

Introduction

I moved quite a bit as a kid. In the middle of seventh grade, I moved to a new school. I had a great social studies teacher who valued family above everything. At one point, we had to do a research presentation on an assigned country. We were required to make something related to that country to show to the class, then present what we learned from our research.

My project was about Iceland. For my presentation, I made a Viking ship. More precisely, my dad made a Viking ship and I showed it to the class for my presentation. The teacher had encouraged parents to help, even to do a majority of the work. She wanted parents and kids working together.

I remember the teacher complementing my Viking ship. *What could I say?* I couldn't say, "Thanks; I worked hard on it." All I could rightly say was, "Thanks; my dad made it."

Main Idea

When you think of the gospel, I hope you think the same thing. *What can I boast about in my Christian life?* I know God because of what Christ has done. God considers me righteous because of what Christ has done. I am a new person because of the indwelling Spirit. I grow in my faith and godliness by the work of the indwelling Spirit.

[Galatians 6:11-18](#) is the conclusion of this letter. The introduction of the letter calls the churches in Galatia to be faithful to the gospel, by which they had come to know God. In chapters 1-2, Paul recounts how he has faced false, works-based gospels throughout his life and opposed them. Chapter 2 concludes with the main point of the letter. [Galatians 2:21](#) "... if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." Chapters 3-4 explain that we are all sons of God and heirs of the covenant God made with Abraham - justification by faith alone. Chapters 5-6 focus on living by faith after our salvation. We live in the freedom Christ has given by walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

[Gal 6:11-18](#) concludes the letter by encouraging God's people to exalt Christ in the gospel. **God's people can *only* boast in Christ.**

Boasting in self

Those who walk in the flesh exalt themselves. If we boast in what we have done, our works or faith, then we point people to ourselves - to what I have done. But there are reasons that people are tempted to walk in the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

Persecution

Some walk in the flesh to avoid persecution. [Galatians 6:11-12](#) “11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 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.”

Paul wants to be clear to everyone who reads this letter in the Galatian churches that this letter is from Paul, the apostle. He is willing to fight against false teachers for the truth of the gospel ([Gal 2:4-5](#)). He is willing endure persecution from these false teachers for the sake of the gospel ([Gal 5:11](#)).

Some in the Galatian churches, however, were willing to **compromise** the gospel. They wanted to make a “good showing in the flesh” ([Gal 6:12](#)). That is, they were more concerned with the appearance of faith, rather than faith itself. One of the great dangers of cultural Christianity is that many people appear to have faith, but do not know God. They know Bible stories. They speak of God. **They honor God with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him** ([Isa 29:13](#); [Matt 15:8](#)).

The false teachers in Galatia were concerned about appearances so that they would “not be **persecuted** for the cross of Christ” ([Gal 6:12](#)). Most people, including professing Christians, want nothing to do with the cross of Christ. The message of the cross of Christ is that a criminal who comes to genuine faith in Jesus as they are being crucified together is eternally forgiven, but the righteous Pharisee who rejects Christ is eternally condemned (e.g., [Rom 9:30-33](#)). The message of the cross is that if you are not willing to deny yourself, take up **your** cross, and follow Jesus, you will forfeit your soul ([Mark 8:34-38](#)). Often people are willing to compromise the gospel to avoid the ridicule and persecution that accompanies truth.

Boasting in the flesh

Some walk in the flesh to boast in their contribution. [Galatians 6:13](#) “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.”

The letter of Galatians frequently points out the **hypocrisy of a works-based gospel**. For example, [Gal 3:10-12](#) points out that the only way to be righteous by the Mosaic law is the perfectly obey the Mosaic law. [Gal 5:2-6](#) states that if you desire to be righteous by the law, then you are obligated to keep the whole law. [Gal 6:13](#) points out the hypocrisy of this view. **No one** keeps the law, **including** those who insist that you must. When someone adds works to the gospel, he immediately disqualifies himself from salvation.

However, these legalists in Galatia desired to boast in the flesh. That is, they wanted to compromise the gospel and remove the offense of the cross so that the churches **appeared** to

be godly, rather than fighting for the truth of the gospel so that people are **genuinely** justified in Christ. They wanted those **outside the church** to be comfortable with the church.

Jesus said that many people would defend their right to eternal life based on their works ([Matt 7:21-22](#)). “Look what I have **done** in your name. I attended church. I was baptized. I taught Sunday School.” Jesus said He would declare to them “I never knew you; depart from me” ([Matt 7:23](#)).

Before we are quick to condemn those in Galatia who boasted in what **they** have contributed to the gospel ... that is the distorted message of the gospel in the modern church. Countless churches tell people that if you repeat a prayer, if you ask Jesus into your heart, if you go through confirmation, if you are baptized ... then you will be eternally saved. As long as churches describe the gospel in terms of what **I** do, people will continue to believe self-centered, works-focused gospels.

Summary

Those who walk in the flesh serve themselves. Relying on the flesh is concerned with appearances. Relying on the flesh avoids the cross of Christ. Relying on the flesh is self-defeating disobedience. Relying on the flesh boasts in works. This is **not** the gospel of Christ - this is the gospel of secularism, the gospel of self-exaltation. No one comes to know God through a self-exalting gospel.

Boasting in Christ

Those who walk in the Spirit exalt Christ. This is our goal in Christian faith. The gospel exalts Christ.

Boasting in the cross

You can boast only in the cross of Christ. [Galatians 6:14](#) “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.”

Alister Begg once described what it may have been like when the criminal who was crucified next to Jesus arrived in heaven. The man was a criminal up to his crucifixion. Yet, he was convinced on the cross that Jesus was the Christ and believed in Him. Alister Begg pointed out that the man’s only defense for why he should enter into heaven was that “the man on the middle cross said I could.”

When asked why they have a relationship with God, eternal life, and forgiveness of sins, no believer says, “**Because I ...**” *How would I finish that sentence?* Because I am a **sinner**. Because I continually **rebelled** against God, even after professing faith. Because I continued to **doubt**

God, even after professing faith. I cannot even say, “Because I have faith,” because even my faith is a gift of God.

The only answer to why I know God is “**Because Christ ...**” Because Christ **became a man** to endure temptation. Because Christ lived a **sinless** life in my place. Because Christ **died** to atone for my sins. Because Christ **resurrected** to overcome death in my place. Because Christ **ascended** into heaven to intercede for me.

For those who boast in the cross of Christ, the world is crucified to them. This is what Jesus meant when He said to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me ([Mark 8:34](#)). Die to the world. Die to yourself. Live to Christ. Paul expresses this in [Philippians 3:7–8](#) “7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” I can **only** boast in the cross of Christ.

New Creation

In Christ, **appearances** do not matter. **Only new creation counts for anything.** [Galatians 6:15–18](#) “15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon 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. Amen.”

Throughout both OT and NT, Scripture proclaims that the only circumcision that matters is “**circumcision of the heart**” (cf. [Deut 10:16](#); [30:6](#); [Jer 4:4](#); [Acts 7:51](#); [Phil 3:3](#); [Rom 2:28–29](#); [Col 2:11](#)). When you genuinely have faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit makes you a new creation. You are born again in the Spirit. The Spirit purifies your heart and makes you holy. All of these things are a work of God, not a work of the flesh.

Life in the Spirit is characterized by peace, mercy, and grace, just as Paul ends this letter. But it is also characterized by suffering ([Mark 10:29–30](#)). Paul refers to “the marks of Jesus” that he bore. “Marks” here refers to his scars. Paul describes in [2 Cor 11:23–28](#) the persecution he endured for the sake of the cross. Jesus promised that genuine faith in Him would include suffering and persecution. The apostles often rejoiced that they were allowed to suffer for their faith in Jesus ([Acts 4:21](#); [Acts 5:41](#); [Acts 21:13](#); cf. [Phil 3:10–11](#); [1 Pet 4:13–16](#)).

The truth of the gospel is worth suffering for. The truth of the gospel is worth speaking about. It is not **enough** for Christians to speak against the evil of our culture. If we condemn the evil of the world and never tell out neighbor how they can be a new creation in Christ, then our neighbor will remain in that condemnation.

Summary

Those who walk in the Spirit exalt Christ. The only thing we can boast in is the cross of Christ. The only hope we have is God's work of new creation, not our own effort. In Christ, we rejoice in peace, mercy, grace, and persecution. The true gospel requires a denial of self and an exaltation of Christ.

Conclusion

Reflection

Much like my seventh grade Viking ship, my life is filled with blessings that I can take no credit for. I could still boast in my Viking ship ... as long as I boasted in what my dad had done, not me. I could still find joy in telling about what he had made for me. My joy was not no less because I didn't contribute.

What can you boast about in your Christian life? I cannot boast about my righteousness. My actions are unrighteous; I am only righteous because Christ has made me righteous. I cannot boast in my faith; my faith is a gift from God, a work of the Holy Spirit. I cannot boast in my spiritual growth; my growth is the fruit of the Holy Spirit within me.

Nonetheless, Christians often take pride in works. We are concerned about whether we **appear** to be a Christian. But those who boast in works exalt themselves.

In reality, I can only boast in what God has done for me. I am saved by God's grace through Jesus's death to atone for my sins. I am only a servant of God because the Holy Spirit has made me a new creation. All that I am in Christ is by God's grace.

God's people can only boast in Christ.

Closing Scripture: [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."