

# A COMMUNITY OF THE CROSS:

*GALATIANS 6:11-14*

By Pastor Jim Lincoln on Sunday, May 25, 2008 (Memorial Day Sunday)

This morning we want to consider God's calling on us as a people of the cross. Paul said, "I want to know...the fellowship of Christ's sufferings." (Philippians 3:10) We have honored those who have given their lives in the service of their country. Now, we want to honor Christ who, "*suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...*" 1Pe. 3:1

## GALATIANS:

In Paul's day, the corruption of paganism had become so bad that synagogues all over the Roman world, began to fill up with Gentiles who had had enough of the corruption. Gentiles were being drawn to the consistent moral values and standards practiced by Jews. These Gentiles were even called *God fearers* because they came to believe in the one true God and identified with Israel's God. However, most drew the line at circumcision. Asking an adult male to get circumcised was asking very much. When Paul came into the synagogues saying that sinners could find peace with a holy God and become a citizen in the common wealth of Israel, through faith and not on the basis of Israel's ceremonial law, many synagogue Gentiles, trusted Christ and joined Christian fellowships. Paul's opponents were furious. Some even tried to have him killed. Some even made vows not to eat nor drink until they had killed him. Others visited churches where Paul had preached attempting to persuade the believers to be circumcised.

Now, the flash point was circumcision but that wasn't the real issue for Paul. Remember, he had Timothy circumcised. The deeper issues had to do with the motive and theology behind this effort.

## PRETENDING

In v.12 Paul says that the Judaisers' motive was to make a good showing in the flesh. The Greek phrase communicates insincerity. These people weren't who they really said they were. At the end of v. 13, Paul writes that they wanted, "*to boast in your flesh.*" They wanted to boast in the number of circumcisions they could get for Judaism. Just as David boasted in the number of Philistine foreskins he took, like trophy hunters they wanted to be able to report or boast to the Jews the numbers of

their converts to Judaism. Their motive was not at all to serve God. Their motive was to make an impression on men. They were joined to the world's way of getting glory and not crucified to it at all. They were seeking the approval of men, not God. How about us?

## TO AVOID PERSECUTION

He mentions a second motive in v. 12. They tried to get people circumcised so they wouldn't be *persecuted for the cross*. But why would they be persecuted for the cross? And what does this have to do with circumcision? Much. The cross implied several things. It meant that man as a sinner brings himself under a curse before God. And to bear that curse Christ died. Now, go tell your neighbor that he's a sinner and is under a curse that only Christ can bear and see if you get a warm embrace. More often than not you will get a hostile or angry reaction. This is one offense of the cross. Second, the cross means that nothing any man or woman can do merits God's favor. If that were possible then Christ's death would not be necessary. So, the cross humbles us and leaves the record of our own righteousness as inadequate before God. And faithfulness to that message will get you into trouble with many people. These teachers were *so much alive* to the approval, fellowship, ideas and honor of their fellow Jews that they couldn't embrace the Gospel of the cross. The cost of discipleship was too much. They couldn't boast in the cross. It was an embarrassment, a threat to their social network, self-esteem and perhaps business success. Now, this was so serious that Paul takes the pen away from his secretary and says (v.11), "*Look at the large letters I'm using to make my point.*"

And after revealing the deception of those who had come to Galatia to get their quota of converts to Judaism, he lists several points about what it means to be a community of the cross. I want to pick out three this morning.

1. As believers and followers of Christ, we accept and even embrace the offensiveness or the shame of the cross (12).
2. We not only accept this; the cross is our boast (14).
3. The message of the cross liberates us as we crucify ourselves to the world and world to us (14).

So, Christians *accept* the shame of the cross. We *boast* in the cross. And, because of the blessings of the cross we *crucify* ourselves to the world and it to us (14).

## FIRST, WE ACCEPT THE OFFENSIVENESS OF THE CROSS

This is part of becoming a real Christian. A real Christian accepts that the cross is an insult; it's an offense. Crucifixion was a disturbing, horrific event. It meant that the person crucified was a criminal, a failure, and a loser. He was a person who had been publicly humiliated and shamed. To identify with Christ, is to bear that kind of reproach. In 5:11, Paul calls the cross a *stumbling block* or a huge obstacle in the way of faith. Why? Well, it meant that the record of your righteousness contributes nothing to your acceptance with God. It means to come to God we have to repent not only of our sins but our perceived righteousness as well. It meant that we must come to Christ with empty hands to receive His record not to offer up ours as any boast or merit.

It means that Jesus had to die in our place for us to have peace with God. And that is so, because *sins never go into thin air*. We said several weeks ago that when we sin, someone always pays.

Look, if I borrow your bicycle and then through neglect lose it, someone has to pay. I might say, "I'm really sorry." But if you say, "Don't worry about it; forget it." That sin didn't evaporate into thin air. You absorbed the loss. Either I pay the debt or you absorb the cost of that bike. But, debts and sins don't just vanish in to thin air.

Now, it's one thing to lose a bicycle. It's quite another when you have been on the receiving end of a personal attack, meanness, indifference or a failure of love. If you have, you can either stay angry, talk bad about that person, gossip and by so doing make them pay down the debt or you can forgive. But, if you forgive you will pay. **And the currency of that payment is the emotional pain of not receiving the justice you may or think you deserve.** And, beloved, that hurts. And that is the cost of forgiveness. And that is often what it means to take up your cross. It is to take up this pain. How would you advertise this in a church ad? Where does it fit under, "Come on out and you'll have lots of fun." But when we sin, someone always pays. Forgiveness is not overlooking sin. It's choosing not to exact justice. And that always hurts.

Now, here's the deal with Jesus forgiving us. I can make restitution for a lost or stolen bicycle. But if you think clearly about what you have done to, thought of, and said about people throughout your life, you would have to spend the rest of your life making restitution and you would never be able to pay it back. When I was converted I tried to make a list of all my offences and attempted to make restitution. However, the more I worked at it the longer the list got, until I realized how impossible that project was. And more importantly, God deserves our absolute and total submission since the day we are born. **God's good and reasonable command is that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength all the time.** Isn't that reasonable? He authored us. Doesn't he have authority over us? He gives you the air you breathe and makes our autonomic nervous system work. You don't chose to breathe. He causes the food we eat to grow. He makes and sustains the

sunshine and the rain. Yet, how can we pay back the countless times we have not given God His due? Beloved, please know that sins are religious before they are moral. Here's my question. **What happens to a sin when the cost of the restitution exceeds your net worth?** How do you get out from under that? (13) Paul says that if the Jews were thinking straight they would have to admit that even they don't keep the whole law. In other words, circumcision won't cover it all.

Here's the gospel of the cross: No one can make sufficient restitution! Restitution is beyond our net worth. But the justice of God demands that sin be punished. What would you think of a judge that said to a thief, a murderer, or the executives at Enron, "If you just say you're sorry and promise you won't do it again, you can go free"? You would be outraged!

If your brother was murdered and at the trial the killer said, "I'm sorry." And the judge said, "Well then, there you have it; you're free." Without the cross, you can't absorb that. If society bore that burden, or that cost, there wouldn't be a civilized society for very long. And you all know it. Someone has to pay. Every sin must be paid for by someone. But, here's the deal, you and I can't pay for our sins against each other not to speak of the debt we owe God. Because *we don't have the capital* to pay it!

The Bible says, "*God sent forth His Son who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God IN HIM.*"

Here's the offense of the Cross. Jesus didn't come to pay a fine. Our sins are capital offences. He had to die as a criminal. God's word says that the soul that sins shall die. Being sorry is insufficient. Penitence is insufficient.

Why can't I go to God and just say, "*I'm sorry and be done with it?*" Isn't he a loving God who forgives? Again, you would be outraged with a judge who did this. Beloved, **What it took for us to be forgiven reveals the sinfulness of sin.** By nature, we minimize sin. When Jesus told Peter that He had to die for sin, Peter said, "No, forget that stuff about death." Jesus said, "*Satan, get thee behind me.*" "Peter you don't get the sinfulness of sin and what must be done to make it right."

Look, if anything short of the death of Christ would have been sufficient to make things right between us and God, don't you think in the Father's eternal wisdom he would have used it and saved Jesus from death? If your moral effort, good intentions, religious ritual, a descent moral record, if any of these could have been good enough to grant us God's peace, surely God would not have crushed his Son.

Where's the offense of the cross? Our sins are so bad that only through the cross can we come to the Father. If anyone could get to God any other way, it renders the cross ridiculous. That would then be the way. This is why Jesus claimed to be the

only way, truth, and life to peace with God. He is the only way. Who else can take away our sins?

And this offense is ecumenical. It offends everyone. Because it insists that everyone is a helpless sinner. It took the Son of God to die for us all and nothing else is sufficient. The whole structure of Jesus' death makes no sense unless the only hope is in the cross. It exposes and judges everyone. And that's the offense of the cross. As believer and follower of Christ we accept this and even embrace it. Heb.13:13, "Let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." Do we?

## SECOND: WE EVEN BOAST IN IT

Now, Paul says more. He says that believers not only accept this but that **we even boast in it**. What do you brag about to yourself? By nature we brag about what makes us look good and important. So, what do you think makes you look good? Is it looks, clothes, achievements, who you know, your smarts, status, (surely not your grand children,) your possessions? What, in your mind, is worth bragging about?

A Christian is someone who, more and more, discovers that that which is most worthy of bragging about is the cross of Christ.

Here's some irony. To millions of people who carry the agonizing burden of low self esteem, therapists say, "*Come, listen...make much of yourself.*" They shine the spotlight on their achievements, successes, contributions, competencies and innate worth as human beings with enormous human potential and they say, "See, in light of all of this you should feel pretty good about yourself." There is a Christian version of this. And then guess what happens? The moment the counselee compares herself with someone who has more of these things her self-esteem plummets again.

Look, the way to feel good about you is just the opposite. Stop making so much of yourself and start making much of who is really worthy of it: God. You were made to worship God. Not yourself. You're just not worthy of such attention. You weren't made to carry that weight. **The way to have appropriate self-appreciation is to make much of God (boast).** A funny thing happens on the way to authentic worship. You feel better about yourself precisely because you have taken yourself out of being the gravitational pull of everything that is. If the worship you attend makes much of God and not you, when you boast in the one thing that is the most worthy boast of all and put that as the gravitational center of your life, you start to feel better. And that greatest and most worthy thing there is to make much of is the loving and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus. We don't need therapy that makes us the center of the universe. What we need is theology. We need to make much of God and what He has done in His Son, Jesus Christ. Have we exchanged theology for

therapy? Listen to sermons? Who are they talking about? In an effort to become relevant to our world we run the risk of becoming like the world and not crucified to it at all. However, the cross is that which is worthy of our boast.

## THE CROSS IS THE ONLY PLACE IN HISTORY WHERE PERFECT LOVE AND PERFECT JUSTICE MEET

Ps.89:14, *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne. Lovingkindness and truth go before you. How blessed are the people who know this joyful sound.”*

If you seek your self-esteem in making much of yourself, there are only two outcomes. You will either become puffed up with pride or you will be filled with shame. Instead, we boast, exult, honor, prize, cherish, brag about, appreciate and revel in the cross because it's the only moment in history that is worth our greatest boast. On the cross Jesus wore a crown of thorns. Perfect majesty and perfect meekness met on the cross. Perfect authority and perfect submission met on the cross. Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, conquered every adversary and Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world met at the cross. The death that gives eternal life met at the cross. Glory and humility met at the cross. It's the most wondrous thing to boast about. Never before was more love for God and man given than at the cross and never before was more hatred of sin expressed. These both met at the cross. Therefore it is the thing we boast about more than any other.

Someone rejects you, insults you, abuses you... yes, that hurts. **But on the Cross, God loved you.** *And if he didn't spare his only son will he not give you all things?* If he has done the hardest thing and the most unimaginable sacrifice for you, is there any lesser sacrifice he wouldn't make for you? Some in the world may see you as ugly or unattractive. Because of the cross God sees you as beautiful because your life is now hidden in His Son Jesus who is the most beautiful of all. Some would make you feel condemned, shamed, and unworthy of love. Because of the cross, God says you are accepted and calls you his beloved. Some would make you feel afraid. However, because of the cross you are the sheep of His pasture and under His tender care. There are plenty of fear mongers today. But His perfect love drives out fear.

Beloved, our primary, biggest, deepest boast and exultation is the Cross of Christ. It's the most beautiful, wise, holy, righteous, tender, loving, compassionate, amazing, staggering, and wondrous thing anyone can consider. Followers of Christ accept and embrace the offense of the Cross. Not only that we exult and boast in it as our deepest and greatest boast.

## BECAUSE OF THE BLESSINGS OF THE CROSS, WE CRUCIFY OURSELVES TO THE WORLD AND THE WORLD TO US.

Beloved, we can't be free *for* the world if we are not free *from* it. If we need too much of its approval, its passions, acceptance, wisdom, values, offerings, sense of morality, we won't be free to receive these things from the Lord. Paul, says in v. 14, "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ *through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world...*"

In Gal. 5, Paul talks about crucifying the flesh. Most of us heard a lot of preaching about that. But this is different. Here, he is telling us that we have to become dead to the world and those in it. Let me ask you this. How does a corpse react when you go and insult it? Does that insult bother a corpse?

Paul could say that he wanted to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings because he was liberated from the need to have the world bend itself to make him happy. His gladness was in Christ. He was crucified to the world and all it offers and claims.

## PSALM 73

There was a time when the Psalmist wasn't crucified to the world or it to him. He said, "I almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant...I saw the prosperity of the wicked... They aren't plagued like other men. . They are always at ease... They have increased their wealth. Surely *in vain* have I kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence... For I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning... When I pondered like this it was troublesome. Until I came into the sanctuary of God, then I perceived their end...when my heart was embittered, I was senseless and ignorant... I was like a beast (following our most primitive urges). But you have taken hold of my right hand. And with your counsel you will guide me and afterward receive me into glory. Who have I in heaven but you? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth."

The Psalmist almost slipped, crashed, and burned. But what did he do? He crucified himself to the world and the world was crucified to him. He said, "*Beside you, there is nothing on the earth I desire. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*"

With God as his portion, why does he need the accolades, approval, things, values, sins, and prizes of the world? He doesn't. The nearness of God is his good. Is it yours and mine? Are we too alive to the world? You will never be free if you do not

crucify yourself to the world and what it values. What does the world and what do some Christians say about a small church? “Unworthy,” is what I often hear. However, Jesus says, you are the Body of Christ and each one is a member of it. Who are you going to listen to? If a small church’s unfaithfulness is the cause of its smallness, then repentance is critical. But if it is that they can’t become like the world to attract more people, then let their boast be only in the cross.

Corrie Ten Boon was a Dutch woman who lived in a concentration camp in WWII with her sister who died in the camp. Years later she was speaking in a church. She walked up to greet one of the deacons of that church and reached out to shake his hand. As she did she recognized him as one of the camp guards at the concentration camp. He was a cruel guard and one of the people responsible for her sister’s death. As she reached out her hand she felt the fury rise up in her soul. But then she realized that she was crucified to the world and the world was crucified to her. She didn’t need to be alive or awake to that anger and bitterness. She was a corpse to it. In fact, she was also crucified with Christ and so as she continued to reach out her hand she felt forgiveness flood her soul. The warmth of Christ flooded right through her and she forgave him on the spot. He didn’t even know it. You can forgive when you know that Jesus Christ paid it all. It’s never easy. However, she said “*How do I demand one penny of payment for something my Savior has paid every last bit of His blood for on the cross?*” We can forgive beloved, because the cross is our boast. If your *reputation* is your idol...if you are too much alive to it...If *approval* is your idol...if you are too much alive to it...If your *image* and *success* is your idol...if you are too much alive to it...If what you need from others is your idol and you are too much alive to it...you won’t be free.

As followers of Christ we *accept* the offense of the Cross. Have you?

As followers of Christ we *boast* and exult only in the Cross. Do you?

As followers of Christ we *crucify* ourselves to the world and the world to us so that we will bend the knee only to Christ. Do we?

And whatever the world offers can only fill a thimble full compared to the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross. No one can love you and me like Jesus. Follow Him to the cross and live.

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!*

*All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

*"We worship at your feet, Where wrath and mercy meet."  
--Graham Kendrick*