

The Book of Galatians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Glorifying Only in the Cross

Galatians 6:11–18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Paul closes Galatians in his own hand, summing up the entire letter in a few pointed sentences. He contrasts the false teachers, who prize external show, avoid persecution, and boast in the flesh, with his own resolve to boast in nothing but the cross of Christ. He declares his crucifixion to the world, sets aside every external marker as worthless, and lands on the letter's great climax: what counts is a new creation. He pronounces peace upon the Israel of God, the people defined by the cross and new birth rather than by ethnicity. The lesson should gather the threads of the whole letter into this final, glorious emphasis on the cross and the new creation.

Two doctrinal points deserve attention. First, the new creation sums up the gospel Galatians has defended: salvation is not by external religion or human effort but by the transforming work of God through the cross, entered by a living faith that, as the letter has shown, believes, repents, confesses Christ, and is buried and raised with him in baptism to walk in newness of life. Second, the Israel of God identifies the church, all who walk by the gospel rule, Jew and Gentile alike, as the true people of God. God's people are now defined by faith in Christ and the new creation, not by ethnic descent or the old covenant markers, which fits the letter's argument and the truth that the kingdom is present in Christ's church now.

Pastorally, this final lesson calls students to glory only in the cross and to live as new creations. Aim to expose the subtle pull toward reputation-driven, self-protective religion, to set the cross before students as their only boast, and to send them out from this study of Galatians resting in grace, dead to the world's approval, and alive as the new creations Christ has made them. Let the study end where Paul ends, in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul exposes the false teachers, saying they want “to make a good showing in the flesh” and to avoid being “persecuted for the cross of Christ,” so that “they may boast in your flesh” (6:12–13). What drives religious people toward external show, and what do these motives reveal about the difference between true and false religion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul takes up the pen himself and writes in large letters, a sign of the urgency and personal weight of his closing words. He uses these final strokes to unmask the false teachers' motives one last time. They want “to make a good showing in the flesh,” to avoid persecution “for the

cross of Christ,” and to “boast in your flesh,” that is, to count the Galatians’ circumcision as a trophy of their own success.

Expose what drives this kind of religion. It is fundamentally about appearances, self-protection, and self-glory. The false teachers preferred circumcision to the cross because the cross brought persecution while a respectable, law-keeping religion did not. They wanted converts they could brag about. Their faith served their reputation and comfort, not the glory of Christ.

Draw the contrast between true and false religion. True religion centers on the cross and is willing to bear its reproach; false religion centers on the self and seeks to avoid cost while gaining acclaim. One boasts in what Christ has done; the other boasts in what it has achieved or accumulated. The difference is ultimately a matter of whose glory we are seeking.

Help students see the perennial relevance. The specific issue was circumcision, but the underlying disease, a religion of appearances that protects self and seeks applause, can infect any church and any heart. Naming the motive is the first step to refusing it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- False religion driven by appearances, self-protection, and self-glory (Galatians 6:12–13)
- Avoidance of the cross’s reproach as a mark of counterfeit faith
- True religion centered on the cross and willing to bear its cost
- The contrast revealed by whose glory we ultimately seek

Discussion Prompts

- What motives drive religion that is all about appearances?
- Why did the false teachers prefer circumcision to the cross?
- How can a religion of appearances infect any church today?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul unmasks self-protective, reputation-seeking religion. Examine your own heart: are there ways you serve God or practice your faith mainly to look good to others or to avoid difficulty, and how would you know?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Paul’s exposure of the false teachers into honest self-examination. It is easy to condemn their reputation-seeking religion and miss the same motives at work, quietly, in ourselves. Much of our service and devotion can be subtly aimed at looking good or avoiding discomfort rather than glorifying Christ.

Help students probe their motives gently. Do we serve where we will be seen and praised, and avoid service that is hidden or costly? Do we shape our witness to avoid the reproach of the cross, softening hard truths to keep people's approval? Do we practice our faith partly as a performance for others? These questions are uncomfortable, but they are clarifying.

Offer a way to discern. One test is to notice how we feel when our good deeds go unseen or unappreciated, or when faithfulness brings difficulty rather than applause. Disappointment in those moments can reveal that we were serving for the showing more than for the Savior.

Point to the freedom of the cross. The cure for reputation-driven religion is not to despair over mixed motives but to return to the cross, where we already have all the approval we need. The one who boasts in the cross is set free from the exhausting work of performing for an audience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination for reputation-seeking motives in our own faith
- Softening the cross to gain approval as a subtle compromise
- Discerning motives by our response when good is unseen or costly
- The cross freeing us from performing for an audience

Discussion Prompts

- Do you ever serve mainly to look good or to avoid difficulty?
- How do you respond when your good deeds go unnoticed?
- How does the approval of the cross free you from performing?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul declares, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14). What does it mean to boast only in the cross, and why is the cross the one and only thing in which a Christian can rightly glory?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Against the boasting of the false teachers, Paul sets his own single boast: "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." In a culture, like ours, full of things to brag about, Paul narrows his glory to one point, the cross. Everything else he counts as nothing next to what Christ did for him there.

Explain why the cross is the only worthy boast. To boast in anything else, our achievements, our morality, our heritage, our religion, is to glory in ourselves. But the cross leaves us nothing to boast about in ourselves, because it declares that we could not save ourselves and that everything depends on what Christ has done. The cross humbles all human pride and directs all glory to God.

Show what it means to boast in the cross. It means that the cross becomes the center of our identity, our security, and our story. When asked what makes us acceptable, we point not to ourselves but to Christ crucified. When tempted to pride, we remember that we are sinners saved by a Savior's death. The cross is both our deepest humbling and our highest glory.

Connect this to the whole letter. Galatians has fought to keep anything from being added to the cross as the ground of our standing. Here Paul states the positive truth: the cross alone is our boast. To glory in the cross is to refuse every rival ground of confidence and to rest wholly in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross of Christ as the believer's only boast (Galatians 6:14)
- Every other boast as a form of glorying in ourselves
- The cross humbling human pride and directing all glory to God
- The cross as both our deepest humbling and our highest glory (1 Corinthians 1:18–31)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the cross the only thing a Christian can rightly boast in?
- What does it mean for the cross to be the center of your identity?
- How does boasting in the cross humble and secure you at once?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul found his entire significance in the cross. What, besides the cross, do you most tend to boast in or build your sense of worth upon, and how does the cross challenge that?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses Paul's single boast into our many rivals. We are surrounded by invitations to build our worth on something other than the cross, our accomplishments, our possessions, our families, our reputations, even our religious performance. Each becomes a place we are tempted to glory and to find our significance.

Help students name their particular boast. For one it may be career success, for another moral respectability, for another intelligence, appearance, or comparison with others who are doing worse. Even good things become idols when we glory in them as the ground of our worth. The question is honest: what do we point to, in our hearts, to feel that we matter?

Show how the cross challenges each rival. The cross tells us that our worth was settled not by anything we achieved but by what Christ paid to redeem us. That truth dethrones every lesser boast. We do not need our accomplishments to prove our value when the Son of God died to

secure it. The cross frees us from the exhausting work of self-justification by performance and comparison.

Invite a deliberate reordering. Encourage students to identify the rival boast that most grips them and to consciously set the cross above it, returning their confidence and identity to Christ crucified. Boasting only in the cross is a daily, deliberate refusal to glory in ourselves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rival boasts that compete with the cross for our identity
- Good things becoming idols when we glory in them for worth
- The cross settling our worth apart from achievement or comparison
- Daily reordering of confidence around Christ crucified

Discussion Prompts

- What besides the cross do you most tend to boast in?
- How does the cross challenge that source of worth?
- How can you consciously set the cross above that rival?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says that through the cross “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (6:14). What is this mutual crucifixion between the believer and the world, and how does the cross change our whole relationship to the world and its values?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a striking claim: through the cross “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” He describes a double death. The world, with its values and approval, is dead to him, no longer his master or his measure, and he is dead to the world, no longer living for its applause or fearing its rejection. The cross severed the old relationship entirely.

Explain what the world means here. It is not the people God loves or the creation he made, but the whole system of values, priorities, and approval organized apart from God, the same present evil age Paul named back in chapter one. To be crucified to the world is to be set free from its grip, its definitions of success, and its power to seduce or intimidate us.

Show how the cross accomplishes this. At the cross we died with Christ, and the world that crucified him lost its claim on us. We now belong to another kingdom and live by another standard. The things the world prizes no longer rule us, and the things the world despises, like the reproach of the cross, no longer frighten us. We have, in a sense, already died to all of it.

Apply it to daily freedom. The believer crucified to the world can hold its rewards loosely and bear its disapproval calmly, because neither one defines them anymore. This is not a grim withdrawal from life but a deep liberty, the freedom of those who have nothing left to prove to a world they have already died to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mutual crucifixion of the believer and the world through the cross (Galatians 6:14)
- The world as the value system organized apart from God
- Dying with Christ as breaking the world's claim on us
- Freedom from the world's rewards and its disapproval

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to be crucified to the world?
- How does the cross break the world's grip on us?
- How does this double death actually bring freedom?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul lived as one dead to the world's pull. Where does the world still have a strong grip on you, in its approval, its possessions, its definitions of success, and how is the cross calling you to die to that grip?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites honest reflection on where the world still holds us. Though we have died to the world in principle through the cross, in practice its grip can remain strong. The world's approval, possessions, and definitions of success still call to us, and we often answer.

Help students locate the world's grip in specifics. It may show up as an excessive craving for approval and status, an attachment to money or comfort, a fear of what people think, or a quiet adoption of the culture's measures of a successful life. Naming the particular hold is the first step to loosening it.

Connect the loosening to the cross. We die to the world not mainly by trying harder to care less, but by gazing again at the cross, where we see how much we are already loved and how secure we already are in Christ. The more the cross fills our vision, the smaller the world's rewards and threats appear. Crucifixion to the world is the fruit of being captivated by Christ crucified.

Press for one concrete death. Invite students to name one specific way the world grips them and one step of dying to that grip this week, whether refusing to chase a particular approval, holding a possession more loosely, or acting on conviction despite the fear of others' opinions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lingering grip of the world even on those who have died to it
- Worldly grip in approval, possessions, fear, and false measures of success
- Dying to the world through being captivated by the cross
- Concrete steps of dying to the world's hold

Discussion Prompts

- Where does the world still have a strong grip on you?
- How does gazing at the cross loosen that grip?
- What is one way you can die to the world's hold this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul writes that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything,” and pronounces peace upon all who walk by this rule, “and upon the Israel of God” (6:15–16). What does it mean that God’s true people, the Israel of God, are now defined by the cross and new creation rather than by ethnicity or external markers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul sweeps away the old markers one final time: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything,” and he pronounces peace and mercy on all who walk by this rule, “and upon the Israel of God.” The people of God are no longer defined by ethnicity, circumcision, or any external badge, but by the cross and the new creation. All who belong to Christ, Jew and Gentile alike, are the true Israel of God.

Explain who the Israel of God now is. Throughout Galatians, Paul has argued that the true children of Abraham are those who share his faith, not merely his bloodline (Galatians 3:7, 29). Here he names the result: the church, the community of all who walk by the gospel rule and belong to Christ, is the Israel of God. God’s people are defined by faith in Christ and the new creation, not by descent from Abraham or the keeping of the old covenant.

Address this carefully and evenhandedly, since it touches a debated area. Some hold that God maintains a separate program and future earthly kingdom for national Israel apart from the church. Paul’s argument here points another way: the dividing line is not ethnicity but the cross, and the one people of God in Christ inherits the promises. This fits the larger truth that God’s kingdom is present now in Christ’s church, with Christ reigning, rather than awaiting a separate earthly restoration. We hold this conviction graciously, while loving all people and longing for all, including ethnic Israelites, to come to Christ.

Bring it home as belonging. To be in Christ is to belong to the ancient, worldwide people of God, the Israel of God, marked not by external badges but by the new creation. This is a profound dignity and a deep unity, joining believers of every background into one family defined by the cross.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's people defined by the cross and new creation, not ethnicity or external markers (Galatians 6:15–16)
- The Israel of God as all who walk by the gospel and belong to Christ, Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:7, 29)
- The promises inherited by the one people of God in Christ
- The kingdom present now in Christ's church, against a separate earthly program for national Israel

Discussion Prompts

- Who is the Israel of God, according to Paul's argument?
- How are God's people now defined, if not by ethnicity or external markers?
- How does this belonging unite believers of every background?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says the only thing that counts is being "a new creation." As you look at your own life, where do you see evidence that the old has passed and the new has come, and where do you still long for the new creation to take fuller shape in you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to look for the evidence of new creation in their own lives. Paul says the only thing that counts is being a new creation, and a new creation, by its nature, shows. The old is meant to be passing away and the new to be appearing (2 Corinthians 5:17), even if the process is gradual and uneven.

Help students see the signs of the new creation. New desires for God and his word, new freedom from old sins, new love for people once disregarded, new peace where there was anxiety, new patterns of life, these are the marks of the new creation taking shape. Encouraging students to notice this work cultivates gratitude and hope.

Be honest about the not-yet. The new creation is real but not yet complete; believers still battle the flesh and long for fuller transformation. This is normal Christian experience, and the presence of ongoing struggle does not deny the reality of the new creation any more than weeds in a growing field deny that the crop is alive.

Move toward hopeful longing. Invite students to name both where they see the new creation already at work and where they long for it to take fuller shape. The God who began the new creation in them will carry it on, and naming both the evidence and the longing keeps them grateful and expectant.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new creation as a reality that shows in changed lives (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Signs of the new creation: new desires, freedom, love, and peace
- The new creation as real but not yet complete
- Gratitude for present evidence and hope for fuller transformation

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you see evidence that the old has passed and the new has come?
- Where do you long for the new creation to take fuller shape?
- How does ongoing struggle fit with the reality of being made new?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul brings the whole letter to its climax: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a new creation” (6:15). How does this one phrase sum up everything Galatians has taught, that what matters before God is not external religion or human effort but a new creation wrought through the cross, and how is that new life entered and lived?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question gathers the doctrinal weight of the whole letter into its climactic phrase: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a new creation.” In a single sentence Paul sums up everything Galatians has argued. What matters before God is not external religion, not human effort, not any badge or performance, but a new creation wrought by God through the cross.

Show how this gathers up the entire letter. Galatians has insisted that we are not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Christ, that the cross alone redeems us, that we are sons of God clothed with Christ, that we are free children of promise, and that the Spirit produces new life in us. All of it converges here. The goal of the gospel is not improved religion but new creation, people made new by God’s grace through Christ crucified.

Explain how this new life is entered and lived, drawing together the letter’s teaching. The new creation is God’s work, not ours, and yet it is entered through the living, obedient faith Galatians has described, a faith that hears the gospel, believes in Christ, repents, confesses him, and is buried with him and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). It is

then lived by walking in the Spirit and sowing to the Spirit, bearing his fruit, until the harvest of eternal life. From first to last it is grace, received by faith and worked out in a transformed life, never external religion or human boasting.

Guard the balance the whole study has maintained. Against legalism, the new creation is not achieved by law-keeping or self-effort; it is created by God. Against a bare faith only, the new creation is entered by a faith that truly lays hold of Christ and is born again into him, and it shows itself in a new life. The phrase excludes both errors at once: not external religion, and not empty profession, but a real new creation by the cross.

End in wonder and assurance, as the climax of the letter deserves. The gospel does not merely reform us; it re-creates us. Help students marvel that, in Christ, they are not simply forgiven sinners trying harder, but new creations, made by God through the cross, destined for a harvest of eternal life. This is the good news Galatians has fought to protect, and it is worth glorying in forever.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new creation as the climactic summary of the whole letter (Galatians 6:15)
- Salvation as God's new creation, not external religion or human effort
- The new creation entered through living, obedient faith and the new birth in Christ (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27)
- The new life lived by walking and sowing to the Spirit unto eternal life
- Against both legalism and a bare faith only: a real new creation by the cross
- Grace from first to last, received by faith and worked out in a transformed life

Discussion Prompts

- How does new creation sum up everything Galatians has taught?
- How is the new creation both God's work and entered by an obedient faith?
- How does this phrase rule out both legalism and empty profession?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole study of Galatians. Paul ends by praying that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would be with our spirit (6:18). Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, from now on, to glory only in the cross and to live as the new creation he has made you to be.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone closes both the lesson and the whole study of Galatians. Paul ends with a benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers." After all the urgent argument, the apostle's last word is grace, which has been the heartbeat of the entire

letter. The study should end on that same note, sending students out to glory in the cross and live as new creations.

Help students gather the whole journey. Across these thirteen lessons they have seen the one true gospel defended, justification by faith established, freedom from the law proclaimed, sonship and the Spirit celebrated, and the new creation held up as the goal of it all. Invite them to name what God has done in them through the study and what one truth they most want to carry forward.

Press for one specific, lasting resolve. Ask each student to name one concrete way Jesus is calling them, from now on, to glory only in the cross and to live as the new creation he has made them. This is the practical fruit of the whole study, a life increasingly centered on Christ crucified and increasingly transformed by his grace.

Close in worship and grace. The God who began a new creation in them will complete it, and the grace that saved them will keep them to the end. Send students out from Galatians as Paul sent the Galatians, resting in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, free, beloved, and made new.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace as the first and last word of the gospel and the letter (Galatians 6:18)
- The whole study converging on the cross and the new creation
- A life increasingly centered on Christ crucified and transformed by grace
- Assurance that God will complete the new creation he began

Discussion Prompts

- What truth from Galatians do you most want to carry forward?
- How is Jesus calling you to glory only in the cross from now on?
- What is one way you will live as a new creation this week?