

Galatians: *No Other Gospel*

Galatians 5:26-6:18

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The Apostle Paul covers a lot of ground in his short letter to the 1st Century Church at Galatia, but I think I can sum up what Paul writes in Galatians and what Evan, Jen and I have preached over the past five weeks with two statements that are foundational to our faith as followers of Jesus:

1. "Placing our faith in Jesus and the salvation He provided for us on the cross is enough."
2. "Jesus' desire for his sons and daughters is that we walk in step with the Holy Spirit, and allow the Spirit to guide us in all we do and say."

Paul wrote Galatians to new Christians who were confused by the message they were receiving that to be a true follower of Jesus, they needed to follow the Old Testament law. As emphatically as he can Paul says, "No! No! No! Faith in the grace Jesus extended to us on the cross is enough. Adding anything to placing our faith in Jesus negates what God did through sending his Son." I've tried to capture that truth for us with the equations:

Jesus + anything = nothing

Jesus + nothing = everything

"Nothing but Jesus" sounds great, but we're not all that different from the 1st Century Galatians. We like clarity and structure. Certainty helps us feel safe and secure. At times, we chafe against rules we feel are unfair or too restrictive, but clear guidelines let us know what's right and what's wrong, when we're in and when we're out of bounds. So, while trying to obey the law often felt like a burden and God's people never successfully followed his rules, the law provided certainty by making God's will clear.

One of the objections Paul and other New Testament leaders inevitably encountered as they preached the sufficiency of faith in Jesus and the grace He makes available to us was, "If following the law isn't what makes us right with God, what is it that ensures people don't abuse

the freedoms they have?” Paul’s simple answer to that objection is “The Holy Spirit.” It’s the Spirit of Jesus living inside of us who guides us to truth and who enables us to live godly lives. He is our Advocate, our Counselor, our Helper, the One who walks alongside us.

Pastor Evan shared two statements in his sermon last week that I think beautifully capture the heart of Paul’s message in Galatians: A source of life is greater than a boundary, and a guide is greater than a law. We gravitate toward boundaries and laws because of the clarity they provide, but we were created to look to Jesus as our source of life and to rely on his Spirit as our guide.

As we turn our attention to the last chapter of Galatians, we’ll see Paul does two things: first, he wraps up his letter and says goodbye to his readers, and second, he applies the truths of life in the Spirit to our interactions as brothers and sisters in the community of the church. I’m going to read Paul’s ending to his letter first, because I want to conclude with Paul’s word to the church family at Galatia. So, I encourage you to follow along as I read verses 11-18 of Galatians chapter 6.

¹¹ See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

¹² Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.
(Galatians 6:11-18)

Paul begins this section by calling attention to the fact that he's writing this letter, or at least the ending of the letter, with his own hand. That might seem like an odd thing for Paul to call attention to, but New Testament scholars believe that due to Paul's poor eyesight, he often dictated his letters to others who would then physically write his letters for him. In this case, Paul wants his readers to know he is the author, because this letter is physically being written by him.

In verses 12-16, Paul recounts his main argument from the body of his letter: that faith in Jesus, not following the law, is essential to being made righteous before God. In verse 17, Paul refers to the persecution he experienced as a mark that identified him as a follower of Jesus. And in verse 18, Paul concludes his letter with his standard farewell.

I want us to turn now to the first 10 verses of Galatians chapter 6, where Paul speaks to his readers about what it looks like for them to be Spirit-led in their interaction with their brothers and sisters in their faith community.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:1-10)

As we read the letters written by Paul and other New Testament writers, it's easy to forget that these early Christian leaders weren't just theologizing in a general way. Each of these letters were written to people like you and me in specific local church contexts. In verse 2 we read, "Carry each other's burdens." Some translations say "Carry one another's burdens." The phrase "one another" was a favorite of Paul's, occurring 34 times in his New Testament letters. What Paul writes in these verses could be grouped under the heading of how to interact with one another. Listen again as I call attention to what is highlighted in these verses:

- If someone sins, they should gently be restored by Spirit-led people.
- Be careful as you work to restore someone caught in sin, so that you aren't sucked into their sin.
- Carry each other's burdens.
- Examine your own actions, so you're not deceived or wrongly take pride in yourself.
- When you're blessed by someone's teaching, let them know how you've been ministered to.
- Don't grow weary in doing good, because you'll be rewarded if you don't give up.
- Do good to all, especially to those who belong to the family of believers in Christ.

Paul understood that loving and caring for each other are natural outgrowths of the love of Christ and of the Holy Spirit living in us and working through us as we interact with our brothers and sisters in our church community.

As I read through verses 1-10 of Galatians chapter 6 last week, my mind went to our church's mission and vision and values, which our staff refined over a two-year period in 2020 and 2021. McBIC's simple mission statement is "Experiencing Jesus and Sharing His Love." We built on that statement to define our vision: "We are disciples who bring restoration and wholeness to Mechanicsburg and to the world." It's critical for us to understand that sharing Jesus' love and bringing restoration and wholeness to Mechanicsburg and to the world is dependent on us experiencing Jesus and being led and empowered by his Holy Spirit. In other words, it's the life of Jesus in us personally and working in us as a church family that is then shared with individuals in our local community and in our individual spheres of influence.

It's not easy, but we tried to capture what experiencing Jesus looks like for our church family by highlighting eight values.

1. Worship and Prayer – Relationship with God is the foundation for our faith.
2. Transparency – We come to Jesus and each other just as we are.
3. Maturity and Integrity – We practice a healthy culture of respect and compassion, where the important things stay important.
4. Healing – We pursue restoration, justice, and wholeness for all people—spiritually, emotionally, physically, and relationally.
5. Togetherness – We commit to one another by bearing burdens and loving unconditionally.
6. Discipleship – We become more like Jesus every day, and show others how to do the same.
7. Partnership – We choose to work and serve together in the church and with the community.
8. Missional Living – We carry the hope of Jesus Christ to those in our sphere of influence.

There is a lot in those eight values and the explanations that go with them. In fact, I believe it was two years ago that we spent eight weeks preaching through these values one week at a time. I'm sharing these values with you because I see a lot of similarity between what Paul writes at the end of Galatians and what is captured in our values.

What's particularly encouraging to me is that this list of values isn't just aspirational—something we hope happens some day in the distant future. These values are regularly embraced by people in our church family in our day-to-day life. I'll share a few examples of the many that I could share.

- Every pastoral staff member is regularly supported and prayed for by a prayer team, prayer teams meet for prayer throughout the week at McBIC, and many of you regularly lift our staff, our church, and its ministries before God in prayer.
- Our Bible Fellowship Groups do an amazing job of praying and caring for each other on a daily basis and when members in their groups experience crises in their lives.
- I've watched staff members and volunteer leaders walk with people in our church family who were struggling with sin issues so they could experience Jesus' forgiveness and grace and be restored to right relationship with Him and with people they've wounded.

- I'm seeing Jesus transform people, bringing healing and wholeness to them through ministries like formational prayer groups, At The Cross Recovery, Peace Promise, Dad Connection, and men's and women's retreats.
- And last but not least, I'm regularly impressed by the ministry I hear happening in our children and youth ministries, where children and teens are having fun and bonding together in community with their peers and mentoring relationships with adult leaders, and are also growing in relationship with Jesus through worship and the teaching of the Scriptures.

Our church is blessed! I thank God for that and for all He is doing here, and I thank you all as a church family for allowing the Holy Spirit to transform your hearts and minds and to empower you to love, care for and minister to others. My encouragement for us is to continue being led by the Spirit of Jesus, and as we do so, continue leaning into loving and caring for one another and building each other up in Jesus Christ.

We turn our focus now to receiving Communion. In Communion, we remember Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross and celebrate the life we have in Him, and we also celebrate the place we have as part of Jesus' Body, the Church. As we prepare our hearts to receive Communion and reflect on all we've learned about the gospel and life in the Spirit in Galatians, I'd like to read the words of the Apostle Paul from Colossians 1:15–20. I'll be reading from The MESSAGE Paraphrase:

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

¹⁸⁻²⁰ He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything,

everyone. So spacious is he, so expansive, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20, The Message)

I chose to read that Scripture because it so beautifully articulates who Jesus is, and at its core, Paul's letter to the Galatians is all about Jesus. I want to emphasize to everyone here today that Jesus is enough. Jesus' death on the cross was God's ultimate expression of grace to us, and by placing our faith in Him, we can experience his salvation. After his death and resurrection, Jesus didn't leave us as orphans. He gave his Holy Spirit to those of us who place our faith in Him to be our advocate and to guide us into all truth.

As we receive Communion today, I encourage each of us to renew our commitment to Jesus' salvation by faith and to submitting ourselves to the work of his Holy Spirit in our lives. If you're here today and you've never placed your faith in Jesus for salvation, I encourage you to do that today.