

# Unlocking Freedom: A Study in Galatians

## Galatians 6:11-18

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

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### Introduction

This morning we find ourselves arriving at the final verses Paul wrote to the Church in Galatia, and as we do so, I want to ask the question of us, have the truths of Galatians hit home? Have they taken root in our hearts? You see as believers we come to God's Word time and time again to draw from it the eternal truths and wisdom of God, which in return guide us in life and reveal for us that which God desires of us. Galatians, Paul's first letter, is packed full of spiritual truth and guidance. It combats the false teachings of the world around us and points us to the gracious truths of the Gospel. It brings to light the selfish intentions of the flesh and reveals for us the obedient life in the Spirit. Have we allowed these truths to change us – the way we think, the way we act, the way we treat each other? I pray that we have. And just like a long journey down a winding road, after 7 months, we are arriving at the conclusion of this beautiful look into our freedom in Christ. If you brought your Bibles with you, turn one last time to the book of Galatians. Read **Galatians 6:11-18**. *Prayer.*

Suppose I had the power to hold out to you 2 hands for your choosing. In the one hand is the mercy of God to forgive all your sins restoring your peace with God, and in the other hand is every desirable thing the world could offer (money, leisure, health, popularity – you name it, it's yours!) – but with that there would be no mercy from God and no peace with Him. Which would you choose? This is the choice that God gives us. On one side He offers salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus restoring fellowship with Him. And on the other side, He offers the choice to turn down salvation – which the Devil makes to look like “a fun-filled, pleasure seeking, in it for my own happiness” choice. This is the Devil's grand delusion, and under this mirage, the multitudes choose themselves and the world over the mercy and peace that God offers – in the book of Galatians this looks like legalism and licentiousness – a false gospel that centers around you – and to choose this option would be foolish. This is why **John Piper** calls verse 16 “a big freeway sign to tell us how to leave the road of foolishness and get on the road of God's mercy and peace!” **Verse 16** – “And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them...” God's undeserving mercy and His incomprehensible peace belong to those whose lives conform to a certain rule. And so let us this morning, strive to understand what this rule is – and in doing so we will look through the motives of the flesh and the mindset of the new creation.

**Verse 11** – “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand...”

Paul seems to take the pen from the scribe assisting him in writing this letter to finish off the last paragraph of the letter, and due to his poor eyesight he writes to them with large letters. This points out to us how important this final paragraph is to Paul. His desire is that they know without a shadow of doubt that the words he is writing next are directly from his heart and mind to them. And upon taking pen, he begins to write about the motivation of the flesh...

## 1. **The Motivation of the Flesh** (vv. 11-13)

**Verse 12** – *“Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”*

Here we see, once again, this example of circumcision being used to describe the false teachings of the Judaizers. Paul said it is not needed for salvation, belief in Christ’s death upon the cross and resurrection was powerful enough to save our souls, there was nothing more we needed to do. But the Judaizers were teaching a false doctrine of faith plus works – trust Christ and get circumcised in order to achieve salvation. This is in opposition to God’s message and His will – the flesh always opposes the things of God. But what motivates this false doctrine that the flesh proclaims? We find the answers to this question at the end of both verse 12 and 13.

The first motivation of the flesh is found in verse 12 – *“simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”* The **first motive** is a motive of **fear**. They are afraid of the persecution that will follow if they believe and preach the cross of Christ. Why does persecution often follow the testimony of the cross in the life of the believer? Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:10); “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you...if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...” (Jn. 15:18-19, 20b)*. The choice to follow after Christ and to faithfully preach the Gospel by word and deed is not a popular and well-received choice. You see, the truths of God’s Word offends the flesh and therefore flies directly in opposition to much of the world’s teachings on morality. In essence the Gospel calls every individual guilty of their own sinfulness – that strikes a death blow to pride and selfish living – the Scriptures then teaches us that we are to live according to God’s standards, which calls for further life change – again, flying in the face of selfish and prideful living. And when you call someone to change their way of living, and do not stand up in celebration to sinful choices of others, many people are offended and respond in mockery of the message and persecution of the messenger. It happened in Jesus’ days, Paul’s days, and continues to happen this very day.

**This fear of what man will say and do motivates the flesh to a false gospel.**

The second motivation of the flesh can be found at the end of verse 13 – *“For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in the flesh.”* Notice that, obedience to God (as they claim) does not motivate the flesh – as *they do not even keep the Law themselves* - but rather **pride** is the second motive of the flesh – *they desire to have you circumcised.. so that they may boast in the flesh*. We even see this pride in verse 12 as they desire to put on a *good show*. **The flesh is directly founded in pride**. Jesus, knowing the sinful hearts of mankind (aka the flesh), said in **Matt. 6:1** – *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”* He spoke concerning giving in **verse 2** – *“When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say, they have their reward in full.”* In **verse 5**, concerning prayer, Jesus says, *“And when you pray, you are not to be*

*as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”* When the flesh motivated by pride guides our religious activities – when we seek the praise of man above the approval of God - our reward will only be the praise of men, and it will reveal the lack of our relationship with God. So, Paul is really warning us concerning what motivates our obedience. If we are motivated toward or away from the things of God because of the fear of man or the praise of others, then we need to examine our relationship with God. For it is the flesh that is motivated by fear and pride, and it is not the mindset of the believer.

When we continue in this portion of Scripture, we will see that Paul, as he often does, reveals both sides of the coin. He points out to us the motivations of the flesh and then he guides us to the mindset of the new creation. *Read verses 14-16.*

## **2. The Mindset of the New Creation** (vv. 14-16)

As Paul has made it clear to us, the only 2 basic religions in the world are that which is accomplished by God in the hearts of mankind and that which is falsely achieved by man. And Paul is clearly separating himself from that false religion of human achievement and clinging to the true relationship found at the cross; we see this in **verse 14**, as he begins the sentence by using a strong negative phrase that means, *May it never be!* “I would never boast in the accomplishments of my flesh, but on the contrary, I humbly exalt the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The mindset of the new creation, or the believer, is to glory in the cross of Christ. For it is at the place, where our Savior gave His life for us – this is where salvation begins. Therefore, it is the symbol of the cross that signifies our salvation from the crushing deadly burden of sin and it is what should motivate our life of obedience to our Lord. When we feel the flesh motivated by fear and pride seek to corrupt our thoughts and behavior, let us remember the cross in which our Lord gave His life, and may that mindset defeat the flesh in that moment, to the glory of God. For victory over the flesh is won at the cross – *“may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* (v. 14). Do you want to crucify the flesh? Do you want victory over the lingering sinful nature within? Then make the cross of Jesus Christ the focus of your mind and heart. This is what Paul is saying. He is saying, “May I never boast in the accomplishments of the flesh! No, never. But rather, when the pride of my flesh begins to grip my thoughts and heart, may I remember the cross of Jesus my Lord, and may my humble obedience driven by gratitude for my salvation, lead me to crucifying my worldly desires. For I am a new creation.” Read with me **verse 15** – *“For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”* That which the flesh tries to achieve is weak and corrupted by sin, salvation is through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is where I will set my mind. This is what the focus of our transformed mind should be. Paul reminds us that we are a *new creation*. We’ve heard that before haven’t we? **1 Cor. 5:17** *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!”* When you place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are a new creation. And with that newness of life, your mindset should be to glory in the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord. Upon salvation, my relationship is dead with the world, *it has passed away, it has been*

*crucified*, I no longer choose the sinfulness of its wicked passions, instead I glory in the cross where my Savior died.

**Verse 16**, “*And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*” This is the rule that orders our life by the mercies and peace of God. To glory in the cross, to crucify the flesh and the worldly lusts which surround us, is the way in which we are to live our lives. We are to walk by this rule. We are to allow the amazing gift of Christ’s death and resurrection drive us to newness of life, beating down the old desires of the flesh.

**How does this look in our lives?**

1. When the desire to mistreat another in order to make ourselves appear better rises within our hearts, we are to beat it down by remembering that Jesus died so that we can have a new life. Therefore, with the cross in view, let us overcome the sinfulness of our flesh, and treat them with love.
2. When our sibling, parent, or child does something that annoys or angers us to the level of boiling over, we are to remember the cross of Christ, and remind ourselves of His loving patience with us, and likewise respond with grace, love and patience toward them.

This rule, to walk in the shadow of the cross, is a great way to help us as believers know why it is we are to live as a new creation. With chapters 5 and 6 in view, Paul wants us to know that it is because of Christ crucified that we have salvation and that is to motivate us toward walking in the Spirit. It all connects here, and in this newness of life we have peace with God and are recipients of His mercy, just like Israel had, God’s chosen people.

Paul then offers a few closing remarks...

**3. Final Remarks** (vv. 17-18)

**Verse 17** – “*From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.*” Paul is referring to the persecution he has received because of his bold testimony of the cross. And perhaps he is reminding them of the beating he endured in Lystra, a Galatian city, where the book of Acts tells us, he was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead (**Acts 14:19**). He is reminding them and pleading with them that they walk, from this point on, together for the glory of the cross of Christ. This is what they’ve been freed to do! And in so doing, he is reminding us of both his commitment to the Gospel, causing us to examine our commitment to the spread of the Gospel; and our role as the body of Christ to walk together in unity, testifying in one voice to the glorious Gospel of our Savior.

And all of this is with the cross of Christ in view – a gift of grace given to us, a sinful group of people. And so Paul concludes his letter by reminding us of God’s grace, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren, Amen.*” (**v. 18**).

**Conclusion** (*Two-Fold*)

This letter to the Galatians makes it clear that we have a choice in life. In the one hand, God offers every man, woman and child salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. A life of freedom in Christ. And on the other hand a false offer of salvation achieved by your best efforts and circling around you as god of your own life. This false gospel keeps you locked up in a cell until judgment day, although it may offer temporary pleasure and happiness, it will not bring freedom. What choice will you make?

Paul has pleaded with us to choose right: to deny ourselves, leave behind the prison cell of self-gratification and false salvation, and choose the Gospel centered on the cross of Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our lives as we walk the new life God has for us – a life of freedom.

And as we remember the challenges offered within the pages of this letter, Paul leaves us with a few final words, and in them he reminds us of the GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ. So as we walk away from here, may we be reminded of God's Freedom offered through the Gracious Gospel of Jesus Christ, and may we forever be changed.

Close in Prayer