BOAST IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST

(NEW CREATION)

Galatians 6:11-18

Key Verse: 6:14 “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Last week we studied Paul, who encouraged us to continue to do what is good because at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we don’t give up. Those who keep on praying for, serving, and loving others in the name of Jesus Christ will reap a harvest of eternal life and peace. Those who have been faithful to the Lord will be greatly rewarded in heaven by our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be faithful and continue to do what is good!

Today’s passage is the final remarks of Paul who encourages the Galatians to stand firm in the truth of the gospel. He reminds them that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus, not by observing the law. He also shares his testimony as a servant of Christ Jesus. Through Paul’s final message we learn the power of the cross of Jesus Christ.

First, boast in the flesh (circumcision) (11-13) Look at verse 11. “***See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”*** In his final remarks Paul said that he wrote this letter with his own hand. Paul sometimes let others write his letters. He let Titus write his letter to the Romans (Ro 16:22). He also wrote this letter in large letters. He might have had poor eyesight at that time. Why did he intentionally mention this? It was because he emphasized the authenticity and genuineness of this letter. He put more effort, sincerity, and affection in this letter in order to affirm the seriousness of his message about the truth of the gospel.

Through this entire letter Paul warned about the false teaching of the Judaizers, who imposed circumcision on the Christians in Galatia. Paul exposed the Judaizers’ wrong motivation for their circumcision. Look at verses 12,13. “***Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh***.” According to Paul, the Judaizers led the Christians to compromise in order to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ. The cross of Jesus has the power of God for salvation. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*.” In the cross of Jesus there is God’s forgiveness of sin. In the cross of Jesus God demonstrated his divine love for sinners. (Ro 5:8) In the cross of Jesus God fulfilled his righteousness and justice.

Why did the Judaizers persecute Christians who believe the cross of Jesus? It is because the cross of Jesus destroyed the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, free and slave, male and female and made all one in Christ Jesus. (3:26) It was unthinkable and unacceptable for the Jews to become one with the Gentiles. Jews despised the Gentiles as unclean animals. The cross of Jesus also makes us be justified through faith in Jesus, not by observing the law. The Judaizers thought that the cross of Jesus mislead people not to keep the Law of Moses. So, if the Christians in Galatia church were circumcised, they could avoid persecution from the circumcision groups and the Judaizers. They meant, “What’s big deal about being circumcised? Nobody will know.” In modern terms they say, “Why don’t you just skip a worship service for your ballgame? You are still a Christian.” “What’s wrong with same sex marriage? That’s just their lifestyle.” If you oppose these issues, you will be persecuted. Paul said, *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted…*” (2 Ti 3:12) These days, modern Judaizers persecute our Christians to compromise with a godless and worldly consensus.

Another purpose of the Judaizers’ imposing circumcision on the Galatians was for their self-glory. The Judaizers wanted to show off their achievement of increasing the numbers of the circumcised. They didn’t care about teaching the true meaning and purpose of circumcision to the Galatians. Their motivation was that they wanted to be recognized as devoted law-keepers among the legalistic Jews. Circumcision itself is sacred and has a good purpose. God commanded Abraham to be circumcised as a sign of his covenant. (Ge 17:11) Circumcision is to identify as being Abraham’s descendants and God’s chosen people. However, circumcision itself is not a means of salvation. Circumcision is not a license for justification. Justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not from circumcision.

Second, boast in the cross of Jesus Christ (14-16) How did Paul’s boast contrast with the Judaizers? Look at verse 14. “***May I never 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 the past, Paul had boasted in the flesh as the Judaizers did. In Philippians 3:4-6, he said, *“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless*.” He meant in modern terms, “I am more proud of myself than anyone else for my human condition and achievements: I was born as a member of the prestigious Kennedy family, graduated from Harvard with a Ph D degree, am a devoted Catholic, rich, popular, athletic, smart, handsome, tall, and so on. And now I am president!

Paul continued in Philippians saying, “*But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ…I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ…*” (Php 3:7,8) In verse 14 he said that he never boasts except in the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord. What does it mean that he boasts only in the cross of Jesus? First of all, Paul was pleased to boast only in the cross of Jesus. He testified how God loved the world and sent his One and Only Son Jesus to this world. He liked to say how Jesus loved him, died for him, and rose again from the dead. He wanted to share how the Risen Jesus forgave him and called him to bring the good news of salvation to the world. Throughout his lifetime, Paul boasted about Jesus and testified to his love. He put preaching the gospel of Christ Jesus as the first priority in his life. (1Co 15:3,4) Once Rev. Billy Graham was interviewed by a TV anchorman, “Why is your message the same today and yesterday, and even a half century ago? Don’t you have anything to talk about except Jesus Christ?” Rev. Graham answered, “I have nothing to preach, but Jesus the Crucified.”

Second of all, Paul found the meaning and purpose of life in the cross of Jesus Christ. In the past Paul devoted his life to protecting the Jewish law and tradition. He persecuted Christians, thinking that they destroyed their law and tradition. He thought that he was doing right in approving Stephen’s martyrdom. (Ac 8:1) But when he met the Risen Christ on the way to Damascus, he came to realize how wicked and ignorant his life had been. After the conversion he rebuilt his life goal in Jesus. He purposed his life to know Christ and to be found in him. (Php 3:8,10) He did not mind losing everything for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus and participating in his power of resurrection. He said, “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*.” (Php 1:21) He also confessed, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” (2:20)

Let us read verse 15 again. In the past circumcision was a very important issue to Paul for becoming a people of God. Like the other Judaizers, he despised the uncircumcised gentiles as unclean animals. He thought that no one could be saved without being circumcised. But now neither circumcision nor uncircumcision meant anything; what counts is the new creation. He meant that he was free from the matter of circumcision because circumcision is not the means of salvation. No one can be justified through circumcision, but through faith in Jesus Christ. What really mattered to him was a person’s conversion through faith in Jesus Christ. A new creation is one who is born again by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17 “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here*.” The important thing in new creation is the change of the inner person. It is his deep personal relationship with Christ Jesus and his new life with Christ. A physical mark such as circumcision does not affect his inner change. The persons’ inner change comes from his repentance of sin and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5) This is why Paul said in Romans 2:29, “*No, a person is a Jew who is on inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code*…”

In fact, how to live and what to wear is not a matter of life and truth. What really counts in our truthful life is the change of our inner person. There are many Christians who have godly forms but deny the power of God. There are many hypocrites who live a double life in church, at home and at their work place. What really counts is the new creation, not circumcision. What really matter to us is our inner change and commitment to Christ, not our outward appearance or habits.

Paul believed that God would bless those who follow his teaching. Look at verse 16. “***Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule-to the Israel of God***.” Here this rule refers to the truth of the gospel that we all become new creations through faith in Jesus Christ, not by observing the law. This rule is also all the teachings of Scripture.

Third, bear the marks of Jesus on my body (17-18) Let us read verse 17 together. “***From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.***” In his final remarks Paul wanted to share his agony with the saints in the Galatia church. He said that he bore on his body the marks of Jesus. What are the marks of Jesus on his body? Here the word ‘marks’ ‘*stigmata*’ in Greek, was used for the brand that identified slaves or animals. By using the word, ‘marks’, Paul identified himself as a servant who belonged to Christ Jesus. But when Paul mentioned the word, ‘marks’ on his body, he meant more than just his identity as a servant of Christ. He meant that the marks were all the scars which he bore as the result of sufferings for the sake of Christ Jesus. As we know, Paul suffered much for the sake of Christ Jesus. In the middle of persecutions he received, he gained lots of scars on his body. In Lystra he was almost stoned to death (Ac 14:19) During his missionary trips he was flogged, beaten, pelted with stones, received lashes, and so on. (2 Co 11:23-27). He was imprisoned, shipwrecked, and exposed in constant dangers from rivers, bandits, fellow Jews, gentiles, and false believers. He was in danger in the city, in the country, and at sea. He labored, toiled, went without sleep and without food. He was cold and naked and so on. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Paul testified that in the province of Asia, the suffering was far beyond his ability to endure so that he even despaired of life itself. He felt that he had received the sentence of death. Paul received many scars as result of sufferings for the name of Jesus Christ.

Was Paul sad about these marks on his body? Did he complain about his sufferings? No! Rather he boasted about these marks. He boasted about his weaknesses. He boasted about his scars which he was carrying on his body for the sake of Christ Jesus. He was carrying the marks of Jesus Christ like glorious and honorable medals on his body.

Do you bear the marks of Jesus on your body? Do you have scars as result of suffering for the sake of Christ Jesus? Have you shed tears for the sake of your Bible student or those who suffer under the power of Satan? One Bible teacher was very excited about teaching her first Bible student. But the student did not show up at all. The Bible teacher cried with many tears. Whenever you are rejected, you are hurt. Your heart is broken when you see your loved ones fall away from their faith. We have scars which came from our own sins. In one way and another we bear marks of Jesus while we serve the Lord Jesus as his servant. The more we suffer for Christ, the more we receive scars. These scars are our glorious medals in our life. When we finish our lives on this earth and stand before the judgment seat of Christ, what can we bring to Jesus? Can you bring your money to Jesus? Can you bring your degree or any other achievement on this earth? No! Only our tears, sweat, and blood which we shed for the sake of Christ will be valued. Nothing but the marks of Christ Jesus which we bear on our body will be appreciated and prized. Do not boast about how much money you have in your bank account. Do not boast about how many degrees you achieved on this earth. Do not boast how smart you are, how handsome and beautiful you are, how strong you are. They all will be gone when we leave this world. Boast about the marks of Christ Jesus on your body. Boast how much you suffered and sacrificed for the name of Jesus. This is why Paul said in his farewell greeting, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus”.

Look at verse 18. “***The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.”*** May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us when we hold the truth of the gospel and bear the marks of Jesus Christ on our bodies.