



## Galatians 6:11 to 18

2/26/2023

We are wrapping up the book of Galatians today.

This book was inspired by God and preserved by God for us to warn us about subtly false forms of Christianity that are no Christianity at all. And as Christians, we need to be aware of them and hopefully immune to them.

Because they can actually be far worse than having no faith at all. The corruption of the best thing can be the worst thing.

Because if you think you're taking the medicine for your disease and it turns out it was just a sugar pill, you'll be worse off. Because you think you took the cure, so you don't look for a cure anymore. False cures deceive you into thinking you are getting better. And you're still sick, but you took that cure, so you think you must be ok, so you grow ever sicker.

But while false forms of Christianity are worse than no form at all, the real thing is worth giving your life to. And it makes it all worth it. There is no life without suffering, but the suffering in a life lived for Christ is worth it in the end.

There are many false Christs, many decoys for the Christian faith, but the real thing, Jesus said, is like a treasure, hidden in a field, which when a man has found, he sells all that he has and buys that field.

So Paul ends this letter where he began: warning us about the false alternatives to Christianity and reminding us of the superior worth of Jesus:

**Galatians 6:11–18 [11] See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. [12] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. [13] For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. [14] 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. [15] For neither circumcision counts for**

**anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. [16] And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.[17] From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.[18] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.**

Paul starts here in verse 11 by pointing out his big handwriting, which is strange. He is probably doing that to authenticate the letter. A scribe with very good handwriting would commonly do the writing for Paul, but here he takes the quill in his own hand to finish the letter in large letters, authenticating it with his signature.

And he was probably known to write in big letters because his eyesight was so bad, so he seems to be ending this way to show it was really him writing and to remind them of his authority and the authoritative nature of this letter.

And in his conclusion, written by his own hand, he contrasts his faith in Jesus, his boasting only in the cross, with the false faith and false boasts of his opponents.

And though the false forms of faith have changed a bit over the years, the fundamental attributes of false Christianity and real Christianity remain the same, this passage will help us to know what to look out for, and what to live for.

**Galatians 6:[12] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.**

- I. One of the attributes of false Christianity is that people are devoted and religious for the show. It's not genuine, it is all to impress.**

As Christianity is being replaced by pagan and secular religions as dominant in our culture, there seems to be far less incentive to pretend to be a Christian. But there's still some - it still impresses church people, it still impresses family. You can still get some accolades. But Paul here echoes Jesus, who told us to beware of this:

**Matthew 6 1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.  
2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.**

So Jesus here says not to be like the hypocrites.

Jesus talks about hypocrites alot.

The word hypocrite comes from the greek word hypocrites which means an actor. Someone who pretends to be one thing while he is another. He performs one way in order to create an image and an appearance, but it is not who he really is.

And a false form of Christianity is all about the show. When we are engaged in it, our lives become not real authentic pursuits of love for Jesus and love for people, but plays that we put on for people to create an impression.

And Jesus says here that hypocrites, when they gave to the needy people, would sound a trumpet to let everyone know a great work of mercy they were doing.

(This was before social media, which is how we flaunt our good deeds now.)

So picture the scene, a person is poor, so they come to the synagogue for assistance. And the hypocrites get up and sound a trumpet so everyone can know they are giving. They humiliate the poor guy and draw all kinds of negative attention to him, treating him like a prop in their piety play, and they give their money not because they love the poor or love God but because they love praise from the people.

And Jesus says, "Don't be a hypocrite – don't give like that. Put offerings in, but don't put offerings in so people can see you putting offerings in. The Christian life is not some play you're putting on or some game you're playing, and people are not your props.

The reward for the Christian life is not being noticed by others. Jesus goes on to say:

**Matthew 6:2-3 "Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."**

So people will give or practice their religion to be noticed by people, and if you do, you have no reward from God.

We actually have to choose who we want to notice us: people or God. We have to choose who we want to be pleased with us, people or God.

Back in Galatians 1:10, where Paul was in the context saying some really hard things, telling people they are believing in another Gospel, another faith all together, says this:

**Galatians 1:10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

He says I'm saying some hard things here, and you may not be pleased with what I say, but I had to make a choice whether I was going to say things that please God and are for your good, or things that please people - what they want to hear, but will end up being their destruction.

And he said that if I chose to say the things that always please people, I would not be serving Jesus.

We do have to choose between a Christianity that makes a good show and the real thing.

We have to decide whether we will pursue a Christianity that maintains our image and gives us something to boast about, or whether we'll boast in the cross of Jesus (which we will explain a bit in a second.)

**So one of the attributes of false Christianity is that people are devoted and religious for the show.**

**II. Another attribute of false Christianity is that it is taylored to be acceptable and not offensive.**

Again Galatians 6:12:

**Galatians 6:[12] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.**

In their context, the religious judaizers were persecuting people that wouldn't add circumcision to the cross of Jesus for their acceptance by God. Yes, the cross is good,

but it isn't enough, you must be circumcised and essentially become culturally Jewish to be a true Christian, they said.

So some leaders said, "Fine, let's just force everyone to be circumcised. We don't want the pressure, we don't want the heat, so let's say that to really be a Christian you need gospel plus circumcision. I mean, the gospel's in there, what's the harm in adding observance of the Jewish law?"

It wasn't like it was all that different, their faith still contained Jesus.

But it was a Jesus who couldn't save completely, who needed the help of our obedience, and that's not Jesus. That's not the Jesus who is triumphant over death and saves those who will believe. That's a Jesus who needs our help, and it isn't Jesus.

And it didn't offend the Pharisees and the Judaizers anymore, so that was nice.

But a Jesus who can't offend is nothing like the real Jesus.

One of the things that made Jesus so unique in the Gospel stories is how polarizing He was. Thousands of people loved him so much and were so compelled by him that they gave their lives to Him. And at the same time, thousands of people were repulsed by him, and even pushed for his death.

He was passionately loved and passionately hated.

He was the most attractive person in history, and at the same time the most repulsive.

And that's how the real Jesus still is today.

And as Christ-followers, we are walking in his footsteps. And if we walk in his steps, we should expect to step in everything that he stepped in. We should expect similar reactions from people.

Christianity when lived out rightly is the most attractive faith imaginable. It promises the free grace of God that gives eternal life, connection with a community of people that becomes so close we call them brothers and sisters, warmth, generosity, joy, laughter, grace, love and acceptance from people, even occasionally some miracles - it's the greatest place in the world.

But we should also expect, if we're walking in the footsteps of Jesus, to encounter some opposition. Jesus was opposed for his life and teaching, and if we are stepping where He stepped we should occasionally expect the same.

We don't look to offend, although some Christians seem to try. They measure how faithful they are to Jesus by how mad they make people. They try to make people hate them by being jerks so they can feel like good Christians. That should not be us.

Scripture tells us

**Romans 12:“18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”**

We don't want to err on the side of unnecessarily making people mad. We're generally nice people.

Our errors, my errors, tend to be on the other side of the pendulum. We work so hard at being nice to everybody and so careful not to offend, that we end up not communicating Who Jesus really is.

We sand rough edges off of our faith so that it can be easily shrink wrapped and packaged and accepted and in the end nobody could ever find anything to be offended about.

It would certainly make life easier if we could sand all of the rough edges off of Jesus, off of his demands on our lives, off of Christian ethics, off of God's design for sexuality and generosity and forgiveness and all the other things that are offensive.

Then we could shrink wrap Jesus up, and put him in a box so he is easily received. But that wouldn't be the real Jesus, and that Jesus wouldn't work.

To try to soften him would be like trying to sand a surgeon's scalpel so it wouldn't be so painful. You might be able to sand it enough so that it won't cut anyone, but if it can't cut, it can't do it's job. For Jesus to be Jesus, he must be simultaneously lovable and offensive.

Look at the heart of the Gospel message:

It's incredibly attractive because it says that God loves us despite our faults and flaws, and that love is greater than we could ever dream.

But it also says that that love had to overcome our sins - that we are more sinful and flawed and in need of a Savior than we ever thought. Which is offensive. To say we needed a salvation where the son of God had to be torn for us is offensive to our pride.

If I say that I bought you a book as a gift, and I think it's a book you could really use, a book that would change your life, a book you need more than any, and then you unwrap it and the title is "How to practice good hygiene", you'll probably be offended.

And at the heart of Christianity is the son of God, hanging on a cross, in our place. It says that we were so bad that that's what we deserved. But we are so loved, that that's what He did for us. And while the gospel the greatest gift ever given and exactly what we need, it's also the most offensive gift ever given because it says that's what we deserved.

So because our message is the most loving, we can expect that if we follow Jesus, we'll receive some appreciation, thanks, and people being attracted to Jesus through us and our church community.

And because it is the most offensive, we should expect people who can't seem to get over the offensiveness of our message, the things we call sin that we need to be forgiven of, and they may resent us for it, or worse.

But because we don't want to suffer, we sand it down, we make it all palatable. It's still Jesus, but a Jesus without any edges, a Jesus who could never cut.

And the people who called themselves super-apostles from among the Judaizers would boast about the marks of circumcision that they had on their body. They thought that made them legitimate, they could teach, they could lead, because they had the marks of practicing the religion.

But Paul contrasts his own leadership with theirs in 6:17:

**Galatians 6:17 “[17] From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.**

Paul says that he had the marks of the Lord Jesus on his body. And it's the greek word, "stigmata." But, contrary to the depiction in movies, stigmata are not nail wounds that mysteriously show up on your wrists and feet. This was a term that was used to describe a cattle brand in their day.

But these marks weren't put there by God, they were put there by his persecutors. He describes some of his struggles this way in 2 Corinthians 11:

**2 Corinthians 11: 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.**

So Paul had the scars that came from being persecuted for his faith.

He suffered for the faith he was delivering. And he treats these scars from his suffering as authenticating marks.

The people who were leading them astray were impressive: they had religion that wowed everybody because they had the outward marks of piety, the marks of circumcision. Paul comes along and says, "Their circumcision means nothing - they're doing it so they don't have to suffer."

But he says, "I've suffered for the faith."

Suffering, by itself, doesn't authenticate a message. The message is true or false regardless of who preaches it.

But one authenticating mark of a pastor or teacher or minister who is in it for the right reasons is that they've suffered for it. It hasn't all been easy, it hasn't all been about impressing people on a stage, but they've endured hardship, experienced loss and opposition, they've felt the pain when people they've poured their lives into have sinned. They've been hurt and disappointed and betrayed. They've been thought poorly of and misunderstood. And they've persevered.



Trials prove what we're made out of, they filter bad motives, they shake all of the things we were clinging to that weren't Jesus out of our hands. And to keep going when all you have is Jesus, that's a work of God in your life.

One of the marks of an authentic leader is suffering.

It will come if we are following Jesus:

The one who endured public mockery and opposition

The one who experienced betrayal

The one who did good and had it spoken of as evil

The one who was misrepresented, misquoted, mistreated

The one who was falsely accused and crucified

To follow Jesus is to follow in his footsteps and expect similar suffering. And it is a test of the authentic Christian leader - when the marks of Jesus come into their lives, what then?

Some, when faced with suffering, throw their faith out the window

Some, when surprised by opposition, change the faith to be more acceptable.

Some, to gain influence, money, bragging rights will modify the faith to make it more palatable

Some will imperfectly stumble along to follow Jesus, to proclaim Jesus, whether the gospel is in fashion right now or out of fashion right now, and will endure hardship.

So false Christianity is practiced just to present an image. It is christianity without any offense.

And another attribute of false Christianity is in:

**Galatians 6:[13] For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.**

### **III. False Christianity Cares More About Influence than Obedience**

They were able to boast: "Look how many people I converted back to the law. All of these people I've led to obedience."

They treated these converts to the law like numbers, like notches on their bibles, so they could boast about all they accomplished. They wanted to boast about others, but they didn't care about their own true obedience because they didn't keep the whole law anyways.

**Matthew 23:1 - 4 "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, 3 so practice and observe whatever they tell you--but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.**

There's a lot to boast about in religion: my influence, my acceptability, my outward piety.

You can boast about who you are and all you've done.

But the way of the cross doesn't allow any boasting.

The world admires self-made people. They take guys like Warren Buffet who went from rags to being the second richest guy in the country, and they worship him because HE did it. Everything he has he earned by his hard work, his skill, his smarts, and his pouncing on opportunities - so he is respected.

Steve Jobs likewise. He started Apple and renewed the company, oversaw the invention of culture-changing devices. He was a strong, successful leader and the fact that he started Apple in a garage and built it into what it is now impresses us.

It makes some sense that people who have worked hard and achieved something are admired.

What wouldn't make sense would be to admire someone who is rich or famous but didn't work for it or earn it.

We look at the trust-fund kids in the Media who think they're impressive because they're rich and famous when in reality it was their parents who achieved something, and they are kind of sickening.

Nobody looks at Paris Hilton and says, “Wow, what a success story. She was born a billionaire and now she's still a billionaire and she lives off the success of her great-grandfather.”

We are disgusted by people who are snooty and arrogant because they have money that they didn't earn. They didn't earn what they have, so it shouldn't make them arrogant, they should just be thankful and humble and try to make themselves useful in the world even though they don't have to be.

And we want a religion that can allow us to be self-made people - people who made ourselves acceptable to God.

Upside down kingdom - we want to boast in our theology and accomplishments, i have this theology that nobody believed, i am higher, but if we are boasting in the cross we should be the most humble and gracious people.

But the Gospel doesn't allow it. The message that Jesus saves by grace through faith and I don't help with that only humbles us:

**Galatians 6:[14] 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. [15] For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.**

The cross comes along and tears down our boasting. It reveals the fact that we are desperate and needy and sinful. We can look at Jesus on the cross and think “I deserved that.”

So for the proud, the cross is not attractive at all. It strips away our ability to boast.

But notice Paul doesn't say “I don't boast.”

He says “I boast in the cross.”

Which doesn't mean we brag about being Christians. The word boast doesn't only mean brag, it can also mean to glory in something, to find your hope or identity in something. And Paul says it is the cross where he glories.

Sometimes we might be tempted to turn following Jesus into nothing but a series of beliefs that we assent to in our heads. But Paul says it is transformative: we are a new creation if we believe.

And it gives us a new boast, a new source of identity, a new glory.

And to boast in a cross would have sounded totally strange to the ancient ears who heard it. Because the cross was an object of shame. In some Roman writings, they wouldn't even use the word cross, they came up with a euphemism for it and called it the "unlucky tree." It was gross and despised, and the people who went to crosses are gross and despised.

So Paul, in saying he boasts in the cross, is saying that that thing that is the lowest became to me the highest.

And in saying the world is crucified, he is saying, "What was the most important thing became the lowest."

And in saying, "To the world, I'm crucified," he is saying that the world thinks he is shameful and low.

The cross became so good that the whole world, and all its acclaim and praise, became worthless. And when the world looked at Paul, they thought he was worthless. Devoting a life to a man on a cross is the best way to waste your life in their eyes.

It's the same thing he said in Philippians 3.

**Philippians 3:7–11 [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] 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 [9] 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—[10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.**

Is this our faith? Does it look like this? Does everything the world offers pale in comparison to Christ? Are we OK with looking utterly foolish because our lives following Christ have cost us so much?

Is this us?

It's the place of peace. Paul closes by saying:

Galatians 6:16-18 “ **[16] And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. [18] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.**”

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Adapted from a prayer entitled *Boasting* in the prayer book *Streams of Mercy* by Barbara Duid.

Father,

We confess before you the deep-seated pride that leads us to parade our strength and goodness before others, while at the same time hiding and denying our weakness and sin. We boast about our spiritual disciplines, our obedience, and our goodness as if any of these virtues came from ourselves. We exalt ourselves over others, mocking their weaknesses and failures, behind their backs and to their faces. Forgive us, Lord!

Jesus, thank you that you love us as we are and are not ashamed to be called our Brother. You took on the weakness of a human body and entered our broken world in order to live the life that we could not live. You humbly saw the needs of people around you, and you loved them in all of their sin and brokenness, serving them with compassion and a pure heart. Thank you that your perfect obedience is now credited to us, even though we still have selfish, proud hearts.

Holy Spirit, we cannot deliver ourselves from our pride. Help us to look to Jesus for our righteousness and salvation--he alone is our hope and refuge.

Transform us, by your mercy and grace, into humble, authentic followers of Jesus who rely on Jesus alone for our righteousness and boast only in Him. Rescue us each day from the pit of our own self-sufficiency. May the words of our mouths and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock and our Redeemer, until the day when our faith becomes sight and our souls are made whole. Amen.

**Assurance:**

**Ephesians 2:8–9 [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

**Questions for Sermon Discussion:**

- 1) Discuss the contrasts between true and false Christianity in Galatians 6:11-18.
- 2) How does making Christianity palatable make it impotent?
- 3) What suffering might we endure for being devoted to Christ and his gospel?
- 4) How does the cross strip us of all boasts we had before?
- 5) What does it mean to boast in the cross?
- 6) How do we come to the place where we boast only in the cross?