Gal. 6:11-16; Eph. 2:8-10; A Reason for Boasting? I. Boasting in the Flesh II. Boasting in the Cross

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you know, no one likes a bragger. That is because bragging- or boasting- is a very common form of pride. From the relatively mild bumper sticker boasting “My child is an honor student, or my child is an All American Athlete- to the more militant pride that is demanded from the LGBT crowd. To boast is not just taking pride in your work- but boasting is more of a flaunting your success. Boasting is to rub the face of others in your own accomplishments. So is there any room for boasting in the Christian’s life? As we draw near to the end of our study of Galatians, we find Paul summarizing his argument for us. Added to that, our attention is directed at the only one who is worthy of our boasting. One of the critical flaws of every religion of man is that man’s works are always included in the formula. If salvation depends on man and our works at any point, our salvation is a works-righteousness. And if salvation is man’s work- if we participate or help God in our salvation- then our works are what make all the difference. Even as Paul will clearly argue in Eph. 2- we are saved by grace through faith- not of works! Why is that important? So that no man can boast! This really gets to the heart of the issue. If salvation is something that can work towards- if it is something that we can earn-- than we have a valid reason for boasting! We can have pride in our own ability- because at the end of the day we are the ones who saved ourselves by what we did! The end result is that man is filled with pride, and God is robbed of the glory and praise that He deserves! So as we find in our summary of Galatians today- be careful what you boast in! Make sure the thing you boast in is worthy of your praise! The Cross of Jesus Christ is the only thing worthy of our trust.

**I. Boasting in the Flesh**

In our first point we consider those who boast in the flesh. Now to boast in this context means to glory in, take delight in or find joy in. Those Judaizers who had come to harass the Galatian Christians were boasting in the flesh- they find their pride and joy in the external works of man. The reason that they have come to you- and the reason that they are so adamant that you embrace their teaching- is that they desire to boast in your flesh Paul said. They wanted the circumcision of these Christians to be another mark in their role call- another notch in their belt. These men who were harassing you- Paul says- they are hypocrites and they do not have your best interest in mind. They are using you- they want you to agree with them so that they can claim you as their victim. Boasting is an arrogant display- as it elevates oneself above and over others. Boasting is when you put something or someone first- as worthy of all adoration. These men were putting on a good show- as v. 12 says. They wanted to make a good showing in the flesh. They were acting all pious- acting as if they had the Galatian’s best interest in mind. But at the end of the day, they were only in this work for the praise of it! They wanted to be able to boast in their effectiveness- and they did not really have the church’s good in view. Now this boasting in the flesh is seen in two ways. The first way that these Judaizers were boasting in the flesh was in their teaching that works of the law, obedience to the ceremonies and external circumcision could affect their salvation. By glorying in their flesh, they were teaching that what they did to and with the flesh could both change their own hearts and change the mind of God. They boasted in man’s ability. We can circumcise our hearts if we only would circumcise our own bodies. This is a form of externalized formalism- simply doing the external act can change spiritual issues. And if we simply go through the motions, God will be pleased with us! We can convince God to accept us if we would only repeat the rites and rituals of the ceremonial laws. By way of reminder, every world religion teaches a form of this heresy. False religions are always focused on the external. Light these candles, say these prayers, make this pilgrimage, do these works- and you will be changed and God will be satisfied! But this is nothing more than simply pride in the works of man’s hands. External circumcision does nothing. But there is another way in which these Judaizers wanted to boast. They wanted to take delight in their own powers of persuasion. As v. 13 says- they wanted to boast because of you- in your flesh. These Judaizers who had come to this church wanted to convince these people to be circumcised- in order to boast in their ability to control and influence them. These Judaizers who demanded circumcision wanted to boast about their ability to convince others. They wanted to take pride in their ability to change the actions of others. They wanted to boast in their numbers- adding to those who followed them- to glory in their power over the masses. Look at how many people I have convinced to be circumcised. It is kind of like bragging about the number of converts you can claim or posting on the size of your church as if you were the reason that church has grown. Look at how good I am- bragging before God and man. In this way, these Judaizers claimed power over the self and power over others. My works of the flesh and works of the flesh seen in others. But when you boast in the flesh you are really robbing the gospel of its grace and power! To boast in the flesh- in your own works or in your power over people- is to make Christ’s work seem small! This kind of boasting makes the cross of Christ insignificant as v. 12 says. The reason people think that their own works are good enough is because the cross is offensive! But any amount of man’s work as a basis for our salvation robs the cross of its power and necessity! If man can obey God’s law by sheer will, then we can be justified by our works! Why did Jesus need to come and die and the cross? If my actions can save my own soul and satisfy God’s justice, why did Jesus have to suffer and die at Calvary! The cross is offensive because the cross says- you are a sinner who deserves death, but Jesus died for you- in your place! So as Paul will continue- do not boast about what man can do- for what can man do in order to make himself right with God! Rather as I Cor. 1 says, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord! Let him who preaches, instead of preaching about man’s works- rather preach about Jesus Christ and Him crucified! God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

**II. Boasting in the Cross**

Imagine for a moment, children, that you took a graded test home from school. As you look at this test your heart jumps- you got a perfect score! 100% Wow! In your excitement you take this paper to your parents who proceed to praise you as well! Great job, they say! So you hang your paper on the fridge for everyone to see- you want everyone to know- you want the world to see that you did this work! You can boast in this grade! But imagine that later that night your younger brother looks at this paper and notices something. This is indeed a perfect paper- but that is not your name at the top of the page! This test was not your test! Would you still have grounds to boast? The fact is- if you did not do the work you do not get the praise! So it is, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord! When it comes to our salvation, this is not a work that we deserve the praise for! Rather – it is work of another that saves! So Paul continues in v. 14, I will not boast except to boast in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now it might sound strange to us to boast in the cross, but remember that the word “boast” means to have joy in- to glory in- to rejoice in this fact! Rejoicing- delighting in the cross of Jesus. But this also makes us uncomfortable. For the cross is an object of humiliation and death! Who would boast in being killed- who would delight in being stripped naked and nailed to a tree? The cross means torture and death! And yet, for a Christian, the death of Jesus is the very thing in which we rejoice! Now for Paul, the cross means at least 2 specific things in our text. First, the cross is a shorthand way of refereeing to our redemption. To speak of the cross is to speak of the entire work of Jesus Christ where He laid down His life and secured our salvation. The second thing that the cross points to is sanctification of His people. Take up your cross and follow Christ- put to death your sins and coming alive in the image of Christ. Being joined to Christ in His death means that our sins are also put to death- justified- and our remaining sins are being put to death- sanctified. As Paul said earlier in Gal. 2:20- I am crucified with Christ, I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So the only hope that we have as Christians is found in Christ and Him crucified for us! Our hope- our reason for boasting- our glory is in this- Jesus did it all for us! Remember our illustration from a few minutes ago- about the test that was not yours. Now imagine instead of some other student taking that test- imagine that your teacher knows that you are struggling in this area. You are overwhelmed- you are not getting it. What if that teacher decided to take the test for you- and then graciously gives you the grade that she earned! What if that teacher imputed her perfect grade to your account- giving you credit for something that you could not do! You could boast in the generosity of your teacher! Well, that is the cross! Jesus earns what you could not- and suffered what you should have- in order to secure your forgiveness and righteousness! That is why Paul- and we should boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!

But Paul is not finished yet- remember that the cross speaks to both our justification and our sanctification! We boast in the cross of Jesus- and then we take up our cross. As v. 14 continues, by this cross the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Strangely, there are 3 crucifixions. Christ has been crucified- the world has been crucified and my flesh has been crucified. Stated another way- the world is dead to me and I am dead to the world. What does he mean that the world is dead to him? Well, if the world is crucified to me, the world no longer has power and control over me. It’s delicacies no longer appeal to me- the temptation no longer entice. The things of this world have grown dim in my eyes- I have renounced this world and the sinful cravings of the flesh. The world here describes the godless set of values and pleasures that are passing. Added to that- I have been crucified to this world. My body, my flesh, my desires are dead to this world. I have no appetite for them. My body no longer craves them. So the flavor has changed- and my taste has changed. The flesh that is crucified is here the self-seeking desires of the body. These are the works of the flesh that we considered from chapter 5. The passions and desires of the old man no longer rule. Applying this to prayer- we ask God to keep us from temptation. But if we are tempted- keep me from falling into that temptation! But not only is their death, there is also life! A new creation as v. 15 concludes. Having been crucified with Christ, I no longer live. But Christ lives in me- or I live in Christ! As Rom. 6:8 puts it, if we have died with Christ we will live with Him. Christ by His Spirit brings us to life- in the new man we are born again! It matters not if you were circumcised- rather have you been born again? Are you a new creation? Have you been raised with Christ? So to summarize this point, it is true that I cannot boast in my works, my flesh or my actions. My ceremonies and works of the law cannot merit my salvation- thus I cannot boast in the flesh. I cannot glory of take delight in what I do by myself- for what can a man dead in sin perform! Rather, I boast in Christ who died for me and raised me up to live in Him!

As we close, Paul is bringing his argument to a fitting close. Physical circumcision matter not. The work of the knife cannot deal with sin! A mark on your flesh does not save! So glory not in what you can do, but in what He has done! The Cross of Jesus Christ is the only thing worthy of our trust. So let Him who rejoices- rejoice in this truth! Jesus died for your sins and was raised for your justification! What you do to your body or with your body cannot add to this perfect work!