

Cross and New Creation

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In his closing remarks to the Galatians Paul issues a warning and a stunning summary of his entire letter. He says, [See what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand](#) (11). Why call attention to the size of his handwriting? In the ancient world letters were often dictated and recorded by an assistant, but Paul is so concerned for the Galatians he grabs the pen to put his concerns directly on the page. The letter is straight from the heart. His message? Flee from the Flesh, Boast in the Cross because you are new creation.

Flee from the Flesh

In the highest grossing R-rated movie of all time, *Joker*, Arthur Fleck puts on a clown face to get attention, to entertain...and to murder. When his clown-faced murders get news coverage he creepily comments, “people are starting to *notice*.” *This* is what he wants. To be noticed. His unbridled desire to be noticed unleashes chaos. He is celebrated in the streets and dances as followers sacrifice themselves for him. The group pressuring the Galatians puts on a face. Paul says they, [who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised](#) (12). The Greek word **good showing** combines the word “face” with a prefix for “good.” Good face. Like the Joker they’re using people to get attention, to put on a *good face*. Can we get more to follow us? How many are we up to now? Using the church to impress their peers, [They desire to have them circumcised that they may boast in their flesh](#) (13). What does this mean? “The flesh” is shorthand for *standing apart from God*. They’re exploiting this desire to “stand on our own two feet,” that impulse to define ourselves apart from God. There are a lot of groups that do this today. Nike ran a campaign a few years ago called Make Yourself to help us be the best 'versions' of ourselves. They used images of impossibly physically fit women working out in sports bras. It appealed to this desire to make something of yourself, even if it was skin deep. Or we hear this today, You be You. Who defines you? Is you the standard of humanity? I hope not. Don’t we need a greater, more fit, more virtuous human? God in the flesh not flesh in the flesh? The sad thing is we’re exploited, not by surprise but *willingly*. Why do we do it? Paul perceptively points out this group does it [to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ](#). Is it possible the reason we go along with the marketing, allow groups to exploit us is because *we* don’t

want to suffer for the cross of Christ? We'd rather identify as fit, activist, intellectual, entrepreneur rather than with Christ? To fit in. Church Father Chrysostom said [pride is choosing to offend God and please others](#). Who do you want to please most? Your peers, then you won't bring up things that spark their displeasure. You won't say no to their request. You have to be there for them! If you think talking about the uniqueness of Jesus is will cause people to disapprove, you'll never bring him up. We would rather offend the God of the universe than ruffle the feathers of our friends. It raises the question, Who's the real god of our lives? *It's the thing you sacrifice to:* your emotions, headspace, time, worry. The masses sacrificed themselves to the Joker because he offered liberation. We sacrifice ourselves to companies, causes, and peers thinking we'll make something of ourselves. Is it any wonder people don't find the gospel compelling? How will our city be convinced they need Jesus if we're not convinced we do? Flee from the flesh.

Boast in the Cross

Philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand says humility is "the habit of living in the truth." To live in the truth is to see things the way they really are, to invite what's true even if it's hard to swallow. You're not going to be that woman in the commercial. But the proud have a habit of living inside what's false. They prop up the lie. Their self-perception is as accurate as a funhouse mirror. But humble people live inside the truth, resist exploitation. Their self-perception is shaped by the true mirror. Exhibit A the Apostle Paul, [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](#) (14). He refuses to make something of himself EXCEPT in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. His single exception for boasting is *in the cross*. What a puzzling phrase! What does it mean? **Boasting in the cross means boasting in our weakness and in Jesus' strength**. To do that you've got to see your weakness *next* to the cross. And we need help with that. Where do we get it? By looking at the cross, John Stott, "[Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to say to us, 'I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.'](#) Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves..until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, [that we shrink to our true size](#)." When we take a good look at the cross, we must reckon

with the fact that our sin was so heinous, our unbelief so hard, it required the death of the Son of God. *That* is humbling. We are that bad. No self-help book will tell you that. Humbling but freeing. Why? Jesus *chose* to do it. Jesus Christ decided to give his life in *your* place. In Christianity, the God sacrifices *himself*! When we take that in, when we look into the mirror of the bloody cross, we can't help but be humbled. And we can't help but be changed. To see the end of our weakness and the beginning of his strength. So Paul says [the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world](#). The world crucified to him: Not the physical world but as he said earlier the [enslaving elementary principles of the world](#) (4:3,9). The exploiting world system, the you be you tractor beam, the merit system, loses its attraction. The more we linger at the foot of the cross the more boasting loses its luster. What about [I \(crucified\) to the world mean](#)? Has Paul been annihilated? No. He has been renewed. The old person who would rather offend God and please people has been put to death, and in her place springs up a new creation, "[For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation](#)" (15). What we have done or failed to do no longer defines us. Looking into the cross only gives us half the picture. To get the full picture we must see: *new creation*!

New Creation

Paul pairs the cross with new creation. The gospel humbles and lifts us. We're cut down to size and filled out with new life. Jesus does not just hang on a cross, he hops out of a tomb! The resurrection gives us a glimpse into new creation. Jesus does not discard the old body and grow a new one; he rehabilitates the old, making it new. It is re-newed. Similarly, faith in Jesus doesn't annihilate our personality but renews it, transforms that weakness with his strength, that ugliness with his beauty. He doesn't exploit but changes us into something more beautiful than any anti-aging cream or workout ever could. We don't need to put on a face, when we have the beauty of the Lord. Future resurrection glory is rolled back into the present to liberate us from the flesh. We don't need to stand apart from God when we can stand up in Christ! But this is not merely for ourselves; it is for our city, our world. The cross and new creation intervene in this present evil age to hatch a rebellion of good. This is why he says, [And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them](#) (16). Walk by what rule? The rule of new creation, the character of the age to come, breaking out

in the age that is. What should that look like? Mercy and peace. *Mercy*: regular contact with this God, the one who sacrifices himself for us puts us in touch with the golden heart of mercy. There's a young lady in my City Group who frequently checks in others. When our family was sick she dropped off enough food for our whole family and tons of Gatorade. She serves the marginalized with meals. She counsels the struggling. She shares Scripture with the hopeless. Why? She walks under the rule of new creation. Golden mercy is married to shimmering peace, shalom, the peace of God that achieves wholistic renewal of all things. The rule of new creation shows up in us when we seek the renewal of our city: when serve the marginalized at M2, the orphaned through Austin Angels, those in crushing unemployment in Kuala Lumpur. When we sit in the mercy of the cross and the peace of new creation it will burst out onto those around us. Let's flee the flesh and boast in the cross because *new creation*.