

17. The marks of liberty

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Many politicians have been accused of being “all show and no substance.” That is, they care more about looking good and maintaining the appearance of significance than they do about actually making a difference. Window dressing . Packaging. That’s what such people are about. To them, image is everything.

Religion, like politics, can be approached with a mentality of “style without substance” as well. The Judaizers were experts at this approach, as Paul reminded the Galatians throughout this Book.

So, holding up the cross of Christ one last time, and with one final stinging evaluation of the liberty-stealing Judaizers, Paul not only scrawls the Gospel of Jesus Christ in his letter but seeks to imprint it permanently on the hearts and minds of the Galatians.

A. WITH MY OWN HAND

Galatians 6:11 See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!

It was Paul’s custom, after dictating a letter, to take the pen and write his own farewell salutation. But Paul is so concerned that the Galatians get the message of this letter that he takes the pen and writes an entire concluding paragraph with his own hand.

Some Bible students believe that Paul’s thorn in the flesh that was mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12 was some kind of eye diseases. This would mean that he would have to write in large letters so that he himself would be able to read what he had written. Whether or not that is true, Paul is making it clear that he has something important to write in conclusion, that he is not simply going to end the letter in some conventional manner. If he did have eye trouble, his willingness to write this closing paragraph with his own hand would certainly appeal to the hearts of the Galatian readers.

Paul has shown them that the believer living under Law and the believer living under grace are polar opposites to each other. It is not just a matter of “different doctrines,” like speaking in tongues, but a matter of two different ways of life. They had to choose between bondage or liberty in 5:1-12, the flesh or the Spirit in 5:13-26, and living for self or living for others in 6:1-10.

Now he presents a fourth contrast: living for the praise of men or the glory of God. He is dealing with motive, and there is no greater need in our churches today than for an examination of the motives for our ministries. We know what we are doing, but do we know why we are doing it? A good work can be spoiled by a bad motive.

By the way, don’t think that Christian legalists are not limited only in the old fashioned mainstream denominations, such as Baptists, Presbyterians, or Methodists. There are plenty of Charismatic denomination people who are legalistic. I even have seen some Calvary Chapel people who are starting to show legalistic flavor now .

B. DO WHAT I SAY, NOT WHAT I DO

Galatians 6:12-13 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer perse-

cution for the cross of Christ. 13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

Living by the grace of God isn't about mere outward appearances, because we have nothing to add to God's grace. Christianity makes a difference from the inside out.

Paul tells us that there are two reasons for the Judaizers' push:

1) Avoiding persecution

The Judaizers weren't about to join the ranks of those "persecuted for the cross of Christ." Instead, they paid lip service to Christ but did not actually embrace the Cross. By not condemning the idea of justification by law, they avoided being persecuted by zealous anti-Christian Jews. The Judaizers were more concerned about preserving their own safety than they were about proclaiming the truth of God's grace.

By now, you are wondering what the difference is between the Judaizers and the zealous anti-Christian Jews. As we studied before the Judaizers are the Jewish people who claimed to be the followers of Jesus Christ, but they held to a "faith-plus-works system". They were the same kind of people who came out of Egypt with the Hebrews when Moses led the Exodus. They were known as the "mixed breed". Ultimately they were the ones who led the Hebrews to the idolatry of the golden calf.

2) Boasting in numbers

There was a second motive behind the Judaizers' salvation-by-circumcision plan: they wanted to "boast in the Galatians' circumcision." Their own inconsistency in following the law demonstrated that devotion to the law was not their basic motivation. What they were really interested in was being able to boast to fellow Jews that they were good Jews. They sought to earn credit with the Jews by converting the Gentile Christians and forcing them to live like Jews. In other words, it was the numbers game in their own little world which had nothing to do with the glory of God.

Today we're centuries removed from the Judaizers. But we're still tempted to boast in the flesh. One way we do this is by playing the same numbers game – keeping spiritual statistics so we can feel good about ourselves. How many baptisms, decisions, and rededications can we count? How many people came to this or that church-sponsored event? How much money does this church receive in offerings so that their pastors have bragging rights?

Whenever I receive pastors and leaders conference brochures from some of these big Calvary Chapels around the country, I glance over them. First, they have the same line-up of "Big Calvary Chapel Pastors" in just about all the conferences. Second, all of these brochures mention how many people attend these speakers' churches. This is not a little church pastor's complex.

Because the numbers game is one of the most fleshly games we can play. And, sadly, it's often pastors and their followers who promote it. That kind of Christianity is external. We need to aim for the hearts and minds of people, not for the numbers and budgets. When we focus on the uncompromising presentation of the Gospel, then God alone gets the credit for changed lives and whatever numbers He decides to bring. There's no room for boasting, except in Christ alone.

By the way, the majority of church growth in America is not of the conversion of new believers in Christ, rather the migration from one church to another church.

C. ALL ABOUT JESUS

Galatians 6:14-15 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

Christianity isn't about what and how we can do to approach God. That is what all the cults and occults do to get close to their deities and please them so that they wouldn't be in hot water.

But for Christianity, it's about what God has done for us. He chose us, we didn't choose Him. As a matter of fact, we were His enemies. But He sent His Son to die for us. He gave us new life. It is His power, His grace, that keeps us secure in our salvation. We have nothing to boast about except the Lord Jesus Christ. Every ounce of credit for who we are and for the hope that we have goes to our Savior.

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

"The world" is the society of unbelievers and they are against Christ by their own choices. Before our own conversion, we desperately wanted to be a part of that group of people. But now we can see that our own sins were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion, and we don't care what the world thinks or says of us or does to us. That includes what other religions demand what we should do to be saved. We trust God's way, not men's way.

Paul keeps coming back to the cross. Jesus Christ is mentioned at least 45 times in the Galatian letter, which means that one third of the verses contain some reference to Him. The Judaizers boasted in circumcision; but Paul boasted in a crucified and risen Savior. Jesus was glorified in the Cross. Certainly this does not mean that Paul gloried in the brutal Roman execution tool. Why would Paul glory in the Cross?

I find two reasons:

1) Paul knew the Person of the Cross

Paul was the top persecutor against the church until he met the Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus. The more he spent time in Christ, the better he got to know the Savior. All the knowledge of the OT Paul had in his head started to sink into his heart through the person of Jesus and everything started to make sense to this rabbi from Tarsus. But the Judaizers didn't know him just like the majority of the world population.

2) Paul knew the Power of the Cross

Once a highly educated and zealous Jewish rabbi who considered a doctrine of sacrifice on a cross was utter stupidity experienced the power of the Cross and became Paul the apostle. The cross ceased to be a stumbling block to him and became, instead, the very foundation stone of his message: "Christ died for our sins."

For Paul, the Cross meant liberty: from self, the flesh, and the world. As we yield to Him, we have victory over the world and the flesh. But the Law appeals to the human ego and encourages the flesh to work. And the world does not care if we are "religious" just so long as Jesus is left out. In fact, the world approves of all the religions apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. THE MARKED MAN PAUL

Galatians 6:16-17 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. 18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Those who “walk according to this rule” are those who accept the Gospel and live by it. Rule in the Greek is “kanon,” which literally means “measuring rod.” The canon of Scripture – the Bible we have today – was assembled by certain criteria or “measuring rods” of authenticity. The Bible is also our canon in that it provides God’s standards for living. It is also the standard against which all other teaching is measured. Paul is using the word here to apply to the uncompromising truth of the Gospel of grace.

The only way to receive God’s mercy is through His grace; the Law brings only His judgment. Law is like a mirror. It doesn’t make us ugly, rather it just shows us that we are ugly spiritually without Jesus.

When we look not only at his epistles but at all of Scripture, the Gospel – with its Christ – stands out as the defining doctrine of true Christianity.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) It is God’s power and His grace, that keeps us secure in our salvation. We have nothing to boast about except the Lord Jesus Christ.

2) The only way to receive God’s mercy is through His grace; the Law brings only His judgment.