

Galatians 6 v11-18

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[0 : 00] And one of the joys of being a slightly larger church is being able to help other churches and Ruben has done a great shift preaching in Headington and Salisbury and Chris Craddock is serving as moderator and lots of the elders are helping out in different ways and so I'm away quite a bit this next month I'm in the Isle of Harris next Sunday and then I'm in Alabama at the end of the month is a tough life isn't it but someone's got to do it Ruben gets Headington and Salisbury I get Isle of Harris in Alabama you know so Ruben's going to preach through 1 Corinthians which will be great and then Andrew's going to go back to doing a series in Genesis and so we come to the end of Galatians and I confess I always get a bit sentimental when we finish a book in the Bible I put my Galatians commentaries back in their place on the shelf this morning part of it is nostalgia but I have found Galatians challenging and yet I've been wonderfully fed myself and I've learned a great deal going through Galatians and part of it is regret I think this morning that I've just squeezed the first little bit of juice out of the orange and in some ways I wish I could go back next week to chapter 1 and verse 1 we're not going to do that there and so here we go with the last eight verses and they really are astounding and they bring together all the big themes that the apostle has been laying before us in the book of Galatians

Galatians and he says as you stand back he says Galatians is about one thing he wants you to grasp at one thing it's about one thing and that one thing is the absolute centrality and transforming power of the cross of Jesus Christ that's what Galatians is about and did you notice when Andrew read it there are two references to the cross in verse 13 even those who receive circumcision they don't keep the law they desire to view circumstance that they may glory in the flesh and the end of verse 12 is that they don't want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ that's what they don't want but Paul contrasting in verse 14 says far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ he says the main thing which is the main thing is the cross of Jesus Christ at the heart and center of our faith at the heart and center of our relationship with God at the heart and center of the Bible is the cross of Jesus Christ and I want to find out an illustrate a way to illustrate that from elsewhere in the Bible so let me ask you this question how important do you think the miracles and teaching of Jesus are you think to yourself are they very important never in history have such words or deeds been achieved but when you look at the gospels the gospel writers tell us that though the miracles and the teaching of Jesus are important the death of Jesus is far more important in fact without the death of Jesus his words and his miracles are powerless so if you look at Mark's gospel and you stand back over a third of the gospel is devoted to Jesus' death take John's gospel and over half the gospel is devoted to Jesus' death and so you mustn't say to people oh well this is the kind of biography of the Lord Jesus no biography has one third on the death or one half on the death in fact at the end of John's gospel he gives us this tantalizing statement doesn't he he says Jesus did a whole bunch of other things and if you wrote them down they would have filled up all the books from the world and a lot of us want to say well just give us some of them tell us a bit more but he didn't why didn't John put all those details in his book because he wanted you and I to focus on the death of Jesus Christ what is vitally important you see to the gospel writers is not so much how you and I live but what you and I believe about the cross some people say to us don't they they say well it doesn't matter what you believe it matters how you live and so let's not get caught up on doctrinal disputes let's not get het up about the incarnation or the resurrection or the miracles let's all live by the golden rule and it doesn't matter no matter what you believe what matters is how you live let's go for peace but if that's true then you've got to go back to correct the gospels on their emphasis and if that is true you've got to go back and help Paul to correct his emphasis and tell him

Paul you need to glory in a lot of other things other than the cross of Jesus you see the very shape of the gospel tells us that what matters is not so much what Jesus tells us to do but what Jesus has come to do for us what he's come to do for you the world does not need another moral teacher they are all saying basically the same thing I'm not putting Jesus in this category but Buddha says isn't it love for one another Allah says obey and submit the secular commentator the Instagram influencer says be kind but the problem is we can't do it and what we really need is not so much someone to come and tell us what to do we need someone who will come and take our hearts and make them into something that we cannot be on our own we need someone from God who will create us and make us into new creations and that is what marks the true church always what marks the true church is not kind of institutional conformity to anything external or circumcision the true church is marked by being a community that is centered on the cross of Jesus Christ you can always tell a true Christian church a true Christian church will not sit in slavery to some central authority to some rituals to rules it won't sit under the influence of one teacher or one great leader inspirational though they may be a true church will be one that sits under the Bible and that recognizes

Jesus Christ and him crucified as it's life and hope and I think that is why Paul finishes the letter with these words just look at the last verse the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit brothers and so two questions this morning what is this grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the second question how do we get it to be with our spirits so first then what is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ now in these verses verses 11 to 18 there are two sides to the grace of the Lord Jesus one is objective and one is and it's external and it's outside of us and the other is internal subjective experiential inside of us now this is going to be tricky we found this again and again of me in Galatians you've got to think hard we've got to work hard together at this so it's a bit like a marriage

I now pronounce you husband and wife there's an objective side to it you sign the document you get the certificate you are a married couple there's a new family created objectively but that's not all there is to a marriage is it there's a subjective side there is the quality of the relationship and so in verse 14 we get both these sides together if you look down far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and now he says the objective side by which the world has been crucified to me that's the objective and then the subjective side is I to the world so let's take the objective side first I think this is the only place in the whole of the New Testament where we are told that through the cross the world is crucified to us we usually are familiar I think with the idea that we're crucified to the world but the emphasis here is that the world is crucified to me so what does that mean verse 15 well neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation what it means is this that in the death of Jesus Christ it's not just the death of one man it's not just the death of the Son of God it's not just the point of our faith but in the death of Jesus Christ the world itself is crucified what happened on the cross is that we get a glimpse of this new creation that God has begun the cross is like the sentence from God on this world what this means is that everything external circumcision uncircumcision doesn't really matter let me read to you from John Brown and this is the best commentary I think on Galatians by a guy called

[10:34] John Brown it's published in the 19th century and this is what he writes speaking about these verses he says this the great principle taught here by the apostle according to the wisdom given him is that true Christianity does not consist in anything merely external but in the state of the hidden man of the mind and heart nothing merely external can make a man a Christian so here we go he may be baptized but the washing of water is not the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit he may observe the Lord's Supper but eating bread and drinking wine and not discerning the Lord's body is not the communion of the body and blood of Christ he may attend the public services of religion but all this may be only bodily service he may give much arms he might put his money in the collection pot and say many prayers but all this may be to be seen by men he may do many things commended by Jesus but his motives may be dangerously defective or fatally wrong nothing will suffice but the new creation the mind and the heart transformed by divine truth regarding the cross of Christ it's lamentable to think how often religion is placed in what has nothing to do with true Christianity counting beads doing penance going on a pilgrimage wearing a particular dress speaking a peculiar dialect and so these things when it comes to salvation are a matter of indifference because the world has been crucified to us you see the law belongs to the world human religion belongs to this world but in the cross of Jesus Christ

God has begun a new creation he's begun to make us alive by his Holy Spirit and this is the first side of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ I wonder if you understand this you see it means that we have a different relationship to the world put it this way the world if we move through the cross the world no longer has a controlling influence in my life and thinking it's been crucified to me it's as if God has taken the world and he's nailed it to the cross the world is dying this world is passing away and so you and I as Christians we are no longer slaves to the basic structures of this world let me give you an example I think non-Christians people who are not Christians often look at Christians true Christians and think they're just weird and often we would have to say well we agree with them but there are sometimes aren't there there are good reasons for us looking weird you see some Christians are very successful but they do not care whether they are or they aren't other Christians look like failures but they don't care whether they are or they aren't this week

I hear of a man in the United States who has made an absolute fortune on the internet millions upon millions upon millions probably near billions he has come to faith in Jesus Christ and he is now investing literally hundreds of millions of dollars in seeing churches planted across the world in places where Christ is not known you would look at that guy wouldn't you and you would say that's a very weird priority I have another friend in London who's refused promotions with huge salary increases and bonuses so that he can continue serving his local church and be an elder there and he can continue to spend time with his family and you look at that and you think that's so weird the world has been crucified to them we live in this world we use this world some of us marry and raise families in this world we have money but we know that there is something far more important than money do you know that we want our children to do well but we know don't we that the cross of

Jesus Christ is far more important to our children than anything and any success this world can offer the best that this world can offer has been crucified to us all the principles of living a happy successful balanced life of accumulating lots of possessions and wealth of keeping your objectives of being focused of having purpose of living in a successful manner it's glorying in the flesh and it is all completely impotent impotent to move you one step closer to the Lord Jesus Christ because that only comes through his grace before we saw the cross as beautiful before we saw Jesus Christ and him crucified and understood it we were deeply anxious to be in favour with the world what the world thought of us was really really important

I think that's one of the signs of whether somebody's a believer how desperate they are for the world to think well of them but now we know don't we that the best that the world has to offer us cannot promote our life in Christ that's the objective side but the subjective side as well the internal side when we place our faith in the death of Jesus it's like moving through a door to the other side of the cross and so now we look back on the world and our relationship with the world is forever changed because we've been crucified we now relate to we now view we now see the world differently and one of the most important things that the book of Galatians does for us is it brings together the cross of Jesus Christ and you and your and my daily experience of the

[17:18] Holy Spirit in our lives there is no separate gospel of the Holy Spirit don't let anyone teach you that it is not as though there's a basic gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the cross and then there's a subsequent gospel of getting the spirit somehow they belong together so let me show you this look at chapter 4 in verse 4 for a moment when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption of sons and because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba father and so it is through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross that we first receive the Holy Spirit and it is through the redeeming work of Jesus on the cross that we continue to receive the spirit I wonder if you believe that look at chapter 3 in verse 1 you foolish

Galatians who's bewitched you it was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified Paul says I preach Jesus Christ as crucified verse 2 of chapter 3 let me ask you this did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith how did you receive the spirit it was hearing by faith that Jesus Christ is crucified verse 5 does he who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith so how does God continue to supply his Holy Spirit to us it is by hearing of Jesus Christ and him crucified and so the cross of Jesus Christ is not one simplistic message growing up

I used to listen to a minister who used to come and preach in our church and he would finish his sermons the same way every week every week it was the same and you'd sit in the congregation and you could see where he was going and you'd get to the end of the sermon and you'd hear the same words and everybody's head would go like this and people knew what was coming there's another minister in Wales and he used to cry and he used to cry at about five past twelve every Sunday you'd get really emotional they called him waterworks so cruel isn't it and he was saying the same thing every week loses effect doesn't it but can you see that we can never exhaust the glory of the riches of all the treasure and knowledge and wisdom that are hidden in Jesus Christ and what we really need to be taught is the full extent of the gospel isn't it if you go back to chapter six the false teachers were saying the real action in the

Christian life is not the cross of Christ it's in your outward external religious observance and they said that the way that you grow in the spirit the way that you move on in your Christian life is outward external observance it is not hearing Jesus Christ and him crucified and I think that is a constant danger for churches like us particularly for us I love living in London it's it is isn't it one of the most beautiful cities in the world and there is art which is glorious there is theatre there is all sorts of things and we live in a culture that is obsessed with externals and it is almost impossible for you and I to avoid this temptation and so you go on to social media you go on to Instagram and I young people what are you obsessed what do you see you see externals externals and they make the external essentially important and it's easy to do that in church life to take things which are good in and of themselves like circumcision as these guys did or communion or baptism or Presbyterianism

Presbyterianism or anything you like and you can take those distinctives and put them right at the center and make them fundamentals and every church I know struggles with this and so we can look at other churches can't be the relevant style the great sound system the videos the building but actually it's a lot closer to home with us isn't it we can put sound orthodox preaching correct liturgy church government none of those things are wrong in themselves the problem is if you take any of those things and you elevate those things and you look to them apart from the cross of Christ when we do that we empty the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and so brothers and sisters I don't know how to say this any clearer than this in the cross we commit cultural social personal suicide to the world that is very shocking but I say it deliberately in the cross we commit cultural social personal suicide to the world it is a graphic and a perfect way to describe our relationship to this world and that's what the grace of the Lord

[23:13] Jesus Christ is all about well secondly let me ask you just briefly Paul wants this grace to come into our hearts into our spirits how does that happen well I think the simple answer from these verses is this it's everything depends on what we boast in and what we glory in so look at verse 13 and what do the false teachers glory in they glory in they boast in your flesh in the flesh look at verse 14 what does Paul boast in Paul boasts in the cross what I glory in is my true joy it's what I trust in it's what I base my life on it's the centre of my personality the field of my dreams the thing that I think about as I go to sleep at night the thing in my life which I need and if I don't have it

I just cannot go on that's your glory and if we boast in the cross of Jesus Christ Paul says this world has no power over us we are free people turn that around if there's something that has power over you if there's something apart from Jesus Christ that you cannot do without it means terrifyingly that you are not glorying in the cross but that you are glorying in the flesh you see if I'm embittered and I just can't get past it if I'm controlled by boredom or fear or something else I may not be glorying in the cross in chapter 6 verse 1 I want to say that we need each other to help each other to glory in the cross can you look at chapter 6 verse 1

I think some of us are blocked in our Christian life because of huge wounds that we bear and those wounds stop us boasting in the cross so look at the beginning of this chapter brothers and sisters verse 1 if anyone is overtaken if anyone is caught up if anyone is captured in any trespass I don't reflect on that I don't think it necessarily means that it is the person who sinned it does mean that but it doesn't just mean that he's saying if anyone sins but if somebody's overt he's not saying if someone sins he's saying if someone is overtaken you are spiritual restore them in a spirit of gentleness and look to yourself lest you too be tempted bear one another's burdens it is isn't it it's such a burden to help each other it's going to take some sort of sacrifice it's going to be a huge waste of your very important time you see what lies at the heart of Galatians is two diametrically opposed views of the cross of Jesus Christ the apostle looks at the cross and he sees it all in its beauty and his glory and his honour and his joy and the false teacher looks at the cross and they're offended by it and they don't want to have anything to do with it and they especially will not suffer for the cross they will not put themselves out for the cross but you see there's only one way for you and I to receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts and spirits and that is to go through the offence of the cross and it's when you do that you go through the offence of the cross that the sweetness of the grace of God is on the other side put it this way if you've never been if you've never been offended by the cross you've not understood it it's not until we come to grips with the offence of the cross that it becomes a transforming power in our lives in the first century and today people never hear the message of the cross for the first time and say oh that's just fantastic why?

why? because when you understand what the cross is about it says something about you and when you see the cross and you understand it it says some very uncomplimentary things about you it says that we are not good people and it says that we cannot find our way to God and it says that we're lost it says and if you look at the world and what's wrong with the world that the curse of God lies on the world and that's our fault and that we are impotent to save ourselves and that nothing short of the death of Jesus God's son will rescue us and you ask yourself the question why did Jesus die?

why did Jesus die? well and your friend or your neighbour comes to you and says look I love you so much I want to show you how much I love you I'm going to show you how much I love you and to do that they run off into the forest and they get eaten by a wolf how does that show their love for you?

[29 : 05] and what would you say at the funeral about that person? but if you discover that one of the children of the church was pinned to the ground by the wolf and that your friend rescued the child and gave his own life to save that child well then it's rescue isn't it?

or if a friend comes to you and says I'm going to lay my life down for you and I'm going to show you how much I love you and they run out into the traffic on the Xbridge Road and they're flattened it doesn't show love it just shows they're silly but if your father is in traffic and your friend pushes them out of the way and is killed in the process then that rescue then that's love it is terribly offensive isn't it for you and I to be told that we're rebels against God and we're spiritually impotent and that there's only one place of rescue and that one place of rescue is in the death of his only son it's very offensive to be told that it doesn't really matter whether you've lived an upright life whether you've paid all your taxes whether you've been a gentle and kind person in your family or you might have been somebody who's lived an immoral and selfish and abusive life because each of us stand equally in need of the forgiveness of God we have no power to help ourselves there is no health in us and that is why that the true Christian church always centres on the cross of Jesus Christ and that is why the true Christian church will always suffer because the cross is offensive and I need to finish but I don't want to finish without skipping over verse 17

I want to read verse 17 to you Paul says this he says from now on let no one cause me trouble for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus the whole of the book of Galatians has been about scars it's been about marks what is circumcision?

it is a scar it is a mark and Paul says you want to talk about scars? let me talk to you about scars let me show you scars a number of them he got when he preached the gospel in Galatia do you remember he was stoned and left for dead in a gutter in Lystra he had countless beatings five times he received 39 lashes and they were proud of their scars but Paul says I bear in my body the scars the marks of Jesus Christ Amy Carmichael wrote this beautiful poem it's well known isn't it?

Hast thou no scar no hidden scar on foot or side or hand I hear thee sung as mighty in the land I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star hast thou no scar?

[32:14] hast thou no wound yet I was wounded by that archer's spent leaned me against the tree to die and rent by ravening beasts that compass me I swooned hast thou no wound no wound no scar yet as the master shall the servant be and pierced are the feet that follow me but thine a hole can he have followed far who has no wound nor scar the apostle Paul finishes by telling you and I that this gospel of Jesus Christ is worth suffering for it is worth bearing scars for come with me to chapter 1 verses 3 to 5 let's read these verses together grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord

Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be the glory forever and ever Amen Christ lives in us and that is all of grace and it is a grace that has brought us this far and it is a grace that will lead us home the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit Amen let's pray Amen