposed to relate to the world around us? Should we get involved in social issues? How are we to relate to worldly issues?
26. Can we know for sure whether or not we have experienced the new birth and have become new creatures in Christ? Wasn't Paul sure? (Galatians 1:8,9)
27. How would you summarize the messages of both Galatians and Romans that Paul wrote during the winter months of A.D. 57-58?

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