

Series: Legalism. License. Liberty!  
Message Title: ***The Cross-Centered Life***  
Date: Sunday, October 8, 2017  
Scripture: Galatians 2:20-21  
Speaker: David H. McKinley  
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

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## Introduction

The cross is one of the most visible symbols in our world today. It is found on buildings, bookmarks, Bibles and benches. You can see crosses hanging on chains, inked into skin, and displayed like art. Crosses embellish cards and mark graves. The cross is highly visible in our culture.

At the same time, the cross can be the cause of volatile reaction and debate. By identification with the cross, some have lost their lives and liberty.

Yet for us, the cross is the most central, vital and essential truth and testament to our faith.

It is so easy to lose sight of what is important. Many forget what is most important. We even have a phrase that says, "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing."

When I preached my first sermon at Warren in view of a call ( September 2008), my message was from Hebrews 12:1-2, *Looking Unto Jesus*. I said then, "I have and will develop many sermons, but I have only one message! It is the message of Christ crucified, buried and raised again." It is still true today and especially true as we pick up our study in Galatians with a familiar portion of Scripture:

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Galatians 2:20-21 ESV).

The message of the cross was the centerpiece of the Apostle Paul's testimony and theology. Everybody's life is centered on something. What about you? What is the central concern and defining desire of your life?

Life is full of extras, but we've got to remember the essentials.

In October 2003, I read a wonderful little book entitled, *The Cross Centered Life* by C.J. Mahaney. I am using the same title today for my message.

“Paul cannot long talk about Christian joy, or Christian ethics, or Christian fellowship, or the Christian doctrine of God, or anything else, without finally getting to the cross. Paul is gospel-centered; he is cross-centered.”

—D.A. Carson

Paul filtered the whole of his past, present and future through the lens of the cross and its glorious hope.

Galatians was among the earliest (c. 49-50) of Paul’s writings to churches, and First and Second Timothy (64-67) were among his last.

“I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and

love that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:12-14 ESV).

Paul never got over the power of the cross—mighty to save! Yet no where did Paul give us a clearer, stronger testimony and theology of the exchanged life made possible through the cross than Galatians 2:20.

But this isn't just a “Pauline” issue; it is a personal one for every person today. There is nothing more vital, valuable and important in the life of every believer than the message and the ministry of the cross.

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

—Isaac Watts

I would remind you Paul's declaration of the cross is at the end of a lengthy discussion regarding legalism.

"Legalism is nothing more than trying to gain God's approval and acceptance through personal advancement or performance." It is a spiritual game of "If, Then" with God.

"Legalism has its origin in self-worship. If people are justified through their obedience to the law, then they merit praise, honor and glory. Legalism, in other words, means the glory (of human goodness) goes to people rather than God." —Thomas Schreiner

But Paul distinguishes his view of his life through his view of the cross.



## **“I have been crucified with Christ.”**

What does this mean? First, let's realize the death of Christ is unique and exclusive in its scope and reach. What Jesus did on the cross is unrepeatable and isolated in His ability to die for us—a substitute on our behalf. Yet, given His death, it gives us opportunity to die that we might live (v. 19). We die to sin—its dominion, its desires and its declaration over our lives.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might **walk in newness of life**” (Romans 6:1-4 ESV). Off with the old that we may come forth anew.

After you work outdoors or workout, what happens? You are smelly... you stink. But a shower or bath transforms that former soiled body and makes it new. You have a new

standing from *stinkification* to *justification*. You are now presentable, embraceable and overall enjoyable.

“Justification is the gracious act of God by which God declares a sinner righteous solely through faith in Jesus Christ.” —Platt and Merida

In the previous verse, Paul warns against trusting Christ and then returning to a performance-mindset to maintain God’s acceptance. From start to finish, the Christian life is all of grace, and it is only by faith. *Sola fide* (faith alone). There is not a system, there is only surrender to Christ!

Paul says that *who he was... what he was... how he was... all he was* are no more because his life is crucified with Christ. And this is the second matter of significance: Paul not only died to his sins (penalty, etc), he died to himself—that which dominates mind and concern.

Life is not about me. My life in Christ is not my life. The sins, stains, struggles and shortfalls are all given over to Christ. You can’t charge and prosecute a dead man.

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for 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; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:3-9 ESV).

Paul’s entire resume was “burned” because he was reformed as a follower of Christ.

**It is no longer I who live,  
but Christ lives in me.**



Yet God's purpose in the death of Christ was not the death of us, it was life for us—a life with new quality, eternal in heaven, new standard, holiness, new perspective, hope.

Galatians 2:20—to live to God. Through the death of Christ, we receive life.

What does God's life/Christ's life look like in a believer?

“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do... Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:17, 19-24 ESV).

The saving life of Christ is a transformational reality, not just bookworm theology. It is real-time power, authority, energy and capacity for life in Christ.

“Engrafted into the death of Christ, we derive a secret energy from it, as the shoot does from the root.” —John Calvin

Too often we only consider the gospel in light of our past failures and our future hope, but not in light of our present strength and sufficiency.

Think about exercising the fruit of the Spirit in your marriage and family, church and ministry, work and society.

**And the life I now live in the flesh  
I live by faith in the Son of God,  
who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

Faith is the fulcrum of initiation and activation of the power of Christ for us and in us. There is nothing harder nor more awkward than faith when we are so prone to works!

“Faith isn’t just for receiving salvation; it is also for enabling us to live out salvation.”

—Platt and Merida

*Sola Gracia* (Grace alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ Alone)!

## **How to Have a Cross-Centered Day**

(Adapted from *The Cross-Centered Life*  
by C.J. Mahaney)

### **• Preach the Gospel to Yourself Everyday**

Let the gospel become the defining truth of your life. "I belong to Christ (purchased and pardoned). I live in Him (strengthened and empowered)." Lean into grace and look away from performance.

Memorize Scriptures that challenged you to review the gospel.

"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV).

What God did in Christ on that day was so you may have power to live righteously in this day!

### **• Provoke Your Passion For the Things of God**

Ever had to stoke a fire?

“The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of love is kindled, but we have to get near enough for its sparks to fall on us.”

—John Stott

## • Pursue a Growing Knowledge of the Depth of the Gospel

Read through a book (like Galatians), not just to “get something” like a snack in the pantry, but to have a meal that satisfies the depth of your hunger to know God.

“The gospel is a life-permeating, world-altering, universe-changing truth. It has more facets than a diamond. Its depths man will never exhaust” —C.J. Mahaney

## • Pray the Gospel Over Yourself and Others

By means of Christ’s work (the gospel), we approach God and when we come, we give thanks for His grace toward us while calling out His grace and mercy in the lives of others.

## • Proclaim the Gospel Through Worship and Witness

Sing the gospel! I hope the songs we sing are “gospel focused” and that they are songs you carry and continue beyond moments gathered here.

In addition to worship and witness, share the gospel! Seek opportunities for gospel conversations that you may prove the power of the gospel with others. For all of us, this is a fear issue and a faith issue. Talk about the impact of your faith on your life.

“We never move on from the cross, only to a more profound understanding of the cross.”  
—David Prior

(Cross Demonstration)

“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” (Galatians 6:14 ESV).