

GALATIANS
Large Letters
Galatians 6:11-18

One of the greatest speeches of all time was delivered by Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg on November 9, 1863. **“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”** Those words had WEIGHT. Several of the most impactful speeches ever made in the world were fairly short. Winston Churchill’s “Never, never, never, never give in” speech took only just under 3 minutes to deliver. These speeches impacted history. Paul’s letter to the Galatians, though not a speech, had a similar (and shall we say, GREATER) impact than the others I mentioned because of its ETERNAL significance. Paul wrote with passion and clarity as he addressed the most prominent threats to the Gospel message. Here is how he ended his letter.

Galatians 6:11-18 NIV

11 See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! 12 Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. 14 **May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule--to 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 and sisters. Amen.

This phrase, **“see what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand,”** indicate that **Paul wanted them to SEE that this was a Personal LETTER to them from him.** It was given with his heart and by his hand. As those Galatian believers read Paul’s words in oversized letters, they could be brought back into the PRESENCE of the one that had brought Christ to them! **This was a literal WORD PICTURE that had EMOTIONAL power in them.** Remember, the Galatians had received him in his sickness (some kind of eye disease) that did not cause them to shrink back from him, but instead to respond to him with love and gratitude and generosity of spirit. **“You would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me!”** Once again, Paul has brought to them a message of LOVE and FREEDOM and GRACE, and he is pleading with them not to FORGET it or FORSAKE it. If the reminder of his weakness would help them to remember, then so be it!

Why are the Judaizers compelling them to be circumcised? 2 reasons. **1) They want to impress RELIGIOUS LEADERS who trust in their own ability to “earn favor” with God by outward acts of the flesh.** He reiterates this selfish motivation in verse 13, reminding them that these Judaizers do not even keep the law perfectly themselves,

but they want “points” for convincing the Galatians to be circumcised. Once again, Paul says that their actions are simply “FLESHLY ACTIONS.” Jesus made it clear that “flesh can only accomplish temporary things, never eternal things!

But their MAIN REASON is **2) To AVOID PERSECUTION that comes when you trust Christ in his death and resurrection for your salvation and hope.** It is noteworthy that this is the FIRST TIME that Paul mentions this motivation about circumcision. Being at the end of his letter, *it seems like an afterthought, but the truth is that it was a FINAL BLOW to the shadow motives that these Judaizers had been hiding.*

In that day, the RELIGIOUS ELITE of the Jewish leaders were not just scornful of Christians; they were PHYSICALLY harming them. Christ-followers were being cast into prison and even martyred for their faith. Paul used to lead the charge in these actions, so he KNEW what they feared. But they would not admit this! **They are fearful BECAUSE they are ASHAMED of the Cross.** *It is EVIDENCE of their lack of faith.* They did not believe that the Gospel had power to save, and they did not believe that God would be with them in their troubles if they did fully trust Christ to save them.

Do I find that I am fearful of how the Cross of Christ will affect my life? [Story of those I know who were OUTCAST from their family when they were baptized] This fear or shame is not some distant concept! In our day, people back away from the cross because of fear and shame as well. They do not want to be mocked as “simple-minded” or as some kind of a “religious fanatic.”

Paul is SO the ANTITHESIS of the spirit of those self-centered false teachers who MINIMIZE the CROSS and arrogantly boast in their own [fake] perfection! Paul cries out in this letter, “**FAR BE IT FROM ME to BOAST in ANYTHING but the CROSS of our Lord Jesus Christ!**” **Why would Paul say that his ONLY BOAST was in the cross?**

THE CROSS REVEALS THE LOVE OF GOD IN FULL MEASURE

No other religion presents the love of God to mankind. Other faiths may acknowledge God’s HOLINESS and his JUDGMENT, but they only create FEAR in our hearts. They do not press us TOWARD God in genuine affection, but they press us toward God out of FEAR! But God calls us to himself in LOVE. He wins our hearts through SACRIFICIAL love. **He makes it clear that he desires for us to KNOW him and live in RELATIONSHIP with him forever, NOT COWER IN FEAR before him.** The cross tells me that God is not AGAINST me; he is FOR me. **How could I not boast in that kind of love?** If I boast of someone’s earthly love for me (**LIKE I LOVE TO DO ABOUT MY WIFE!**), **how could I not boast in God’s love for me even more?**

Once again, Paul’s plea for us is to “**KEEP IN STEP with the SPIRIT.**” **This is a call for us to WALK WITH GOD!** The cross is our invitation to learn to love God as we walk with him in a loving, responsive relationship. It is not a call to religion! When we read his word, or pray, or worship God, it can and should be from a place of HEARTFELT

affection for the One who loved me enough to die for me. I don't have to fear him. I ADORE him!

THE CROSS REPRESENTS THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ABOUT OUR FAILURE.

Christ went to the **ULTIMATE, EXTREME MEASURE** to buy us back for himself, **all the while KNOWING full well our brokenness and failure.** We must never forget that GRACE is not some form of IGNORANT AFFECTION, but of love that acts with its EYES WIDE OPEN. Grace does not INGORE the depth and consequences of our sin; it EMBRACES it for our sake! **If anyone wants to see just how broken and sinful we are, then just look at the cross.** God's grace is fully aware of our inability to do good perfectly or to live life purely. We are BROKEN people. I am so saddened by my sinfulness. I fail all the time. I feel like Paul in **ROMANS chapter 7** so much: **"Oh, wretched man that I am, who will DELIVER me from this body of death?"** I am so GRATEFUL that I can answer that question just as Paul did: **"I thank God for Jesus Christ, our Lord . . . there is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are IN CHRIST JESUS!"** I do not have to fear coming INTO THE LIGHT when I sin. God is not surprised by my sinfulness. He loves to CLEANSE us from our filthiness when we stumble and fall. He will not push us away! To go back to the LAW and SELF-EFFORT would force us back into hiding when we inevitably stumble. BUT GRACE invites us IN! **The message of the cross is so unlike all of the other religions in the world.** It towers above them because of the God of Grace who indwells it and empowers it. Yes, **the Cross of Christ is OFFENSIVE to human pride and effort,** but it is LIBERATING and GLORIOUS for those who embrace it in humble faith.

THE CROSS IS OUR ONLY REAL HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE

It was Paul who would later pen these words: **Romans 1:18 NIV**
¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

There is no other way to God. All other paths are DEAD ENDS. They all fail with our failures. The only way through to God is **BY FAITH IN HIS WORK!** This is why Paul would not boast in any other source. God's grace as revealed in the cross is our POWER for living for God on this earth and our provision for living for him FOREVER in heaven. **Grace FITS US for ETERNITY.** Jesus Christ is both my Savior MOMENT BY MOMENT and FOREVER FOR FOREVER. This is why Paul stressed the fact that it is in the cross that we are **"crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to us."** We are no longer who we were! He emphasizes this by acknowledging that, **"15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the NEW CREATION."** Paul wrote to the Corinthians that, **"If anyone is IN CHRIST, he is a new creation! Old things are passed away, behold, all things BECOME NEW!"** Does this describe your life now? How are you different since Jesus saved you?

Paul believed this so much that he was willing to SUFFER for it so that OTHERS might know. This is convicting to me! How much have I suffered for the sake of the cross?

Paul made it clear just how much he believed what he was preaching when he said, “**17 From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.**”

Brand-marks = “Stigma,” These marks were not some TATOO that an artist drew on his body. They were instead SCARS and WOUNDS that revealed the PERSECUTION that he had endured out of OBEDIENCE to Christ to win others to Christ! In contrast to those false teachers, Paul had served God out of love for God and with love for others. **He faced the persecution they were seeking to avoid!**

Do I bear on my body the brand marks of Jesus Christ in any form? What EVIDENCE can be found on me that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior and Commander?

Finally, did you notice what Paul said to the Galatians about his scars? “**From now on, let no one cause me trouble . . .**”

Paul is speaking to the Galatians, and giving a final, gentle, moving plea: **If you have any love for God or for me, then please, do not be the CAUSE of my sorrow and grief and pain in the future.** The wounds I have endured are hard enough, but they are made exponentially worse when the ones that I suffer to reach turn away from the truth to some lies. **It is the plea of a father begging his children not to make him weep any more.** The Galatians, by giving a listening ear to these deceivers, add trouble to Paul’s life, not just their own. **Paul cannot SEPARATE himself from their lives and fate. He is tied to them by LOVE.** Any time you give room to those who oppose the truth that your spiritual mentors live for, you bring grief to them. Some of you are in danger of doing just that in your lives today by the LIES you are BELIEVING or the PATHS you are TAKING. PLEASE WAKE UP and TURN AROUND!

Paul concludes his letter by reiterating the wonder of grace. **18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.**

GRACE is the FINAL WORD. Grace is the AMEN. It is truly our last and only hope. It is how we are called to live our lives. There is no other way, nor could there be any more GLORIOUS WAY!

THE CROSS REVEALS THE GLORY OF GOD!

This entire letter has been about us **BOASTING IN** the cross of Christ in our everyday lives. **I pray that GALATIANS has helped you to UNDERSTAND the FOUNDATIONS of GRACE and the NECESSITY of FAITH.**

I hope that GALATIANS has encouraged you to know Christ better and love him more.

I hope that GALATIANS has INSPIRED you to LIVE by grace and walk closer to God through the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. That was Paul's intent, and it is certainly echoed by your pastors today.

Let's pray.