

Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ **Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.** 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.** ¹⁵ **Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.** ¹⁶ **Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.** (NIV 84)

Theme: Bear your Cross Under Pressure

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians throughout Galatia to combat the false teachings of a group of Jews, who professed to be Christians, whom we call the Judaizers. The Judaizers were undermining the clear gospel that Paul taught the Galatians. They taught that was necessary to follow the laws of Moses on top believing in Jesus Christ to be saved. Especially when it came to circumcision. They taught that you must be circumcised in order to be saved. Their argument sounds an awful lot like what a group of Jews said in Acts 15, **Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”**

Of course, you see the problem with this. They made the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depend on something that we do. As if Christ's perfect life, suffering and death, and resurrection aren't good enough, so we must add to his work. Ultimately, then, salvation depends on us and our obedience to circumcision, or other laws of Moses not by grace through faith. So this teaching of the Judaizers attacked the very fabric of the Christian faith.

In our text for today Paul examined why the Judaizers taught such a thing. And to say the least, they weren't sincere in their teaching. **Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.** The Judaizers wanted to impress the Jews, who hated Christians because they don't

follow all the laws of Moses. The Judaizers wanted to look good on the outside so that the Jews wouldn't persecute them. So they tried to convince the Galatian Christians to follow the laws of Moses and get circumcised by claiming they had to in order to be saved. And then when some of the Galatians did so, they pointed it out to the Jews. **Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.** They bragged about what they did, “see, we convinced some of those Christians to follow the laws of Moses and get circumcised. We are just like you; we care about the laws of Moses.” So the Judaizers caved in to the pressure from the Jews who were persecuting them. And the Galatians, in turn, were succumbing to the pressure of the Judaizers who pushing them to get circumcised.

Peer pressure led you to do some pretty foolish things when you were younger. It was peer pressure that led you to take something off the shelf that one time, to cheat on that test, or to drink a couple beers at a friend's house. When one of your friends was getting picked on it was peer pressure that led you to join together with them in the hopes that you could avoid getting picked on as well.

We typically look at peer pressure as something he had to do with when we were younger. Something that affected us back when we were teenagers—in high school. But in reality we still face peer pressure today. From your friends, your co-workers, and from the world in general you face peer pressure when it comes to all sort of different things, especially your faith.

You face pressure like the Judaizers felt from the Jews—persecution of some sort. In one way or another you suffer because of your faith. Maybe a job or a promotion falls through because you insist on worshiping instead of working on Sundays. Perhaps you get some grief from your friends, or a rift grows between you and some family members because of your faith.

And there is pressure from people in our society—whom you don't even know. They want us to change our teachings—to allow for something or be more lenient toward others. Pressure is put on you if you reject evolution in favor of creation; “you must be a real idiot to reject such scientific proof,” they say. There is pressure to accept homosexuality. “After all,” they say, “God created everyone and no

one chooses to be a homosexual, you should be accepting of God's creation." There is pressure to get along with and accept all other religions—to coexist with them. "Come on," they claim, "All religions are essentially the same anyway, they are nice people who do good things. What right do you have to tell them that what they believe is wrong?" Then there are teachings about God's gift of sex only in marriage, or the roles of men and women. "Well if you hold to such old teachings as that, there probably isn't much hope for you or your congregation." We could go on and on, but you get the point. And what then is the temptation? To avoid all confrontation. To say, "I don't need this; I have enough things to worry about in my life; I don't need any more pain and sorrow, or strife and grief." So you decide not to talk much about your faith, not to bring it up to your friends or your relatives, to let your neighbor bow down to a false god. You are just going to go along with everything, and may even deny certain teachings just so you wouldn't have to deal with others may think or say about you.

In other words, we're not always willing to carry our cross---to suffer for the sake of Christ. We don't want to deny ourselves pleasure, or money, or deprive ourselves of our family and friends. So we take the easy road. We cave under pressure. And we take the easy road—the road the world and our sinful nature are leading us down. We don't exactly follow Jesus when he says, as he did in our gospel for today, **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.**

We may not always be willing to carry our cross, but Jesus was. He knew what was going to happen in Jerusalem. He prophesied about it again and again, **Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.** His disciples tried to talk him out of it. But he went anyway. He resolutely set out for Jerusalem—he willingly went to his death. He didn't run or flee. He didn't try to get out of it; but he took up his cross willingly.

He knew all that he would suffer through too. All the beatings, the crown of the thorns, being spit upon, getting mocked and ridiculed, and the flogging. He knew the pain he would suffer through when

nails were pounded through his hands and feet. And he also knew what would cause his greatest pain and agony—it was when he was forsaken by his heavenly Father. He knew that he would take all our sins upon himself, that he would become guilty of everything we have done wrong. And since he became a sinner in our place he was forsaken by God. At that time he suffered through the pain and agony of eternal damnation. He suffered through the condemnation that we deserved. He knew he would suffer through all these things, but he carried his cross to Golgotha willingly.

Because of Christ all your sins have been paid for. They will never come back to you to haunt or condemn you. They have been removed as far as east is from west. There is nothing you have to do—it's all been done already by Christ. You can't add to what he has done. Your good works don't earn you a little extra forgiveness, you've been completely forgiven already. His perfect life has been given to you so that you don't have to worry about obeying the laws of Moses perfectly. He fulfilled the law for you, so it is now obsolete—you don't have to be circumcised to be saved. You have forgiveness and eternal life already won for you. It is received through faith in Christ, which is also a gift from the Holy Spirit. Following the law or not has no meaning—the only thing that matters is what Christ has done for you, which you receive through faith.

And so you don't have to worry about what others may think about you or say about you, or even do to you. You don't have to be afraid of any persecution you may face. It may hurt for awhile, it may sting the rest of your life. But in the end you'll be in heaven. You have a perfect life with your Savior, free from pain, toil, or sorrow.

That is what we do when we carry our cross. Like an athlete in training, we look ahead to the goal. We don't focus on the pain we are currently experiencing, but the glory we will receive. When we suffer through this life, when we carry our cross, and when that burden seems too heavy to bear, we look at Christ and his cross. We see the forgiveness and eternal life he won for us through his cross. With a perfect life in heaven waiting, we push harder and are more willing to carry our cross.

And we get the point where the pressures that the world put on to us no longer matter. You were crucified to the world. And if someone is crucified that means they are dead. So if the world is crucified to you,

that means that the world is dead to you. You don't care about the world. You don't care what they think, or say, or do. You don't need the world, you don't need their support, you don't need their approval. The pressure they put on you as a Christian doesn't bother you; and it isn't going to get you to change anything. Peer pressure may get some. It used to lead you to do foolish things. But not any longer. The only thing you care about is Christ and what he thinks of you and how he wants you to live your life.

Not only is the world crucified, or dead to you, but you are crucified to the world. As far as the world is concerned, you are dead. They want nothing to do with you. You used to be cool. You used to be like one of them. They used to be able to persuade you to go along with them in certain things. But not any longer.

You're different now. You don't succumb to their pressures. You're no longer a child of the world, but a child of Christ. So they shun you, they mock you, they want nothing to do with you. And that doesn't bother you one bit, since you don't care about the world.

So you carry your cross. And you carry it willingly. So what if you suffer. So what if you go through hardships and difficulties. Your life on this earth may not be that pleasant, or it will be a little less pleasant. But that pain and that sorrow won't last forever.

So as you carry your cross you look to Christ and his cross. And know that you are forgiven. And know that he's no longer on that cross, he rose from the dead and is in heaven. And soon you will be as well. So you boast about Christ and his cross. You brag about what he has done and he has given you. He gives you the strength to bear your cross under pressure. For that is what he did for you. Amen.