
Fame: Our Glorifying Together

Galatians 6:11-16¹³

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Fame?

A movie...

A show...

A pursuit...

A passionate celebration of...

As a church, what do we tend to celebrate?

Our doctrinal stances?

Our ministry strategies?

Our wonderful building?

Our significance in the world?

What did Paul celebrate?

The churches of Galatia as a region in world...

The defection of the church away from the gospel...

The troubling involvement of well-known church leaders...

The public confrontation by the Apostle Paul...

The powerful correction of the churches...

How does the story and letter and words to them help us as we cultivate community?

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In Human Frailties (v. 11)

Over against the perceived centers of theological power, Paul presents himself, full of physical frailties.

¹¹ See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

Its Stark Reality

Whatever part or whole of this letter that Paul wrote with his own hand was in large letters. It would have been obvious to anyone having the original manuscript in their hands. But Paul's referring to it preserves it for us. We would have never known if he had not said. And so the fact that the Spirit had him say it is important for us. It moves it from being a historical curiosity to having greater spiritual significance.

Its Varied Reasons

Sometimes, people would write in large letters as a means of emphasis. We can bold, underline, highlight in our writing and it is understood we are doing so for emphasis. All caps in Social Media means SHOUTING.

Sometimes Paul dictated his letters. Because some were forging Pauline letters and sending them to churches, Paul had to authenticate his own letters. He would write a sentence or more in it to prove he wrote the letter.

Sometimes Paul wrote with his own hand as a graphic reminder of his own physical struggles. He had paid a dreadful physical price over the years of ministry. Stonings, beatings, deprivation, ship wrecks, failing eyesight all added up into intense physical suffering.

Its Desired Result

Given the importance of the subject and Paul's confrontation of theological defection, this may have all three reasons blended into one powerful sentence. The aim was to be sure the churches accept his apostolic rebuke and correction. But it was also meant to highlight the dire danger they were in from those who would draw them aside into the error. He recognized the powerful and pervasive influence that the messengers from Jerusalem would have had. It would have effectively pitted Paul against James with Peter as an unwitting proxy. Those sent from James needed to understand that Paul's Christ-revealed understanding of the New Covenant was for all Christians.

Paul also wants to shame them some. His standing is not just as the Apostle, but as a co-sufferer with Christ. He writes as one who is marked by the ministry. The moments and events of suffering are written in the scars on his body. They want to have the mark of circumcision to authenticate their faith? He has the marks of the cross as a genuine effect of the true faith.

With Spiritual Opposition (v. 12-13)

¹² 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. ¹³ 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.

Their Identity (v. 12)

So who is Paul marking out? Who are the "It is those who..."? He has already clearly spoken of the church in Jerusalem. He has pointed out James as the de facto leader. He indicates that there is a traveling band of people who traveled around teaching the error Paul identifies.

They are the ones who try to force Gentiles to accept circumcision. They believe that circumcision is necessary to be included in the promise to Abraham. Paul uses strong words to describe the Judaizers tactics. Instead of debate, discussion, manipulation they have resorted to "force". While the threat may not involve physical intimidation, there is some sort of threat implied. Given the context it may well have been that if they don't accept what the Judaizers are offering, then the churches will not be recognized or accepted by the church in Jerusalem.

They are the ones who want to be able to "make a good flesh show" when they make this demand. They want to make a good showing, a public display of these people.

Their Avoidance (v. 12)

Paul denounces their purpose in pressing their error. They were saying that Gentiles must conform to the Mosaic Law. Circumcision was required by the Law so that the Abrahamic promise might be passed down. In order to participate in the salvation the Messiah, Jesus provided, one had to take circumcision. In order to be a proper Christian, one had to conform to the Mosaic Law. So two of the core tenants of Paul's teaching on Christ and the cross, on the New Covenant and the Christian were directly being denied by the people, known to us as "Judaizers".

But Paul exposes them as teaching this error in order to avoid the persecution that comes with preaching the cross. They had tried to blend the Old and New Covenants. When you do this, you must of necessity, diminish the centrality of the cross.

Therefore, Paul is using his own persecution as evidence of his cross centered, Christ glorifying preaching. They are attempting to build a theology that avoids suffering. Paul is living a theology that embraces suffering.

Their Failure (v. 13)

They fail because they do not and cannot keep the Mosaic Law. So it was self-condemning for Jewish believers to try to press Gentile Christians to conformity to the Law. It is inconsistent and Paul in other places, argues it is incoherent. The return to the Law is a return doomed to fail. Instead of welcoming, celebrating and boasting in what Jesus has done on the cross, they were focus on the Law. Instead of what Christ had successfully done for them, they were demanding people do what they unsuccessfully tried to do. At the root of it is the gospel: we believe and accept and celebrate what Jesus has already done, not in anything we do.

No one can keep the Law. Whether you are a believer or not, it is not possible to fully keep the Law and thus fully meet its demands. So why, oh why, do we try?

Their Motives (v. 13)

Here is a common motivation. It gave them somewhat to boast in. They could boast in the number of Gentiles who were saved, truly saved, because they had taken circumcision. It went back to a performance track and measures of success.

This is also meant to shame these churches in Galatia. Paul is saying, "You were being used. You listened and moved to accept their preaching, their principles and this practice. But you were simply being used as evidence of the truthfulness and reality of their error. How does that sit with you?"

So their desire for people to conform to the Law was not born out of theological sureties but out of self-promotion and reliance on the flesh.

By Christ-Centered Boasting (v. 14)

This sentence may well be the shortest and profoundest summary of New Covenant theology.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Its Exclusive Commitment (v. 14)

It is the cross of Jesus Christ as the means of all grace. We will not boast in what we do not know and what we do not value. We believe in the centrality of the cross. We believe in the centrality of Christ. These are not just on paper propositions. They are worship fueling wants, desires emotions. What we believe and what we value, what we celebrate, is the sacrificial, substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross. It is totally baffling to the world. It caused the Jews to stumble. But for us, the execution of Jesus on the Roman version of an electric chair has brought all of God's grace to us.

It is the truth around the Jesus Christ as Lord who commands our faith and obedience. The one whose death and resurrection we celebrate is the one the Old Testament promised. He is the Messiah. He is our Lord. This is not just a phrase or a title. This is a title that entails our obedience. We are saved by Jesus our Lord.

It is what Paul celebrated. It was not just a "I will boast..." but he in effect takes an oath. He swears, "Far be it to boast, to celebrate anything else..." So we are called to a commitment that is to the exclusion of all others. There are other important things, ideas, principles, truths, practices to celebrate. But nothing, not even good things, are to displace glorying in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Its Life Transforming Principle (v. 14)

The death and resurrection of Christ is not only how we are saved but how we are transformed. Much of modern Christianity has lost this truth. Thankfully, we are seeing a resurgence of an emphasis on the gospel that makes the death and resurrection of Jesus the foundation of our transformation as well. Understanding, applying and living the truths of the gospel will advance our holiness as nothing else can.

Our co-death and co-resurrection with Christ is the core, central truth you must know in order to make real progress in holiness. I am convinced that this is why so many people struggle. There are dozens of "the secret of the Christian life" or "how to be..." whatever

is the focus of the writer. The secret of the Christian life is not a secret. It is an open truth taught in the Scripture. The problem is that it places the focus on what was done for us, not on what we do. Therefore, it doesn't give us 5 steps, 12 milestones, 7 attitudes, etc. It gives us a basic set of truths and then widely applies to our lives.

So we boast in the cross because through its work you have died to the world and world to you. Though you live in the old creation, the world, you are not under its control. Though live in where sin is present, sin does not rule you. Through Jesus' death and resurrection you have been spiritually separated from the old, the world, the flesh and ultimately then, the Law. Now you are alive in Christ and so are a part of the new creation, no longer under Law but under grace.

Its New Covenant Foundation (v. 15)

The physical rite of circumcision has no meaning in the New Covenant age. It pointed to a New Covenant reality. But was part of the Old Covenant and the Mosaic Law. Now that Jesus has come, its function as a pointer to the true Son of Abraham has been fulfilled. Now that the Spirit has come, its function as pointer to the circumcision of the heart has been fulfilled.

In Christian Community (v. 16)

These are truths that impact us personally. But they are also truths that are for the church, for the New Covenant community.

¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Our Lifestyle

"To walk" means to live a life by this rule. It means to conduct a lifestyle marked by glorying in the cross.

It is ironic that Paul says, "By this rule." He is poking the Judaizers a little. You want rules to live by? Here is the great rule that governs all the New Covenant theology, life and practice. We will glory in nothing, we will celebrate nothing, we will boast in nothing else. We will celebrate, focus on, center in the Jesus' full and finished work on the cross.

Here is why this sermon is concluding the series. We will be a community of God's people who will glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This will be our central theme in all we do. We will cultivate a suffering, sacrificial view of the Christian life as a reflection of the cross. We will not boast in ourselves. We will boast in Jesus.

Our Blessing

There will be peace and mercy among ourselves as we live by the gospel. There will be peace and mercy with other Christians. We will be offering God's peace and mercy to the world through our glorying in the cross alone.

Our Identity

Who is the Israel of God? This phrase only occurs here. Notice what Paul says. There will be these blessings on all who walk according to the rule, "We will not boast in anything else..." and upon God's Israel. God's true Israel is first the Lord Jesus. As Paul taught in

Romans, believing Jews are grafted into the true vine, Jesus. Believing Gentiles are also grafted in. It is not that the church replaces Israel. It is that Christ fulfills Israel. Believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are placed into Christ and thus are God's Israel. How do we know who are the Israel of God? They are all who boast only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflect and Respond

God forbid that we should glory... should boast ... should celebrate
in anything else
except
for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our commitment...

Our calling...

Our charge...

Our celebration...