

This morning we conclude our series of sermons from the book of Galatians. As Paul comes to the end of his letter he takes the pen into his own hand and restates what has been the central focus of the entire letter. He doesn't finish with a list of important things to remember, but just one thing that matters: The Cross of Jesus Christ.

One of the best known songs from 1960's by The Hollies is, "He Ain't Heavy...He's my Brother." One of the explanations for the title came from a well-known Vietnam War photo, where an American soldier is carrying a Vietnamese man on his shoulders. A journalist asked the soldier if he'd been carrying the man far, and the soldier smiled at the camera and said, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother." There are other stories about where the name of the song came from, but they all point to one thing, bearing each other's burdens. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we are all brothers and sisters through faith, and being brothers and sisters in Christ, God wants us to help each other—in good times and in bad—to help each other stay focused on Jesus as our Way to eternal life. "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Remember that the reason Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Galatia was because some of them had introduced false teaching into the Gospel of Jesus Christ; insisting that people perform certain works, especially circumcision, in addition to believing in Jesus in order to "earn" salvation. There were some leaders of the Church in Galatia who even tried to discredit Paul as a real apostle of Christ. Galatians is one of Paul's most emphatic and heated letters, where he even calls some of these Galatians foolish because they didn't fully trust Jesus' work on the cross. Paul explains that we are saved entirely by Jesus' work, and we receive Christ's merit, through God's grace, by believing in Jesus. In other words, we are saved by Grace through faith.

Now as we come to the end of Galatians, Paul addresses a tough question: what about members of the Church who profess Jesus as Lord and as Saviour, but yet still continue to sin?

What are we to do with them? Is it "their" problem and not ours? Or is this a problem for the entire body of Christ?

Paul doesn't beat about the bush when he says, "if anyone is detected in a transgression, restore him in a spirit of gentleness." Who is this "someone" that Paul is referring to? He is specifically addressing a person who has already come to

faith in Jesus as Messiah. But in “restoring” a brother or sister in Christ who continues to sin, Paul says, “Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.” Just like that soldier who carried his Vietnamese comrade, we still have to care for each other...but we are to do it carefully, with God’s Spirit guiding us. We, as Christians, can never ignore the needs of another Christian, whether that person needs food, shelter or in this case, gentle reprimanding because of sin. Listen to Paul’s words in verse 2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” Remember, the entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

When we love Jesus, when we are adopted in God’s family, we have a responsibility to others in God’s family. That’s why our attitude towards brothers and sisters should be one of gentle restoration: “He ain’t heavy...he’s my brother.”

As we do the work of God, we should always remember that we can do absolutely no good without the Holy Spirit living in us and working through us. It’s always all about Jesus and never about us. Without Jesus, we are all lost sinners. But in Jesus, we become new people, children of God adopted into His family.

In the last few verses Paul shows how the centrality of the cross relates to three different things--first to the false teachers, then to himself, and finally to all those who trust in Christ. Let’s look first at how the cross relates to those false teachers.

Remember, they are called Judaizers, they want the Galatian believers to follow the external requirements of the law to somehow enhance their salvation. Paul has repeatedly emphasized that the work of Christ upon the Cross and the Grace of God is sufficient for salvation, circumcision and diet and dress codes don’t have the power to transform lives. But the cross is a real problem for those who want to indulge their pride. It’s a problem for those who have a desire for others to see them as successful. Because the cross is pretty embarrassing. It wasn’t the religious symbol it is today--at that time it still carried the full implication of what it really was--an instrument of torture and execution.

Perhaps the Judaizers were still concerned with what their friends in their old synagogue thought of them, hanging out with unwashed gentiles. If they could only say to them "see these Gentile Christians are living as good Jews because of Jesus," they could’ve been spared some embarrassment.

And so the Cross was still a stumbling block to them.

Next Paul relates the centrality of the Cross to himself. For him the cross is his one reason to boast.

Paul contrasts the boasting of the Judaizers in their own work--the work of the flesh, with his only boast--in the cross of Jesus Christ. He doesn't boast in his heritage. He doesn't boast in his success as an evangelist. He doesn't boast in his status as an apostle in the church. No, he boasts only in the cross of Jesus Christ.

He doesn't simply say that he accepts the message of the cross, he boasts in it. The cross is the centerpiece of his life. The place where justice met grace. The blood stained, hated Roman instrument of torture, had become precious to him, for it was the place where his life had been transformed.

Finally Paul relates the central place of the cross to the lives of his readers, telling them that it is the one thing that counts, when in verse 15, he says, 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.'

The cross is the source of the transformation that Paul calls "a new creation." And again a contrast is shown between the way of faith and the way of the law. Paul says it doesn't matter if you're circumcised or not, what matters is that you've been transformed on the inside.

Paul, writing to the Galatians, sees that a constant battle is going on between our sinful nature and our spiritual nature, and inspires us to go for the better deal of the spiritual nature, which brings joy and lasts for eternity. Paul says, it is bringing people to enjoy this new creation which is the whole point of our ministry, and the religious traditions and habits matter only in so far as they help to make us aware of our need of God's nursing and bathing. The really important thing is being made new and that new creation comes about through the cross of Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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