

Galatians #21

January 26, 2025

Series: Galatians: Treasuring the Gospel of Grace

Today's Message: The Vanity of Boasting in the Flesh; Galatians 6:11-13

In the Galatian churches the pressure was on. The heavy pressure being imposed on the Gentile believers was being applied by fellow believing Gentiles who had themselves become converts to Judaism beginning with circumcision. Paul is making the case in the letter that the error of these Judaizers was that they were pushing a "conversion experience" based on works done to the body and in the strength of the "flesh." For Christians, according to the Scripture, there is a conversion experience to be sure, but it is a conversion of the inward man initiated and sustained by the Spirit and not according to the flesh. (see Gal. 5:16-17; 6:8)

The Gentile believers faced all kinds of pressure because of their declared faith in Jesus. The non-believing Jewish community despised the Gentiles for their supposed arrogance for claiming faith in the Christ, which the Jewish people claimed would be their Messiah. Many Gentile believers had discovered that if they partook in the ritual of circumcision, they would enjoy an entry-level of acceptance within the Jewish community, thereby avoiding the heavy hand of persecution from that community. Also, if a Gentile, who claimed Christ, would on some level identify as a practitioner of Judaism it would mean that they could enjoy some of the religious freedoms afforded to the Jewish community by the Roman government. This is important because the Roman government had agreed not to prosecute the Jewish people for practicing their religion publicly. So, these believing Gentiles used these low-level rituals as a means of avoiding Jewish persecution and at the same time enjoying a sort of amnesty from prosecution by the Roman government.

The bottom line, according to Paul, was that adding works of any kind to salvation through faith alone in Christ alone placed them on a slippery slope. Once a person embarked on the path of adding any work of any kind to gain acceptance before men they were setting aside the true gospel once received. And Paul would have none of it. He would spare true Christians, whether Jew or Gentile from the false hope which the false gospel of works would generate. So, let's see how Paul concludes this letter by driving the home the point that it is vanity to claim any confidence in outward appearances. To claim the necessity of a Gentile to partake in a partial or full conversion to Judaism would contradict the divine Gospel of salvation by grace alone and the necessity of living according to the Spirit. In the end the offense of the cross would be abolished (5:11).

I) (6:11) Paul makes note of his large letters

- A) No one really knows why Paul makes this comment.
 - 1) Some think it could be that the thorn in his flesh was bad eyesight brought on by the bright light that blinded him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). And now he had to write with large letters in order to see what he was writing.
 - 2) Some think that he was using large letters to emphasize the importance of his closing points.
- B) Nevertheless, it is apparent that Paul emphasized his contempt for the motives behind the "faith plus works" claim of the Judaizers.
 - 1) 6:11-13: John MacArthur points out that here Paul directs his contempt for the Judaizers by pointing out that they were motivated by "religious pride, cowardice and by hypocrisy." We will use these same points for our outline headings.

II) (6:12a) The Judaizers were motivated by religious pride.

- A) Paul states their motivation of religious pride by saying, **"Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised."**
 - 1) *Flesh* here has to do with human effort or of self-effort apart from the Spirit.
 - 2) They were more concerned with pleasing men and getting along in the religious community than they were about pleasing God. **The gospel proclaims that believers possess an inward righteousness provided as a gift by the Spirit through faith in the righteousness of Christ.**

- (a) Galatians 2:21: "...for if righteousness could be gained through the law (or, by outward efforts for righteousness), Christ died for nothing."
- 3) Jesus warned in Matthew 6:1 against taking pride in the performance of outward acts of righteousness when He said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."
 - (a) See also Matthew 6:2 concerning self-seeking of honor; 6:5 concerning praying in such a way as to be esteemed by men; 6:16 about fasting to show piety; also read Luke 16:14-15.
- 4) Paul warned the Colossians about the same thing in Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ."
 - (a) Anything that exalts the flesh or human effort rather than things which originate from the Spirit and exalts God is rubbish (see also Philippians 3:7-9).
 - (i) Anything that is produced by human effort has the motivation of pleasing the desires of the flesh. These works are not produced by the Spirit and lack spiritual sincerity.
 - (ii) Only the perfect saving work of Christ can provide spiritual benefit to a person by faith!
 - (a) Christ plus nothing equals everything. Adding to Christ's work for righteousness is condemned by God. "No one will be declared righteous by observing the law (Rm.3:20)."

III) (6:12b) The Judaizers were motivated by cowardice.

- A) Paul says, "...they do this to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ."
 - 1) With an emphasis on circumcision the Judaizers (who apparently believed in Jesus) they could avoid being accused of identifying with Christ alone, whose one act of righteousness on the cross is the believers claim to right standing before God. Christ alone!
 - (a) The cross was also a stigma in the minds of non-believing Jews as well as the Romans. The cross was a form of execution of enemies of the "state."
 - 2) For true Christians the cross is a sign of God's redemptive grace, which became effective only through the cross of Christ. It was there that Christ became the final divine sacrifice to save believers from sin and death! The cross is an expression of God's righteousness and His grace.
 - (a) See Galatians 2:20; 3:1; 5:11; 5:24; 6:12; 6:14!
 - 3) The cross is offense to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23) but salvation to believers!
 - 4) The danger of avoiding the offense of the cross is to fall into the denial of and the sufficiency of the cross. Everyone who rejects the cross of Christ is an enemy of the cross (Phil. 3:18-19).
 - 5) The offense of the cross is proved when works such as circumcision or other rituals is preferred over grace of God and the power of God for salvation through the cross (death) of Christ!
 - 6) The Judaizers were more concerned for their social standing and their safety from persecution. Whereas straight forward claims of the sufficiency of the cross of Christ for salvation is not safe.
 - (a) It would likely mean persecution in the form of being ostracized by one's family and society.
 - (b) Denial of the cross for the Jew would allow them protected status in the Roman Empire.
 - 7) The bottom line, the redemptive work of Christ on "the cross undercuts every human religious system of works righteousness. (MacArthur)" Justification comes through faith in Christ alone!

IV) (6:13) The Judaizers were motivated by hypocrisy.

- A) Hypocrisy and cowardice are bedfellows. These Judaizers pretended to be something they were not. They pretended to be keepers of the law (rituals, etc.) but did not keep all of it.
- B) Though they didn't keep the law, they worked hard at gaining fame by winning Gentiles to the ritual of circumcision. Again, this was the first step of outward conversion in the flesh not by the Spirit.
- C) In Matthew 23:2-4 Jesus condemned the Pharisees for demanding that everyone keep the law, but He says that they themselves would break the law. (They laid heavy burdens of *works* on people.)
 - 1) They neglected the spirit of the law which is love for God and love for neighbor (Mark 12:30-31).
 - 2) There are two choices: To trust in human achievement or trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ!