

*Sermon on Galatians 6:11-18 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

**Peace comes to those who trust in Jesus as a rule of life.**

“Look at what large letters I use as I write to you in my own handwriting. 12 Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh are the ones who would compel you to be circumcised — but only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even the circumcised don’t keep the law themselves, and yet they want you to be circumcised in order to boast about your flesh. 14 But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world. 15 For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation. 16 May peace come to all those who follow this standard, and mercy even to the Israel of God!

17 From now on, let no one cause me trouble, because I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. 18 Brothers and sisters, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” -- **Galatians 6:11-18** (CSB)

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How do you live? What is your M.O.? Do you face each day with random indifference, take on whatever comes up? What do you pursue as most important? What takes up the majority of your attention and time?

I want to regularly ask myself these types of questions because I am increasingly convinced that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also!”

In the history of the church, movements of people have often committed to a “rule of life” as a way of structure and keeping the main thing, the main thing.

To find some better alignment - last fall (as 2020 was the perfect year to think about doing things differently) I read a book by Justin Whitmel Earley called *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*.

“The modern world is a machine of a thousand invisible habits, forming us into anxious, busy, and depressed people. We yearn for the freedom and peace of the gospel, but remain addicted to our technology, shackled by our screens, and

exhausted by our routines. But because our habits are the water we swim in, they are almost invisible to us. What can we do about it?”

“The answer to our contemporary chaos is to practice a rule of life that aligns our habits to our beliefs. The Common Rule offers four daily and four weekly habits, designed to help us create new routines and transform frazzled days into lives of love for God and neighbor...”

Earley presents 8 habits, four daily and four weekly that help draw us back to our appropriate center, to what defines us and sets us apart from the soup we live in! Scripture, prayer, community, and resisting distraction are key and can be helpful. I have to confess, I haven't always taken the advice, but want to more. Because I know I need to be reminded and taken once again to the source of life, the place of hope and peace.

Galatians has been much the same experience. The Apostle Paul has been calling the churches to a re-aligning rule of life. A re-centering of the church away from performance, away from the earning of salvation to the reception of the gift of grace -- and living to never negate it. To live from salvation for the glory of Christ, for our good, and the good of all.

All of the drama, the tension between believers, the truth that we have encountered in our study of Galatians is summarized here.

We see the **compromise** that is deceiving the church, a **crux** that changes everything and is worth living for, and the **conclusion** that sets us to continue on with a new rule of life.

In these final verses, Paul takes over for a scribe, and writes in his own hand to emphasize what he has been saying all along. He uses the last of the ink to reveal the truth and spur us on in the faith. This is Paul writing in ALL CAPS!

This is his last appeal to keep trusting the gospel for salvation and living it out day by day. But it begins with danger...

## **The Compromise**

“Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh are the ones who would compel you to be circumcised – but only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.” -- **Galatians 6:12** (CSB)

The churches in Galatia are in danger not merely because there are false teachers trying to lure them into circumcision as a way of gaining salvation but because the human heart is drawn to glory (our own) and we find it in the approval of others.

This is what the false teachers are shilling and it is what they are living for themselves. Preaching Jesus is not well received and if they are found doing so they will face persecution. This is something Paul knows about personally.

As he traveled and preached the gospel, he had been stoned, harassed, thrown out of town, on a number of occasions, because people don't like when the status quo is shaken, they don't like being told they are the problem!

So it seems from this that the false teachers might not even be convinced in their preaching of the need to embrace the law, but they are doing so to mingle Jesus with the already approved ways of life in the culture.

The problem is not circumcision, or the embrace of feasts and the temple calendar, they mean nothing. The problem is why they are forcing Galatians believers into it.

Real Christianity is a matter of inward change, not external observance. It is substantial, not superficial. The real reason they are intent on circumcising the Galatians is that, afraid of being persecuted, they want to make a good impression outwardly.

“They want you to be circumcised in order to boast about your flesh.”

They wanted to be able to say, ‘sure they follow Jesus, but they are obeying Jewish standards - look what good leaders we are.’ See, they wouldn't be persecuted if Jesus was just an add-on to what was already socially acceptable. They wouldn't lose Roman approval or access to the Temple, they wouldn't lose friends and the privilege they knew if they could prove the idea of Jesus + the old way.

I can't help but think of Oprah and her line-up of "spiritual advisers." Or the acquaintance in D.C. that described himself as a "Buddhist Christian." Our flesh longs to synchronize all kinds of things to make us "approved" in the eyes of those around us - or to find approval for the sinful inclinations of our flesh.

The Galatian danger is having Jesus but also having other things that share priority or place.

"If Paul had gone into the synagogue and preached something like this, "Now brethren, I was a Pharisee and I followed the Jewish religion, but I've got something I think is a little better now. It is alright if you want to follow Judaism and if you want to be circumcised and if you want to follow the Mosaic system. Those things are wonderful, and I commend them to you — you go ahead and do them. But I want to suggest that you add something to that. You try Jesus." If he had said just that, he wouldn't have gotten into trouble with the Jews. And you know, that is the kind of preaching that some give today, just a compromising sort of thing. "Well, you go ahead, but take Jesus along with you, too."

"On the contrary, Paul went into the synagogues of his day and declared that Judaism, the sacrifices, and circumcision were valueless in bringing a man to God. Only Christ can bring a soul to God, and nothing else is needed. God accepts nothing else but the sacrifice of Christ, and nothing else will avail. Man is declared as bankrupt before God and is reckoned "dead in tres-passes and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). He does not come as a customer to the counter with something to offer God for so great salvation, but he comes as a beggar to the back door of heaven to receive something for nothing. We come empty-handed; yet we receive everything. This wounds the pride of man; it slays his vanity; it lays his glory in the dust. If man could only offer something to God, it would flatter the flesh and build up his ego. This is the real offense of the cross." **J. Vernon McGee**

The false teachers say Jesus is nice but to be sure you are saved, behave this way. And man, that sounds appealing to us, and we have all probably fallen for the same kind of compromise. But that won't do.

If we really read the law and see what it commands, for example love your neighbor as yourself, we will see that we can't possibly save ourselves by obeying

it. A religion based on externals and behavior as a way of salvation may prompt pride and bring popularity, but it cannot deliver the eternal life it promises.

What this whole letter from Paul asserts is the exclusivity of Jesus. There are not many paths, or the mingling of religious thoughts and actions depending on preference, there is only one way, one King to rule them all. And he won't share his place of authority.

Comforting Thomas with the truth of his place with the Father... "Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." -- **John 14:6** (CSB)

Don't fall for the compromise. As we have heard through our whole study of this letter. Cling only to what is the prize. To the only source of salvation and life.

Jesus is it. His work for us. His righteousness, his inheritance. His claim over us. And that drives the devil and every other idol and religious posture crazy and angry in jealousy.

The early church was not persecuted because they worshiped Jesus but because they worshiped Jesus only and that's the crux!

### **The Crux**

"But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world." -- **Galatians 6:14** (CSB)

Paul has nothing else. The church has nothing else. Our boast is in the cross of Jesus alone.

The cross is not appealing from a worldly standard. We hang it on our walls and wear them around our necks, but there is a repugnance to it when rightly understood.

The pastor who on his first Sunday heard from a sweet lady, "I hope you won't make too much of the blood, the last preacher always made too much of the

blood, it's just gross.” The pastor responded, “I promise to never make too much of the blood... because you can never make too much of the blood!”

We shouldn't “like” that Jesus died on the cross. A tortured and painful death. But the boast is not in the method of what the cross represents, but what was accomplished there. The ugliness of the cross is our sin.

That humanity, corrupted by inherited sin, is incapable of relating to our Creator - separated by our own pursuit of self and disregard for God. Yet while we were lost in our sin, Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the law of God, he died as an atoning sacrifice for us, bearing the weight of judgement we deserve, and then defeated the death that imprisoned us through his resurrection. And through that death and resurrection we are united to his perfection, his righteousness is now ours, his Spirit is remaking us.

For some of us, that is a relief, a joy, a sweetness unmatched in this world. But for others, it remains absurd.

“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are being saved.” -- **1 Corinthians 1:18** (CSB)

“For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.” -- **1 Corinthians 1:22-23** (CSB)

“People find it insulting to be told that they are too weak and sinful to do anything to contribute to their salvation. The gospel is offensive to liberal-minded people, who charge the gospel with intolerance, because it states that the only way to be saved is through the cross. The gospel is offensive to conservative-minded people, because it states that, without the cross, “good” people are in as much trouble as “bad” people. Ultimately, the gospel is offensive because the cross stands against all schemes of self-salvation. The world appreciates “religion” and “morality” in general. The world thinks that moral religion is a good thing for society. But the world is offended by the cross.” **Tim Keller**

But if it remains as foolishness, we miss the power of it. We miss salvation. The souls that live convinced of compromise, of pursuing self as divine and the priority, embrace destruction.

“For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame; and they are focused on earthly things. 20 Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.” -- **Philippians 3:18-21** (CSB)

If someone understands the cross, it is either the greatest thing in their life, or it is repugnant to them. If it is neither of those two things, they haven't understood it.

The cross may be offensive to you, but He bore all of the offense for you and for me that we might stand before God blameless and without spot or blemish.

Paul wants it to be the greatest thing in the lives of the Galatians. The Spirit wants it to be the greatest thing in our lives - that it would be our boast.

So much so that the world is crucified to us through the cross.

Paul is saying the entire world system in all its glory, but in opposition to God, is dead or destroyed in its power to attract him;; it has no influence or power over Paul, no appeal to him. Paul is similarly dead to the desires and attractions of the world, for he serves Christ as his new master.

This is what we get in Christ.

We bring nothing but receive salvation in faith. And we boast in the cross - the finished work of Jesus - our approval, our passion, our path are all redefined there.

The world is dead to me and I am dead to the world. No longer under its thumb - and this is where peace is found.

## The Conclusion

Really it is the continuation of life in Christ, the rule of life for those boasting in the cross.

It isn't circumcision or uncircumcision that mean anything, what matters is a new creation.

“Throughout history, Christ has taken the weak, the fallen, the lame, the morally bent, and the worst of sinners to his heart. He's cleansed addicts, forgiven serial adulterers, washed the feet of social outcasts, cleansed the consciences of cowards, and forgiven the religious pride of Pharisees. He's expelled demons—actual and symbolic—from countless thousands, healed broken relationships, created peace where only war raged, and brought the deranged to their feet, clothed and in their right mind. No treatment program, no amount of medication, no change in political system, no ritual, no worldly power can do that—only forgiveness can...The new creation desires more of Jesus and less of self, but only as it continues to hear the gospel.”

The worldly attempts at compromise don't hold up. We no longer take heart in our record, our ability to look holy, or perform.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” -- **2 Corinthians 5:17** (CSB)

That we would know we have been reconciled to God through Christ and that we would now live for a ministry of reconciliation - for the renewal of others and all things in Christ. Serving one another in love, working for the good of all, fulfilling the law of Christ because we can't get over the cross.

The gospel creates a new motivation for obedience — grateful love arising from a faith view of what Christ has done. This new motivation renews us from the inside out. It's a new birth, supernatural transformation of character, a new creation.

We live out our new creation - identity - destination - clinging to Jesus alone. Not obsessed with my ability to live up but Jesus' finished work for me.

“May peace come to all those who follow this standard (rule) and mercy even to the true children of Abraham.” (16)

The gospel, the cross as the rule of life.

What we constantly put before us, what we revel in, what we proclaim and cherish. From this center the new creation takes hold and flourishes. Everything flows from Jesus alone, his fullness for all of life.

“We passionately believe in a living God and find the half-gods, mockers of freedom, falling along the wayside. We commit ourselves to a living Christ And discover that we are introduced into the country of freedom. We receive into ourselves the gift-bringing Spirit and realize the aptitudes and abilities for living freely. Apart from faith in God we live in a world of brute determinism, bullied by those who are stronger than we, coerced by laws that are alien to our nature, constricted by hostile forces. Or, we live in an absurd, haphazard randomness. In faith we find ourselves in a conscious and developing a relationship with a free God and therefore able to experience and realize freedom ourselves, achieving “an elegant solution, “forging “a beautiful life.” **Eugene Peterson**

**Peace comes to those who trust in Jesus as a rule of life.**

How will you live?

Find peace - ruthlessly cut off all that clambers to share place and priority with Jesus. Boast in the cross. Live from Christ’s finished work for you. Order your life to start here, stay here, and flourish here.

For one of our kids it is tremendously helpful to hear a lullaby to bring on peaceful sleep. What many of us need is good night’s sleep (physically and spiritually).

Trusting Jesus as our rule of life will bring on that rest. “It is finished” is the lullaby of all things, our restless hearts included.” **Justin Whitmel Earley**, *The Common Rule*.

May it be so with us.

This is Galatians. This is our hope above the ways of the flesh. This is our anchor and rule of life.

“May every reader of this letter acknowledge the grace of Christ, the freedom of the gospel and the power of the Spirit. And may all of us attend to the circumstances in which God has placed us, so that our faith will indeed work through love in the lives of those around us.” **Moises Silva**