

Galatians 18 - The Glory of the Cross
Pastor Joe Oakley - 2/16/2025

Today I'm preaching the last sermon in our study in Galatians called Freedom through Christ.

The letter to the Galatians was written to a group of churches in Galatia, which was a Roman province in what is modern day Turkey. Paul visited these churches 3 times, but at some point, some false teachers called Judaizers began to influence the believers in Galatia.

The word Judaize means to embrace the customs and beliefs of Judaism. The main point of their teaching was that to be made right with God, it is not enough to have faith in Jesus Christ; one must also obey the Law of Moses. This is the main issue Paul addresses in Galatians.

Today we come to Paul's closing comments in Galatians 6:11-18. My sermon is called The Glory of the Cross. Galatians 6:11 says:

See what large letters I use as I close in my own handwriting!

Paul usually dictated his letters to a scribe. But he would often personally write a short portion at the end. He did this to authenticate the letter and to add a personal touch. For instance - 2 Thessalonians 3:17 says:

The greeting in my own handwriting: From Paul. This is the mark of genuineness in every letter, this is what my handwriting looks like.

Not only did Paul write this last section of Galatians, but he also points out that he wrote this section with large letters. He did this for emphasis like we would use capital letters or bold type. Paul is saying - this letter is authentic and this part is really important. This is the conclusion of the matter. Then he says in Galatians 6:12

Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Paul is referring to the legalistic Christians among the Galatians and he said that their motive is to make a good showing in the flesh. These legalists pretended to be motivated by concern for the Galatians. But Paul saw through their deception and discerned that their real motive was fleshly and selfish. They wanted the Galatians to come under the law of Moses so they could glory by looking good to other legalists.

And notice that they were trying to compel the Galatians to come under the law.

Compel means to force someone to do something. Remember, there was nothing wrong with a Gentile being circumcised. There was everything wrong in compelling a Gentile to be circumcised, saying he could not be right with God without it.

Then Paul makes an interesting observation. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Who was going to persecute them? Other legalistic Christians or those still in Judaism.

If these legalists had said, "We are saved only by the work of the cross of Christ, not by our obedience to the law," they would have been persecuted. And their unwillingness to stand in the face of this pressure made them stand for false doctrines.

We can face the same kind of persecution today from unbelievers. They usually say they are okay with people having any kind of spiritual belief. But when you say that salvation is only through faith in the death of Christ on the cross - the persecution begins. It's usually in the form of mocking or ridicule or saying that you are close-minded or judgmental or hateful or a bigot. Its amazing how quickly those who say they don't judge can actually judge! Jesus said in Mark 13:9-13:

You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of Me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them...

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of Me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

One of the signs of the end times is betrayal. But Mark adds that this will include betrayal by family members. This includes being betrayed by family and friends.

Betrayal is painful – but betrayal by family and friends is particularly painful. The betrayal that Jesus is speaking about is betraying Christians because they are Christians! You might not see how this can happen – but it is already happening in Muslim nations. If someone converts to Christianity – their own family and friends can turn on them and turn them in. In many places, Christians are told to renounce Jesus or be killed. Don't think it can't happen in America!

In my lifetime, American has moved from being a nation based on Christian principles to being a post-Christian culture. And we are quickly moving from a post-Christian culture to an anti-Christian culture. In that culture – Christianity will not be tolerated. We will be considered outdated, irrelevant, hateful and mean because of our biblical stance about sin.

Persecution is part of being a follower of Christ. And in Galatians 6:13 Paul says more about the Judaizers who were trying to avoid persecution.

Even those who advocate circumcision don't keep the whole law themselves. They only want you to be circumcised so they can boast about it and claim you as their disciples.

This is always true about legalists. They cherry pick certain behaviors that they harp on to compel others to follow their legalism - but all along they are not even keeping the whole law themselves. They only want to be able to boast about converting others to their brand of legalism.

I have a pastor friend who was raised in a very legalistic denomination that was overly concerned about outward appearance. They had many rules about how people could dress and how they did their hair. They also banned people from watching tv because it was worldly. He knew of pastors who would stand at their pulpits and make a big deal about not having a tv in their house. But they had one out in their garage.

That's what legalists do - they boast about their legalism while they themselves are not keeping all the rules they are preaching. But Paul did not care about the glory that came from fame or from riches or from status, power or recognition from people. That's not what he gloried in, rejoiced about and boasted about. He said in Galatians 6:14

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.

It is hard for us to appreciate how strange Paul's words were to the people of his day. To them, the words "**cross**" and "**glory**" just did not go together. They were direct opposites because there was not a more humiliating, shameful way to be executed than the cross.

When Paul said he boasted in the cross, he was not meaning the pieces wood that Jesus was nailed to. He was speaking of the results of Christ's death on the cross.

He boasted that Christ's death on the cross results in forgiveness of sin, salvation, justification, right standing with God, healing, eternal life, redemption from the curse of the law and victory over Satan!

Notice that Paul says that through the cross - the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. We all have the same 3 enemies - the world, the flesh and the devil. The cross is victorious over all three! In Galatians 5:24 Paul says:

Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The cross also gives us victory over ourselves and our selfishness! That's why 2 Corinthians 5:15 says:

He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves,

but for Him who died for them and rose again.

The cross also gives us victory over the devil! Colossians 2:13-15 says:

You, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Christ. He forgave all your trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Jesus defeated Satan and his demons, made a public spectacle of them and disarmed them. Everything Satan can use against us was nailed to that cross. And so now we overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 12:11 says:

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

Our victory is not in our power – it's in the blood of the Lamb.
Our victory is not in our goodness – it's in the blood of the Lamb.
Our victory is not in our righteousness – it's in the blood of the Lamb.

So get your eyes off yourself and onto the blood and the cross!
That's where the victory is!
Do you want salvation? It's in the blood of the cross.
Do you want deliverance? It's in the blood of Jesus.
Do you want healing? It's in the blood of Jesus.
Do you want to overcome? You do it by the blood of the Lamb.

Not only does the cross give us victory over our flesh and the devil, but it also gives us victory over the world. Again, Galatians 6:14 says: **...the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**

When Paul speaks of the world, he is not talking about planet earth. He is speaking of the demonic powers and authorities and the community of sinful humanity that is united in rebellion against God. 1 John 5:19 says:

We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the control of the evil one.

Paul has said he has died to the flesh and so must we. He now says he died to the world and so must we! When we are dead to the world the things of the world no longer influence us or pull us into behaviors that dishonor God. 1 John 2:15-16 says:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the

cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world.

We must differentiate between the people of the world whom God loves and the worldly system that is opposed to God and which we must not love. **You see, God does not want to take us out of the world; He does want to take the world out of us! And that will only happen when we love Him more than we love the world!**

And there is nothing more worldly than what Paul has been talking about in Galatians 6 - boasting in your flesh. There is nothing more worldly than conforming your behavior to the expectations of the world and then boasting in it.

When we live for the glory that comes from fame, from riches, from status, or from power over people we are very alive to the world and the world is very alive to us. And when we are alive to the world it tries to make us more worldly. That's why Romans 12:2 says:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

**Satan wants to conform us through his words.
God wants to transform us through His Word.**

And we must renew our minds through the word of God so that we can defeat the words of self, Satan and the world! Galatians 6:15 says:

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

Circumcision meant something to the nation of Israel. It was the sign of being in covenant with God based on the law of Moses. But when Christ established the new covenant - circumcision has no spiritual value.

What matters in salvation is not outward behavior, but inward heart change. If you are circumcised, but not a new creation, you do not belong to Jesus. If you are uncircumcised, but are a new creation, you do belong to Jesus.

You cannot behave yourself into salvation. You cannot do enough works to pay for your sin. What really matters is what Jesus did for us on the cross and what God does in us when we place our faith in Christ's work on the cross rather than our own works. When we do that we are made new in Christ! 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 says:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

We don't make ourselves a new creation; God does that. Christianity is something God does in us, not something we do for God. This is the difference between grace and law.

What we must do after being born again is stop viewing life and Christ from a worldly perspective. Paul says in Galatians 6:16

Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

The Greek word for rule here is *kanon*, which means a straight stick like what a carpenter or surveyor used to keep things straight. It keeps things headed in the right direction.

You might have heard this word used regarding the Bible, which is the canon of Scripture. God's word is the standard we live by. Following it keeps us walking in the straight-line God has laid out for us and which Jesus lived out in front of us.

And just as Paul pronounced a curse on those who taught false doctrines at the beginning of Galatians - here at the end he pronounces a blessing on those who walk according to the canon of Scripture.

The blessing that comes from continuing in the word is peace and mercy. The word gives us peace that passes understanding and mercy is greater than all our sins! Thank you Lord!

I find Galatians 6:17 to be a very interesting verse. In it Paul says:

Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

Paul had suffered greatly for Jesus and he bore scars on his body from the times he had been beaten and stoned because of his faith.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-25 Paul lists the many ways he suffered for Christ.

I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked.

So Paul is saying to the Galatians, "Listen, I have suffered greatly for Christ. I have endured the worst you can imagine, so stop troubling me. I should not have to prove my credentials for ministry anymore. I should not have to be troubled with you continuing to follow false teachers after I have given my life to Christ and to minister to you. So stay in the gospel of grace and stop troubling me!

Then Paul closes his letter to the Galatians in 6:18

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Paul could wish nothing greater for the Galatians than this.

This is an appropriate end for the letter and a prayer for all our lives.

To walk in a grace relationship with God instead of a legalistic, performance-based relationship requires us to have grace in our spirits. In our hearts, in our innermost being.

We don't work for grace - it's a gift. The law works from the outside in but grace works from the inside out! That's why grace must be in our spirit before we see it in our lives.

After the intensity of this letter where Paul rebuked, taught and corrected the Galatians, comes the peace of his benediction.

Paul has attacked the deception of righteousness through keeping the law and he leaves the Galatians with one word that changes everything: Grace!

Grace is the one word that really matters!

Grace is the one way that we find salvation and freedom through Christ!

To glory in the flesh is an expression of pride.

To glory in the cross is an expression of praise!

To glory in the flesh is to boast in yourself.

To glory in the cross is to boast in your Savior!

To glory in the flesh is to trust in your own works.

To glory in the cross is to trust only in the work of Christ.

So, no matter what the enemy says you always have an answer.

That answer is to boast in Jesus and His work on the cross.

- If Satan brings up your sins – you boast in the blood of Jesus.
- If Satan reminds you of your failures – you boast in Christ's success on the cross.
- If Satan tells you you're not good enough – you boast in Jesus because He is good enough and your faith is in Him, not in yourself!
- If Satan says God will never bless you – you boast in the fact that God has already blessed you with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
- If Satan tries to condemn you – you boast in the fact that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- If Satan tells you God does not love you, you boast that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus!

That's worth boasting in the Lord about!

Can anyone join me in boasting in Jesus and His cross this morning?