

# Galatians 1:1-6 & 6:11-18

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[ 0 : 00 ] I don't know if you get those letters at Christmas time or whether you look at people's posts on Facebook, if you're into Facebook. I often get these letters from people who tell us that Adelaide's doing very well in her Spanish.

She's now fluent, age 12, and she's heading off to university next summer. Or other people say how they've enjoyed their lovely holidays in Turkey and Canada and Australia. Or others who tell us about the lovely new extension on their home.

And if you read these things, or you look at the Facebook posts of friends on their beach, wherever they are, what do we see? We see what people are really boasting in.

We see what they want you to know about them, what they want to define themselves by. And actually all of us, if we're honest, whether we're as explicit and brazen as that, all have things that we take pride in.

We might not boast in them verbally, but we find our security, our meaning, our identity in certain things, don't we? We naturally define ourselves by something.

[ 1 : 05 ] And Paul, as he closes this letter, is wanting to challenge us. What do you define yourself by? What do you boast in? What do you think gives you security?

What makes you you? What is it? What do you take pride in? And Paul is so passionate in his desire to get us to see there's only one thing that really matters.

There is only one thing we should truly boast in. That he grabs the pen himself. He's been dictating this letter to a scribe who probably had needs to handwriting than him. And now he grabs it. You can see in verse 11 of chapter 6, see with what large letters I'm writing with my own hand. Why does he take the pen? Why does he write in large letters? Well, some commentators will say it's because he's going blind.

There's problems with his eyes. Well, that may be true, but there's a better reason. He's wanting to emphasize this. This bold print, italics, underlined on a word processor.

[ 2 : 04 ] That's what he's doing. He's writing, I'm writing this in my own hands. As the letter is read out in the churches in Galatia, everyone hearing it will know it's in his own hand. Everyone will hear.

This is a passionate plea of the apostle who loves them. Who wants them to have freedom in Christ. Who wants them to boast in the right thing. And the question he's laying before us now is, what do you boast in?

What are you trusting in? Is it the true gospel? That we are put right with God by faith in Christ alone?

Or is it this false gospel where there's no gospel at all? But it's faith in Christ plus your own works, your own obedience, your own achievements. Are you going to boast in what you have done for God?

Or in what God has done for you? Are you going to boast in what you have done for God? Or what God has done for you? You see the contrast very clearly in verses 13 and 14.

[ 3 : 06 ] Paul says, See Paul lays these examples before us.

To force us to choose. Are we going to boast about what we've done for God? Or what God has done for us? Are we going to boast in the flesh? What we have done?

Or in the cross? What God has done in Christ? So here, Paul paints the contrast. And he fills in the colours, as it were. By comparing the consumer-friendly life and the cross-focused life.

The consumer-friendly life is all about what we've done. Or the cross-friendly life is about what God has done. His big point is this. Because God rescues and transforms people.

Paul, only through Christ's death, Christians must boast in Christ's death alone. We must define ourselves. Not by our own actions, our own obedience, our own achievements.

[ 4 : 18 ] But by Christ's achievements on the cross. Paul contrasts these two ways of life. By showing the motivations of the two ways of living. Verses 12 to 15. And the consequences of them.

In verses 16 to 18. So let's look at the motivations first. Of a consumer-focused life and a cross-focused life. Verses 12 to 15. Look at the motivation for these false teachers.

They're really consumers. Look at verse 12. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised. They're people who just want to look good on the outside.

They're people-pleasers. That's their motivation. And they also want to pursue comfort. Look at how the verse goes on. And they only do this in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

These false teachers who want to persuade people to trust in their own works and boast in their own achievements. They just want to pursue comfort. They don't want to be persecuted.

[ 5 : 18 ] Face opposition for the cross of Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ will always provoke opposition. It will do that for at least two reasons. Even in our day.

Firstly, it speaks of human inability. We all like to think we're pretty good people, don't we? The general feeling out there in our society is actually naturally human beings are quite good.

The cross of Christ says the opposite. You are not good. You cannot save yourself. You are a rebel in danger of hell. You need to be rescued. And people hate that idea.

The cross speaks of human inability. Because of that, secondly, the cross also speaks of exclusivity. There are not many ways to God. All ways are not equal.

All ways are not equal. There is only one way to be put right with a holy God. And that is through the gift of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 17 ] People hate those ideas today, don't they? They hate both those ideas. They hate the new Paul's day as well. And so the false teachers are saying, it's not just Jesus, it's Jesus plus.

Because they wanted to pursue an easy life. They wanted to be people pleasers who'd be popular. And thirdly, they were prioritising style over substance. Look at verse 13. Even those who are circumcised themselves do not keep the law.

But they desired to have you circumcised. They may boast in your flesh. So then they couldn't really do all that the law of Moses commanded. So they just did a few external things.

Like get circumcised. Like keep some food laws. All these things so they could feel like they were doing the right thing. And so that people could look on the outside and say, well, they're good religious people. They valued style over substance.

And that's why they were persuading the Galatians to trust in Jesus plus their own works. They didn't really love them. They didn't care about them. They just wanted to have other people agree with them.

[ 7 : 17 ] They just wanted to cross them off. Look, other people would come over to our side. They wanted popularity. Like politicians going for a vote. They perhaps don't necessarily care about the issues at stake.

But do want to be popular. Not that all politicians are like that. I hasten to have them. There's some very good ones. See, ultimately, what were these people boasting about?

They're boasting about their achievements. Look, we're circumcised. Look, we've got people to come our way. To agree with us. They wanted to be defined by their own achievements. And that's actually the heart of a consumer-driven life.

A life that's all about satisfying myself and my own needs. Think for all the adverts you see on television. What are the motivations those adverts use to sell products to you?

If you wear this geodermat, you'll please people. If you buy this car, you'll be much more comfortable. If you have these particular cosmetics, you'll be much more beautiful, much more attractive.

[ 8 : 20 ] It's all about prioritizing style over substance. Outward appearance over inner reality. It's all about pride in our own achievements. You see, these false teachers had a consumer-focused life.

Consumer-driven life. They wanted ease. They wanted pleasure. They wanted popularity. They wanted to be able to boast in their own achievements. They wanted external appearance of being religious and good.

They didn't want the internal change. And that's appealing for all of us, if we're honest, isn't it? Who wouldn't like an easy life? Who wouldn't like to be popular and avoid conflict?

Who wouldn't want to avoid the accusation of being intolerant or judgmental or fundamentalist or exclusivist? Who wouldn't want to feel we're contributing something to our own rescue? Human pride naturally longs for those things. But Paul says, their motive is for a consumer-focused life. That is a life that will leave you under God's curse. Instead, you want a cross-focused life, Paul says.

[ 9 : 26 ] Let's look at the motivation for Paul's life. Verse 14. This is the cross-focused life. Far be it from me to boast and accept in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

See, here's just a startling contrast. These false teachers wanted to diminish the cross. They didn't want to talk about the cross of Jesus. Whereas Paul is standing there saying, this is what I'm going to boast on.

I'm going to define myself by my inability to please God, my need for Christ's death. That's what I'm going to boast with. I'm going to say, I am not worthy of God's love.

But I'm going to boast on the cross because it's only what Christ has done that makes me right. Those others didn't want to be persecuted because of the cross. Paul says, bring it on because nothing else matters.

The world may hate me, but I do not care. Because the only thing that matters is that I have been rescued by Christ. Several years ago, I went with a friend of mine to watch a football match at Sanford Bridge.

[ 10 : 27 ] It was Chelsea versus Southampton. When Chelsea were very good, so not last season. And Southampton were less good. And my friend was a Southampton supporter. And so I was with him.

I was kind of supporting Southampton as well. But because we were cheapskates and because we weren't part of the Southampton supporters clubs, we had tickets down the Chelsea end.

Now, can you imagine? When Southampton came close to scoring, what do you think we did? Sat on our hands.

When Gianfranco Zola scored the winning goal for Chelsea, what did we do? Say boo-hiss? No, we politely applauded. We didn't want to stand out in the crowd. Paul is exactly the opposite.

He was not a fair-weather believer. He would boast in the cross. He would preach the cross. He said, this is what defines me. And why does it define him? Look at what he says there.

[ 11 : 27 ] Well, it defines him because it's through the cross he's been rescued. But what more does he say? Verse 14. By which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. In other words, the old way of life is completely gone.

There is nothing in this world that has any hold on me anymore. There is nothing in this world I desire more than Christ. Because Christ defines me.

Tim Keller puts it like this. If there is nothing in the world that I must have, if there is nothing in the world that I define myself by, then nothing in the world can control me.

If there is nothing in the world that I must have, if there is nothing in the world that I define myself by, my status, my achievement, my income, whatever it is, then nothing in the world can control me. And that's the cross-focus life. The life that says, I'm a sinner, I need God's rescue. That comes only through what Jesus has done in the cross. So in contrast, if I define myself by my popularity, or by my success, or even by being a victim, as some people do.

[ 12 : 40 ] Gosh, some people have very hard lives, I know. But if we define ourselves by those things, then we want to cling on to the things of this world, we'll boast in those things.

Whereas if we see ourselves as sinners in need of forgiveness, with no hope except the cross of Christ, then we will boast in the cross. And that gives us an entirely new beginning.

An entirely new beginning. And that's what Paul goes on to say. That nothing else matters. Look at verse 15. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

So he wants to boast in the cross, because nothing else matters. His religious observance of the past doesn't matter. He wants to be defined by the cross, because that's all that matters.

Circumcision, keeping the old Lord Moses, couldn't make him a friend of God. But equally, he says here to the Christians in Galatians, even if you haven't been circumcised, if you're uncircumcised, if you think, it's alright, I understood the gospel, I know I don't have to be circumcised, just don't define yourself by that either.

[ 13 : 44 ] Don't take pride in that. Because that doesn't matter either. What counts is not what you've done for God, or what you haven't done for God.

What counts is what God has done. Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Who is it who creates? It's God, isn't it?

I can't make myself new, you can't make yourself new. God does it as we trust in Christ. Now let's think for a minute. Typically, what do we think makes a difference to our standing with God?

If I ask you, how are you doing as a Christian? How do you start to answer that question? Or as you look around at church, or at Christians in general, how do you perceive them?

See, so often we can, we can think it's something about us. Do I have my doctrine straight? Have I read enough books? Have I done enough mercy ministry, showing kindness to the poor and the needy?

[ 14 : 48 ] Have I done enough evangelism? Have I shared the good news with other people? Now all those things are good things to do. We don't do those things, we're not defined by them.

They're a result of what God has done in our lives. Or maybe others of us come here and think, yeah, I could never be worthy to be part of God's people. You don't know the abuse I've had in the past. You don't know my struggles with, with some secret sins.

It's same-sex attraction, marital infidelity, addiction to alcohol or drugs or whatever. Maybe you don't know the brokenness in my background. I could never be right with God. Paul says none of that counts for anything.

What counts is what God does in your heart and your life. Boast in the cross of Christ, not in your weakness, not in your failure, not in your achievements, but boast in the cross of Christ.

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. God makes us new as we trust in Christ. That's what matters. This is Paul's implashing plea.

[ 15 : 57 ] Christianity is not about external moral behaviour. It's not primarily about living a nice life, looking good, looking religious. It is about internal change.

It is about being delivered from freedom, from slavery, delivered from this present evil age, as Paul put it in chapter 1, for the freedom, the joyful freedom, of knowing Christ, of having our sins forgiven, of having the curse we deserve taken away from us, of being adopted as children into God's family.

And only God can do that. And God can do that because of Christ's life and death and resurrection for us. We'll go back to chapter 5, verse 6 for a minute.

Paul says, it starts exactly the same way. It says something slightly different, which helps us to understand verse 15 of chapter 6 a bit better. So chapter 5, verse 6, for in Christ Jesus, if you trust in Christ, neither circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

That's how God does this new creation, is we trust in him, that's faith. He makes us new. And that faith is then displayed in a life of love, which is the outworking of God giving us a new heart, and working in us and through us.

[ 17 : 18 ] So you see now why Paul boasts only in the cross of Christ? It's the cross of Christ that defines him. It's not his past religious zeal in Judaism.

It's not his present missionary zeal as a Christian. It's not defined by the number of churches he's planted or the letters he's written or his status as an apostle. It's defined by the cross of Christ. And that results in a new motivation for his life. Faith working through love. Love for the Lord Jesus. Love for the one who's given his life for Paul.

And that can be true for all of us. We boast in the cross of Christ. That gives us a new motivation. Faith working through love. The new creation. God makes us new.

And that newness is shown in loving others and living by faith. So that's a cross-focused life. Motivated by Christ's death. Love for Christ.

[ 18 : 16 ] As opposed to a consumer-focused life. Who wants popularity and pride and pleasing others and style and the substance. Let's look more briefly at the consequences of these two different ways of life.

In verse 16 of chapter 6. As for all who walk by this rule. This principle. This boasting in the cross of Christ. Peace and mercy be upon them.

Even upon the Israel of God. Paul is saying if you're boasting in the cross of Christ. If that's the principle of your life. That you need God's rescue. Then you will have mercy and peace.

And you, by the way, are the true Israel of God. It's not those who get circumcised. It's not those who keep the law of Moses. You who trust in Christ will have mercy and peace.

We have peace with one of God. Through Christ. We have peace with one another. Because we're no longer defining ourselves by our own status. Our own achievements. As soon as we think it's all about what we do. We end up judging others.

[ 19 : 17 ] And condemning others. But now, if we're boasting in the cross of Christ. Then we receive God's mercy. God's peace. Meanwhile, the consumer-focused life might seem like it gives us popularity and comfort.

But ultimately, it leads to judgment. Ultimately, it leads to judgment. Because either Christ pays for our sin or we pay for our sin ourselves.

Either Christ has taken the curse for us. Or we will have to take the curse ourselves. The cross-focused life leads to peace and mercy from God.

The consumer-focused life might give us pride and popularity and comfort in the short term. It has a devastating consequence of judgment in the end.

And those consequences become even more clear in verse 17. From now on, let no one cause me trouble, says Paul. For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. It's almost as if he's taunting the false teachers.

[ 20 : 20 ] You've got the mark of circumcision? I've got the marks of belonging to Jesus.

Remember, circumcision doesn't count for anything. Belonging to Jesus does. It's like you say, look at the scars from my persecution.

Look at what I've endured for Christ. The word for marks here is actually the same word used for branding an animal or a slave in the Roman world of the day. Paul says, you'll see who I belong to. But scars are not the only thing you get for following Christ. Yes, you might face opposition. Yes, we will face persecution. But that's not the final work. Look at verse 18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers.

Amen. For those who choose to trust in Christ alone, there is grace. God's unmerited, unlimited kindness to a totally undeserving.

That's what we get for trusting Jesus alone to put us right with God. Grace. Jesus plus the disaster.

[ 21 : 28 ] So here's the choice. What are you and I going to boast to? What are we going to define ourselves by? By the cross of Christ? By our need for a saviour?

Or by Jesus plus our own achievements? Our own religious obedience? Our own standing in our communities? If we boast in Jesus alone, then the cross defines our past.

Not our behaviour, not our own way of life, not our family background. The cross defines our past.

It's forgiven. If we choose to boast in Christ, the cross shapes our present. It keeps us humble.

We are nothing without the cross. It gives us a motivation. Love for the Lord who brought us and gave his life for us. The cross creates our identity, the children of the living God.

The cross also determines our future. We are part of the new creation. We receive grace and mercy now, but we will enjoy it forever. If we boast in the cross, it defines us past, present and future.

[ 22 : 33 ] So why would we boast in anything else? Let's pray.