

## ***The Gospel in Galatians***

### ***Boasting in the Cross***

Lesson #14 for September 30, 2017

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? By his uses of the term *boasting in the cross*, did Paul mean boasting about God and all that Jesus has done to reveal what God is really like?
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 that 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! What kind of God would come to this world and die on a cross?
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.) What was God's "secret plan" or "mystery"?
4. What do you think Paul looked like? Paul was likely covered with scars from his multiple beatings, attacks, shipwrecks, etc. (See 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.) We know nothing about most of these experiences. Most of them happened before the history of 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 those words came from him personally. (Galatians 6:11) Can you imagine what that document would be worth if it could be found today with those large letters in Paul's own handwriting? 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, Syria. 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." Do you think that Paul's scars were apparent to those who saw him? 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 him 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 and the church leaders—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; AA 403-405) Does being circumcised make one a better Christian? A better Jew? Paul knew that he was to be the apostle to the Gentiles, not the Jews.

In the earlier years of the gospel work among the Gentiles some of the leading brethren at Jerusalem, clinging to former prejudices and habits of thought, had not co-operated heartily with Paul and his associates. In their anxiety to preserve a few meaningless forms and ceremonies, they had lost sight of the blessing that would come to them and to the cause they loved, through an effort to unite in one all parts of the Lord's work. Although desirous of safeguarding the best interests of the Christian church, they had failed to keep step with the advancing providences of God, and in their human wisdom attempted to throw about workers many unnecessary restrictions. Thus there arose a group of men who were unacquainted personally with the changing circumstances and peculiar needs met by laborers in distant fields, yet who insisted that they had the authority to direct their brethren in these fields to follow certain specified methods of labor. They felt as if the work of preaching the gospel should be carried forward in harmony with their opinions.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles\** 400.1.

Afterward, when it became apparent that the converts among the Gentiles were increasing rapidly, there were **a few of the leading brethren at Jerusalem who began to cherish anew their former prejudices against the methods of Paul and his associates. These prejudices strengthened with the passing of the years, until some of the leaders determined that the work of preaching the gospel must henceforth be conducted in accordance with their own ideas.** If Paul would conform his methods to certain policies

which they advocated they would acknowledge and sustain his work; otherwise they could no longer look upon it with favor or grant it their support.—*Ibid.\** 401.2.

Throughout his ministry, Paul had looked to God for direct guidance. At the same time, he had been very careful to labor in harmony with the decisions of the general council at Jerusalem, and as a result the churches were “established in the faith, and increased in number daily.” Acts 16:5. **And now, notwithstanding the lack of sympathy shown him by some, he found comfort in the consciousness that he had done his duty in encouraging in his converts a spirit of loyalty, generosity, and brotherly love, as revealed on this occasion in the liberal contributions which he was enabled to place before the Jewish elders.—*Ibid.\** 402.2.**

After the presentation of the gifts, Paul “declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.” [Acts 21:19] This recital of facts brought to the hearts of all, even of those who had been doubting, the conviction that the blessing of heaven had accompanied his labors. “When they heard it, they glorified the Lord.” They felt [403] that the methods of labor pursued by the apostle bore the signet of Heaven. The liberal contributions lying before them added weight to the testimony of the apostle concerning the faithfulness of the new churches established among the Gentiles. **The men who, while numbered among those who were in charge of the work at Jerusalem, had urged that arbitrary measures of control be adopted, saw Paul’s ministry in a new light and were convinced that their own course had been wrong, that they had been held in bondage by Jewish customs and traditions, and that the work of the gospel had been greatly hindered by their failure to recognize that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been broken down by the death of Christ.—*Ibid.\** 402.3.**

**This was the golden opportunity for all the leading brethren to confess frankly that God had wrought through Paul, and that at times they had erred in permitting the reports of his enemies to arouse their jealousy and prejudice.** But instead of uniting in an effort to do justice to the one who had been injured, they gave him counsel which showed that they still cherished a feeling that Paul should be held largely responsible for the existing prejudice. They did not stand nobly in his defense, endeavoring to show the disaffected ones where they were wrong, but sought to effect a compromise by counseling him to pursue a course which in their opinion would remove all cause for misapprehension.—*Ibid.\** 403.1.

The brethren hoped that Paul, by following the course suggested, might give a decisive contradiction to the false reports concerning him. They assured him that the decision of the former council concerning the Gentile converts and the ceremonial law, still held good. But the advice now given was not consistent with that decision. **The Spirit of God did not prompt this instruction; it was the fruit of cowardice. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem knew that by non-conformity to the ceremonial law, Christians would bring upon themselves the hatred of the Jews and expose themselves to persecution. The Sanhedrin was doing its utmost to hinder the progress of the gospel.**

**Men were chosen by this body to follow up the apostles, especially Paul, and in [405] every possible way to oppose their work. Should the believers in Christ be condemned before the Sanhedrin as breakers of the law, they would suffer swift and severe punishment as apostates from the Jewish faith.—*Ibid.*\* 404.1. [Bold type and Bible reference in brackets are added.]**

Were the Judaizers just trying to avoid persecution by following the Jewish rituals?

Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world's Redeemer. **Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked.—*Ibid.*\* 405.1. [Bold type is added.]**

11. About 10 years later and 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?

**Jeremiah 9:23-24:** <sup>23</sup>The LORD says,

"The wise should not boast of their wisdom,  
nor the strong of their strength,  
nor the rich of their wealth.

<sup>24</sup>If anyone wants to boast,  
he should boast that he knows and understands me,  
because my love is constant,  
and I do what is just and right.

These are the things that please me.

I, the LORD, have spoken."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Jeremiah 9:23-24). New York: American Bible Society.

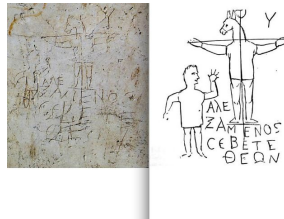
14. Once again, try to imagine the shock of someone boasting about a cross to a person living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. To the Jews who were looking for a Messiah to rescue them from Roman oppression, the idea of a crucified Messiah was totally offensive. The Messiah was supposed to conquer the Romans—not to be killed by the Romans as a criminal! 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, September 26, 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 referred to in John 3 and Romans 6:1-6? Do we use the word *justification* in ordinary life? Probably only with regards to our word processors! What does *justification* mean in that context?

16. Notice the following comment from the *Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, September 26:

The contempt with which the ancient world looked upon the cross of Christ clearly is 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.... The point is clear: the cross of Christ is deemed ridiculous. It is in this context that Paul boldly declares that he can boast in nothing other than the cross of Christ!

17. That depiction is shown on the website cited below and is displayed here:



The earliest probably [*sic*] depiction of Jesus on the Cross is the Alexamenos graffito, which was discovered on Rome's Palatine Hill in 1857. It is believed that this inscription, which was carved into a wall, was meant to mock Christians, as the head of the person on the cross has been replaced by a donkey's. The person added the words, Αλεξαμενος κεβετε θεων, which roughly means in Greek "Alexamenos worshipping God". —<http://www.medievalists.net/2015/04/the-crucifixion-of-jesus-in-medieval-art/> (Accessed June 25, 2017.) [Content in brackets is added.]

18. Read Galatians 6:14; Romans 6:1-6; 12:1-8; and Philippians 3:8. Paul seemed 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? Is that really necessary?
19. What has the cross done to effect 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?
20. 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.
21. 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?

22. 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 that change? Is that what we call *justification*? Notice these comments in our *Bible Study Guide*\* for Wednesday, September 27: “Paul explains that becoming a new creation means more than just a change in our status in the books of heaven; it brings about a change in our everyday lives.” Does the new birth signal that justification has taken place? Or, are these separate issues and separate processes?

If Paul used the word *righteousness* primarily for one’s standing before God, we must seriously question whether any of his readers, and especially his Gentile readers, would understand him at all.—J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul, A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry*.\* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

Zeisler was a tutor in New Testament at Trinity College, Auckland, New Zealand, and his book has been recognized as one of the most authoritative books on the subject of righteousness and justification.

23. Is there a real change that takes place with justification which basically means “to be set right”? (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.
24. 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 that are now in the New Testament that had been written yet except for Paul’s earlier books.
25. 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, shipwrecked, 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.—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*,\* April 1, 1899, par. 2; 6SDABC\* 1113.4; LHU 230.2; SD 242.4.

26. 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? Could we even be scarred by our contention for social issues?
27. 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)
28. 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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Last Modified: August 6, 2017

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