

# “Why Boast in the Cross of Christ?”

**Galatians 6:1-10; 14-18**

Pentecost 4, Proper 9-C

**July 7, 2019**

Friends, I think it is pretty much safe to say that the verb “to boast” is not really used all that frequently, by us Americans, in our everyday conversations, anymore! And that’s why I thought it might be helpful for me to begin this message by sharing with you two different dictionary-definitions for that verb: “to boast.”

One dictionary said that “to boast” is to: “TALK EXCESSIVELY about one’s own ACCOMPLISHMENTS, POSSESSIONS and ABILITIES!” Another dictionary said that three synonyms for the verb “to boast” could be: “to brag,” or “to swagger,” or even “to gloat.” And some idiomatic expressions that help to clarify the meaning of boasting, would be: “To toot one’s own whistle,” or “To blow one’s own horn,” or even “To sing one’s own praises!” While most people tend to do a little boasting from time to time, others can easily become “turned off” when they do so. Oh, people may boast about their children or their grandchildren, or even their stock portfolio or their bank accounts.

Some people may even brag about their own athletic abilities or even the size of their waistline, but when St. Paul speaks to us today about boasting, he says: *“Far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

**Oh, there were times when St. Paul felt that he was drawn into a boasting contest with some of his religious opponents against his own will. That’s why he says in Philippians 3: “If anyone has any reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more so: Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the Tribe of Benjamin; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church, and as to righteousness, I was blameless as one under the law!”**

**BUT LEST THE APOSTLE GIVE ANYONE IN THE PHILIPPIAN CONGREGATION THAT HE WAS INDEED TRUSTING IN HIS OWN INNATE SENSE OF GOODNESS, FOR HIS ETERNAL SALVATION, PAUL WENT ON TO SAY: “But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, my Lord, and being found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own based on the law, but that which comes from God and depends on faith—THAT I MAY KNOW HIM AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION; BECOMING LIKE HIM IN HIS DEATH, THAT IF IN ANYWAY POSSIBLE, I TOO MIGHT OBTAIN THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD!” -- So you can see, that St. Paul’s testimony here to the Philippians squares up 100% with what he is saying to the Galatians in our epistle lesson this morning: “Far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world!”**

**Friends, St. Paul; alias Saul of Tarsus, was very well versed in the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures. He was thoroughly acquainted with the writings of the Prophet, Jeremiah, who says in Jeremiah 9:23, “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, nor the strong man boast of his strength, nor the rich man boast of his riches!” And King Solomon agrees, when says in Proverbs 27:2, “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else and not your own lips!”**

**Why not? Because boasting is never appreciated in the eyes of another person.**

Many of the **FIRST CONVERTS** to the Christian faith, were Jewish people who had been circumcised **ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> DAY TOO**, and the whole time they were growing up, they learned to take pride in the fact that they were circumcised, as an outward sign, that they had also, by God’s grace, been made members of God’s Old Testament Covenantal people, called into being for the Hebrew people, by Moses, at Mount Sinai.

And these proud Jewish men, who also heard the Gospel, and who came to believe that Jesus was indeed, the long-awaited and Promised Messiah of the world; WELL, these men believed that this same requirement of circumcision should be carried over into the life of the Church.

The problem, here, however is, that it is much easier for human being males to be circumcised as babies, than it was for them to become circumcised as adults, especially back in those days! **Some, of these false teachers, known as the Judaizers, who had crept into the congregation went even so far as to say that circumcision was necessary for a man to receive eternal salvation.**

Friends, many people may brag about many different things today, but most no longer boast in the Church of being circumcised. Sometimes pastors and the members of their congregations may boast about other things, like: **(1) How many children in their congregation, and from their surrounding neighborhoods, that they have enrolled in Vacation Bible School, and in some megachurches today, the number is well-beyond 1,000.**

Some may boast of their **CHURCH ATTENDANCE** or their **STYLE OF WORSHIP**, or that somehow the pastor has convinced the members of the church, he serves, to become members of **ONLY ONE POLITICAL PARTY.**

### **WHY DID PAUL BOAST OF THE CROSS?**

When Jesus Christ revealed himself to be who he truly was, and is, and when the Holy Spirit empowers each of us to say that “Jesus is our Lord and Savior;” we then come to **believe that the great work he did for us in offering up his perfect life, unto death, on that old rugged cross ----- is a work that he also did, personally, for every one of us!** He lived the perfect life for us that none of us could ever live, and then offered his innocent life as a sacrifice upon the cross; drinking for us in our stead, the cup of wrath from the Heavenly Father, which we, ourselves, had otherwise deserved.

When **32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, addressed the United States Congress in 1941,** he spelled out for all the members of Congress, **the kind of life he wanted all Americans to enjoy, for themselves, following World War II; which could be summarized in terms of four different kinds of freedom.** FDR wanted us to be able to enjoy: **(1) Freedom of speech;** **(2) The Freedom to worship the God, according to the dictates of one’s own conscience.** **(3) The freedom of want;** and **(4) The freedom of fear.**

But St. Paul is sharing with us in our sermon text this morning, yet a **FIFTH FREEDOM; THE FREEDOM WE HUMAN BEINGS MIGHT HAVE TO BE FREED FROM ALWAYS GIVING INTO THE NATURAL INCLINATIONS OF OUR SINFUL NATURE.** You see, this is the **difference between God’s Law and God’s Gospel** that he reveals to us in the Holy Scriptures!

The **LAW of GOD, the TEN COMMANDMENTS** can surely teach us which actions are right and which actions are wrong, but **ONLY THE GOSPEL CAN EMPOWER US, TO BECOME MUCH MORE OBEDIENT TO THOSE LAWS OF GOD, THAT WE COULD EVER BE IF SIMPLY LEFT TO OURSELVES.**

St John writes in **I John 5:** *“By this we know that we love God, and everyone been given a second birth as the children of God; in that we obey his commandments, now believing that his commandments are not burdensome (Vv. 1-3).* Why? Because the public crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross, struck a mortal blow to sin’s worldly power. It was as if sin was nailed to the cross with Jesus (Colossians 2:13-15), because he did not die on the cross to atone for his sins, but for ours, because he was free from all sins! **Christians boast in the cross of Christ because:**

- (1) It can give them the **power to say “no” to sin and “yes” to God**; so that, by their obedience they, therefore, now glorify God and serve the needs of their neighbors.
- (2) Another reason we Christians boast about the cross of Christ, is because **it is the greatest demonstration of God’s love for fallen, wayward human beings, of all time!**
- (3) Another reasons Christians boast of the cross of Christ is because it also **fills us with the sure and certain hope of life everlasting.**

Friends, I want to tell you, briefly, about the life story of a man named George Bennard, who was born in Iowa in 1873. Although he did not grow up in a Christian home, he became a Christian when he was 22 years old in 1895. He had a lot to learn about the Bible and the Christian faith, but by virtue of his diligent study of the Bible, and his zealously for the Christian faith, he was ordained as a traveling evangelist of the Salvation Army, three years later, in 1898.

Four years later, when he was 39 years old, he was attending one of those old-fashioned tent-revival meetings in Michigan, when for whatever reason, there were three teenagers who made it their personal mission to harass and to heckle George Bennard, because of his faith.

At first, Mr. Shaw became very troubled and could not understand why he was being persecuted, in a Christian nation, for being a Christian, but soon thereafter he sat down and was inspired by God to write the words of that beautiful hymn: “The Old Rugged Cross,” as his personal testimony that **he would never be ashamed of Christ Jesus or his cross because of all the love and comfort, peace and sense of security that the hope of the cross had brought to him**, no matter how many other people there might be in this world, who would ridicule him for his faith. And the words to that hymn are so very lovely, aren’t they?

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame.

And I love that old cross where the dearest and best, for a world of lost sinners was slain.

So, I’ll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down.

I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it some day for a crown!

**And shouldn’t we always pray, that God would give us that same kind of firm commitment to our beliefs and personal dedication to the cross that George Bennard had? And yes, that St. Paul also had?**

**Friends, I want to close my sermon this morning by telling you a story about a little 10-year-old girl named Rachael**, who one summer, as school was let out for the summer, traveled with her little sister on the train, some 200 miles to spend a large part of their summer break with their grandparents, who lived on a farm in Michigan.

And let me tell you that 10-year old Rachael was very excited to be taking along with her, her most recent and prized purchase; a slingshot that she was going to learn how to use while in Michigan on her grandparents’ farm.

Shortly after Rachael and her little sister arrived at their grandparent’s place in the country, she found an empty Coca-Cola bottle and place it atop one of those fenceposts.

It was one of those fenceposts used for fencing in the pasture. Having done this, she then steps back about 15 or 20 feet, before reaching down to the ground to pick up a stone, which she then put into the little pouch of her slingshot. She pulled the ammunition backwards, and ... swoosh ... it went soaring swiftly through the air, although Rachael, unfortunately, missed her target altogether.

Therefore, she got about 5 feet closer, repeated the same action, and once again ... "swoosh" ... she missed her target of the coke bottle altogether.

The third time she tried it, she was even closer, but wouldn't you know it!

"Swoosh;" she missed the bottle for the third time, but unfortunately, it boomeranged very powerfully off the barn and killed her grandmother's prize rooster!

Of course, Rachael panics, but then immediately runs over to where the rooster was laying lifeless on the ground. She thought about what she should or could do and decided to carry that dead rooster over to a distant woodpile, where she removed some of the top pieces of the wood, and created a cavity, a hole, so to speak, in the middle layers of that woodpile. There, she placed the deceased rooster inside of that firewood; so that it was virtually unseen.

She thought she might just be getting away with murder, when halfway to the farmhouse, her little sister, who was always trying to pull a fast one off on Rachael, though Rachel was the older sister, comes over to Rachel and says: **"Cock-a-doodle-do!"**

**Oh no! Her sister saw what happened, and her sister, quite naturally decides to use the truth she had discovered to her own full advantage.** That night when her grandmother asked her to help clear the dishes from the supper table, the little sister spoke up and said: **"Grandma, clearing dishes off the supper table is one of Rachel's favorite things to do!"**

Then under her breath, she whispered to Rachel: "Cock-a-doodle-do!"

Well, to make a longer story short, Rachel's younger sister kept up using these same tactics on her older sister Rachael, for about three days; so that for three days, Rachael ended up doing both her assigned chores, and her little sister's assigned chores as well!

But after the third day, Rachael was getting tired of being taken advantage of, and so she gets enough courage to go and confess her sin, as she saw it, to her grandmother.

Her grandmother, really surprised Rachel, however, when she turned to Rachel and said, **"I know, I saw the whole thing out the kitchen window, and I have been wondering just how long you were going to allow you little sister to get the better of you!"** Friends, grandma knew it was an accident. Grandma knew that Rachel never intended to cause any harm to her prized rooster. And grandma forgave Rachel her transgression!

Friends, our God calls upon us to confess our sins to him too, so that we also might have our sins forgiven, and learn to share that same unrelenting gift with one another! Those who boast of Christ and his cross will find God's power available to them to forgive! Amen