

MBC – 8/21/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson  
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM  
**“The Essence of Our Christianity”**  
 Galatians 6:11-18

This morning we finish our study in Galatians and Paul concludes by writing these final words himself. He normally wrote using an *amanuensis* – a scribe who took down his dictation – and then he would sign off himself. But here he goes on a bit longer in his own hand because these words were very important to him and to them—

- Galatians 6:11–18 <sup>11</sup>See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup>And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. <sup>17</sup>From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. <sup>18</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

What really matters in your life? What eats up your time and your thoughts and keeps you staring at the ceiling at night when you should be sleeping? Is it your kids? Your finances? Climate change? How much your crypto-currency is worth? The fact that we could soon be at war with Russia, or China, or Russia and China?

- Beloved what matters more than anything is something that you can’t even see, and perhaps don’t think much about, and that is your *soul*. Everything else that you can see and touch will pass away, but your soul, the real you, will live forever, either in torment or in bliss. Do you believe this? That’s what Paul has been dealing with for 6 chapters: *eternal* realities.

Can I remind you that this is a man who had *seen* the resurrected Jesus, several times, and a man who had actually been to heaven and come back – we read about it in 2 Cor.12. We live by faith, Paul lived by sight! So when he speaks about Christ and eternal, heavenly truths, he’s an eyewitness. No wonder he’s so passionate in this letter – and so angry at those who would mislead people about Jesus. So he ends—

- <sup>11</sup>See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

You’ve heard of Large Print Bibles? Well Paul started it 2,000 years ago! Some people think that Paul had bad eyes and that’s why he goes Large Print here. But he actually did this to emphasize these final words of his letter – it was like he was underlining what he was writing – like texting in all caps. You know people who do that? You think, “Why are they yelling?” But he wanted the churches in Galatia to hear him. And God wants us to hear these words this morning because he has been contrasting two completely different religious systems that represent two different ways to be saved. And two different eternal destinies.

These final sentences sum up the ***Essence of our Christianity***. First question:

## I. Is it Inward, or Outward?

The answer is: the *essence* of our Christian faith is inward, not outward. The essence – that which is essential, is spiritual and invisible. It is *centered* in the heart, not outward rituals or religious ceremonies. And I want to explain this, first, by way of contrast—

Throughout Galatians we have talked about the Judaizers – those pseudo-Christian false teachers who followed Paul on all his missionary journeys trying to undo the Gospel of grace. They added something physical and external, to the Gospel – circumcision. They actually said that a man cannot be saved apart from circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. Yes, they preached faith in Jesus, and oh yes, of course, your heart should be sincere and devoted. . .blah, blah, blah. What really mattered was what you did, and what others could see; the external, outward. That was the *essence* of their religion. Why did they do this? Look at—

- Galatians 6:12–13 <sup>12</sup>It is those who want to *make a good showing in the flesh* who would force you to be circumcised – ah, they want to make a good showing before men for their religious ceremonies – “in the flesh.” And in the next verse, “*that they may boast in your flesh.*”

“Look how religious and devout we are! We have a religion you can see! It’s observable, it’s not some mystical, spiritual deal. And our followers have the external, outward evidence of our religion too. No wondering about who is saved here: you can look and see!”

- Really? Can you and I look at another person and know with certainty that he or she has been born again? No. Last Lord’s Day Erroll quoted from Paul in 2 Cor.13:5 where Paul says to believers, “*Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith*” – he said that because it is entirely possible to be self-deceived about your own faith. And how does he tell us to examine our faith, what do you look for? To see if indeed, “Jesus Christ is in you.” Ok, so do you find Him with your 5 senses? No. You have to look into your heart. And that takes us into something that is invisible, spiritual and inward.

Beloved, the evidence of your faith is outward and observable – but the *essence* of your faith is invisible, spiritual, and in your heart – which only God sees.

By the time of Jesus, the Jewish religion had degenerated into an external, outward, empty show. Jesus quoted from Isaiah when He said—

- Matthew 15:8–9 <sup>8</sup>“This people honors me with their lips, but their *heart* is far from me; (so) <sup>9</sup>in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”
- Matthew 6:1 <sup>1</sup>“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.

In Matt.23, He condemned the Pharisees: “*they do all their deeds to be seen by others,*” and “*you also outwardly appear righteous go others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*”

It was all external, physical. Their religion could be seen by others, but their hearts were empty. Motion without devotion. But that is the religion of many people sitting in churches this morning: they are

relying on their physical actions as the proof of their salvation – going through the liturgy, or lifting their hands and shouting hallelujah, putting money in the offering plate – even the act of coming to church itself – and all of these might well be the Spirit-produced evidence of a regenerated heart. But they can also be faked in the flesh. The question is: take away all of these externals and what is left – in your heart – between you and your God?

\*What the Judaizers did with circumcision, many churches do today with baptism. There are churches and denominations that teach that salvation comes through baptism – the Christian Church, the Church of Christ believe this along with the Catholic Church (and the Lutheran church – just sayin’ they teach you are regenerated when you are baptized. Now baptism is very important, Jesus commanded it. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, you should be baptized in obedience to him. If you refuse that, the church should rightly, question your salvation. But the external rite of baptism doesn’t save you! No outward act, no physical motion saves you. Obedience in baptism should be the *effect*, but it is not the *cause* of your salvation – big difference. To say that baptism saves you is to confuse the sign with the thing it signifies. And the thing it signifies is internal and spiritual. Look at—

- Galatians 6:15 <sup>15</sup>For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

You could substitute “baptism” for circumcision. Circumcision and baptism are outward, visible ceremonies performed by man. But the new birth is an inward, invisible miracle performed by God. This is what counts. This is what is essential: has God given you the new birth? Have you been born again – by the Spirit of God? – you don’t birth yourself!

- Beloved, our outward obedience to our inward faith is crucial. Erroll will be dealing with this truth as he preaches through 1 John. Our outward words and deeds are the unmistakable *evidence* of our faith – but they are never the *essence* of our faith. The essence of your faith is not what you do, but who you are, as a result of God’s grace. And who you are is the inner you – the new man, the new woman in Christ.

I.e., the essence of your faith is what God has done in your heart through your faith in Christ. It’s hidden, invisible to the human eye, and that’s the very reason we must flesh it out – work out your salvation, Paul said – because it’s *essence* is spiritual and inward. Jesus said about our worship, that God is Spirit – invisible, spiritual – and we must worship Him “in spirit,” meaning with our inner person – from the heart. Is that how you worship God? Is your inner person fully engaged? Is your worship flowing from a heart of gratitude for what has done in you that you could never do for yourself?

- And yes, I believe if you are worshiping from your heart, it will come out of your mouth. It will lift up your hands. It will affect your offering, and your service to others.

But regardless of how religious you are, and how much you serve or give or go to church, take away all the stuff you can see – what is in your heart? Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ – in the hidden place of your heart?

Paul said that we live by faith not by sight – even though he had sight! – but what does it mean to live by faith? What is faith? Believing God and His Word. Where does that happen? In your mind and heart – on the inside – you can’t believe without thinking, and that happens inside, not the outside. When I say that the core, the essence of our Christianity is spiritual, this is what I mean: We live from the inside out.

Are you ever quiet with God? Jesus was. Often. Do you meditate on His Word, do you worship Him – apart from church on Sundays, and even here, is your *heart* engaged? Do you say with David, “Bless the Lord, o my soul, and let all that is within me, bless His holy name?”

- Legalists have absolutely no idea what I’m talking about. They are sitting here thinking, “Whatever. Don’t give me this heeby-jeeby heart stuff, just tell me what to do; When to show up for the work day; Who to make the check out to.”

And Paul says, “What really matters is a new creation.” Something supernatural, invisible, and spiritual.

Jesus said something that you can ponder and meditate on in—

- John 6:63 <sup>63</sup>It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Again, all the legalist just heard is Charlie Brown’s teacher: waw-waw-waw-waw.

As MBC begins a new chapter in its history remember that the *essence* of all that we do must be spiritual, from regenerated hearts, full of Christ, full of the Holy Spirit. “*All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.*” A second question: Is the essence of our Christianity human or divine?

## II. Is it Human or Divine?

Is it what we do for God or what God has done for us? If you have been part of MBC for any length of time, you know the answer, but it doesn’t go without saying. And it needs to be reinforced in everything we say and do. This church is a God thing, from beginning, to the middle, to the end. Amen?

- When these false teachers pushed circumcision as the infallible mark of salvation, they were substituting a work done by man for a work done by God. And that has two serious implications: 1.) The death of Christ was not enough to save. You still have to do your part to be saved – don’t you know people who think that way? God has His part, we have ours. That is a lie from the pit of hell. Jesus did everything we need for our salvation. All we do is believe that. 2.) The second implication is that you have to earn God’s favor by your own actions – and if that’s true, then salvation is not a gift of God’s grace. It’s a reward for a job well done. That’s human religion, but it’s not the Gospel.

This is why Paul takes off the gloves when people mess with the cross of Christ and the grace of God. And he even impugns the motives of the Judaizers. He says in v.13, “They don’t even keep the Law themselves!” They know that lawkeeping can never save because no one can keep the Law perfectly. So why do they preach this message?

Because they want to boast about their followers – v.13. Misery loves company and false teachers always want followers. But he gives another reason in—

- Galatians 6:12 . . . in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

How do they avoid persecution by preaching circumcision?—

People don't mind a message that you to do something to get to heaven: "Get circumcised, keep the 10 commandments, pray the rosary – that's reasonable." "God helps those who help themselves, so do your best and cross your fingers for heaven!" That's what unbelievers expect to hear: "Good people go to heaven, you seem like a good person, so do these things to tip the scales in your favor!" People join cults and false religions because they tell them exactly what they must do and must not do to be saved. And it's all very ego-flattering: to think that you can be good enough for God!

You won't be persecuted for proclaiming that message, but preach the cross of Christ and the free grace of God to save whom He will, and people will go into a rage!—

- The Gospel smashes our egos and insults all of our good intentions. The Gospel says that we are dead in our sins, not just a little sick. Not only are we morally incapable of saving ourselves, but we don't want to be saved – not one of us. We are helpless and we are hopeless. We don't need a little help up from Jesus – we are dead and need resurrection! That's insulting.
- I've told you the story about the message I put up on the sign years ago: "Jesus died for sinners – you qualify!" And I heard a gal at the bank just going off: "I hate that message! It's so negative, we need positive messages!" Uh, hello – what is more positive that knowing there is a Savior who died so you can be forgiven of your sins? Unless you don't think you are a sinner, and you can make your own way to heaven – then you hate the Gospel. And the cross.

And the Gospel goes on to say that we are under the curse of God for our sins – every one of us. God is much holier than we can imagine, and we are much more sinful than we ever thought.

- And when we look at the cross, we see that it took the sinless Son of God, dying in our place, with our curse on His shoulders, to bring us to God. Nothing less would do, and nothing more can be done. Nothing cuts us down to size like the cross. At the foot of the cross we shrink to our true size.

And natural man hates this message! "First you tell me how awful I am, then you tell me there is nothing I can do about it – how is that good news?" It's good news when God opens your eyes to see that He provided us a Savior who did it all for those who will trust in Him – Hallelujah, what a Savior!

**Listen:** no one understands the Gospel until he or she understands that Christianity is first inward and spiritual, and second, it is 100% the work of God and the will of God, not of man.

And Paul says, "Preach that message, and you will be persecuted." And Paul would know, right? At one time, he persecuted Christians because he hated the message of Christ crucified: He wasn't a sinner. He didn't need a Savior. But then he saw Jesus and everything changed—

- Galatians 6:14 <sup>14</sup>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.

Paul used to boast about his external religion: he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. Educated by Gamaliel, a Pharisee of Pharisees. Look at my credentials! But his heart was a dead as a stone. And the moment He met Jesus, he put his Jewish religious resume' in the shredder and said this—

- Philippians 3:7–9 <sup>7</sup>But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>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 <sup>9</sup>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.

Can you say that? “I have let go of anything I might boast in before God – church attendance, volunteer work, giving money – any religious stuff – I count it all as garbage – in order to trust in Jesus alone.”

We sing v.14, don’t we?—

Forbid It, Lord, That I Should Boast,  
Save In The Death Of Christ My God:  
All The Vain Things That Charm Me Most,  
I Sacrifice Them To His Blood.

You just can’t boast in the cross and still boast in yourself. It’s one or the other. We will only give up boasting in ourselves when we humble ourselves as hell-deserving sinners and run to the cross for salvation – and spend the rest of our day glorying in the cross.”

- And when you do that, you and the world part company: *“by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* You are dead to the world, and the world is dead to you.”

We see it more and more every day: Christians are enemies of society, right? We are intolerant bigots, we believe in a book that is full of hate and homophobia. And then we say that only some people go to heaven, but we know for a fact that we are going!?” And we say, “Sorry you feel that way, but I’m going to keep following my Jesus.”

- Beloved, Jesus said, “Don’t be surprised that the world hates you. It hated Me first.” Let me ask you, can you say, “Because of Jesus, I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me.”? The world behind me, the cross before me. No turning back, no turning back.

The essence of Christianity is internal and spiritual, and it is divine rather than human, so Paul gives a final gut-punch to the legalists when he says—

- Galatians 6:15 <sup>15</sup>For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

“You can take or leave circumcision? It doesn’t count for anything?” Can you imagine how that ticked them off? It would be like saying to an Adventist, “The Sabbath doesn’t count for anything.” Or like saying to a Baptist, “Church potlucks don’t count for anything!” What does count? The new birth – *something only God can do, and something only God truly sees* – and it is totally apart from us. God’s children—

- John 1:13 . . . were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

The essence of our faith lies in something we can't see and something we can't do. Beloved, that should make you want to worship God—

- Galatians 6:16 <sup>16</sup>And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Three final thoughts here about the church—

### **1.) *The church has a rule to guide it.***

“And as for all who walk by this rule” – the word for rule is *kanon* – like the canon of Scripture – it meant a measuring rod, a surveyor's line. Everything – everything we do and proclaim as the church must be measured by the rule of the Gospel as revealed in the canon of Scripture. And this applies to all churches, no exceptions. We aren't free to modify this rule or adapt it to our own likings – come up with a different kind of church. I'll say more about this.

### **2.) *The church is the Israel of God.***

Look at it: “all who walk by this rule” and the “Israel of God” are not two different groups. It should read, “all who walk by this rule, *even* the Israel of God. Paul isn't talking about Jewish believers here (once again, sorry Johnny Mac Study Bible), he is talking about the church – Jew and Gentile – we are the true circumcision, Abraham's seed, and the Israel of God.

### **3.) *The church enjoys peace and mercy when it walks by this rule.***

When a church preaches and lives by the Apostle's teaching, there will be unity and joy and fruit in that church. And I love the last thing Paul says before his closing benediction—

- Galatians 6:17 <sup>17</sup>From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

The false teachers want to boast about a physical mark in the body, made by men? Paul says, “I've got my own scars – the Gk. is *stigmata*! – all of the scars from countless beatings for preaching the Gospel.” So Paul says, “Leave me alone you false teachers. Buzz off. Persecution is the mark of a follower of Christ, not circumcision.”

## **Review of Galatians.**

Before we close with Paul's benediction, let me sum up what we've seen in Galatians. The Gospel was under attack in the Galatian churches. And Christians were actually listening to false teachers who perverted the Gospel until it was no Gospel. And Paul was angry: at the false teachers, and also at lazy-brained believers who weren't exercising spiritual discernment. So Paul confronts this problem by addressing 3 issues: chs.1&2 dealt with the issue of authority; chs.3&4 dealt with the issue of salvation; chs.5&6 dealt with the issue of holiness. As MBC begins a new chapter as a church family, these same three issues will determine the future of the church---

### **1.) The issue of authority.**

Right after Paul and Barnabas left Galatia on their first missionary journey, a new set of teachers arrived, teaching a “Gospel” of faith plus works. They claimed to be under the authority of the church in Jerusalem – they came across as devout, godly men. So who were the churches to believe?

Paul’s response was to assert his authority as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He was commissioned by Jesus, not by any men. And His Gospel came to him directly from Jesus Christ – so if a man or even an angel came along preaching a different Gospel than the one he preached, let them be anathema – accursed.

- Beloved, there are many voices out there – in pulpits, on YouTube, on podcasts – claiming to speak the truth of God. Some even claim to be modern-day Apostles. Who do you believe? The answer is very simple: you only believe those who only preach and teach what the Apostle’s taught. That’s just what the early church did—
- Acts 2:42 <sup>42</sup>And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- Awhile back a man started coming to this church and he was trying to get me and others to read this certain book by this certain author – this guy had a theory about the Bible that put everything together – and I was shortchanging the church if I didn’t get on board – but it was not the Apostle’s teaching. He left.

This is the rule, the measuring line for the church until Jesus comes back. Peace and mercy will only be on this church as long as it devotes itself to the Apostles’ teaching, Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. That was Galatians chs. 1&2.

## 2.) The issue of salvation.

How are sinners justified in the sight of a holy God? How can a holy God forgive sinners and still be righteous? Only through the sin-atoning death of Christ. It’s all about Jesus, beloved, that’s why Paul said he “placarded” Christ before them. He preached Christ and Him crucified. He boasted only in the cross of Christ and what Jesus accomplished on that cross. What did Jesus do?

- Galatians 1:4 He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.
- Galatians 2:20 . . . the Son of God, loved me and gave himself for me.
- Galatians 3:13 <sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. He took God’s wrath for our sins, on Himself. His death propitiated – satisfied that wrath, forever.
- So what must we do to be saved? A few years ago, my daughter Sara did a video where she was interviewing her boys on their understanding of the Gospel. She asked George, who was 6, “What must a person do to be saved?” George shouted out, “Nothing! You can’t do anything to be saved!”

Right answer! Jesus did it all. He didn’t leave some missing ingredient for your salvation. He accomplished salvation for His people. All you or I can do is to receive it by faith. *“We are not justified by works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus.”*



Do not listen to anyone who says, “Well yes, but you still have a part. God needs to see this or that in your life!” That is Satan talking. God sees all He needs to see when He looks at His Son! If you see the same thing, you are saved—

*His grace has planned it all, 'Tis mine but to believe,  
And recognize His work of love and Christ receive.  
For me He died, For me He lives,  
And everlasting life and light He freely gives.*

MBC – don’t think for a moment that Satan will stop attacking the Gospel message, because he won’t. Hopefully he won’t do it through this pulpit, but it might come through a camp speaker, or a book that starts going around the church, or maybe a home study starts going off track: You *all* must be diligent to fight for the one true Gospel. And let me say that this necessitates all of you understanding, and loving the doctrines of grace – there are 5 of them, and ask Rudi or Erroll if want more information!

The issue of salvation is chs.3&4, and the final issue, the issue of holiness in chs.5&6.

### **3.) The issue of holiness.**

The question is, once saved by the grace of God, how do we become holy? How do we become more like Jesus – and that is the goal – that Christ be formed in you. God saved you to conform you into the image of His Son.

Paul’s answer is that it’s impossible in the power of our own flesh. We began by the Spirit, we must continue to by the Spirit. You can only kill sin by the Holy Spirit.

Beware of shortcuts, and gimmicks: a few years ago there was a book out on “the Prayer of Jabez” – turn your life around. Then a couple years later the same author did another shortcut book: “Secrets of the Vine.” Christians constantly look for some 1,2,3, to victorious Christian living. Some Bible App that will make it easy. An online Bible study that puts it all together. . .

\*It will never be easy to walk in the Spirit, because the flesh its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh – didn’t Paul say that? And until you die, you will be in this flesh, and sanctification will be hard work, it will require discipline, and the pain of denying your sinful desires.

So be on the alert when people tell you about this new teaching, this new book or Bible study. Holiness is a harvest – it is the result of what you intentionally sow, and you will reap what you sow – that’s in the Bible, isn’t it?

- Great is Thy Faithfulness

Benediction—

- <sup>18</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.