

## Galatians: Faith Alone in Christ Alone

*Sowing and Reaping* (Galatians 6:6-18)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on August 11, 2024

### Introduction

- ❖ This morning I'll be wrapping up our series in Galatians. For those of you who are new, our normal practice is to preach through books of the Bible. We usually jump back and forth between the Old and New Testaments. So in the Spring, we preached through Nehemiah. This summer was Galatians. We'll probably jump back into Genesis next year to finish off that book – since we've been preaching sections of that book over the past two years.
  - But for this fall, we'll go through two more thematic sermon series. Next week, we'll start one focused on integrating Christ and your career. It's called *Faith at Work*. We did something similar ten years ago. So it's due time to cover this topic again. And then, we'll dip into the Gospel of John and preach seven messages on the *Seven I AM Statements of Christ*. Take a look at one of the sermon pew cards in front of you.
  
- ❖ **But as we wrap up this series in Galatians, we see the Apostle Paul wrapping up his own letter in chapter 6.** Starting in v11, he takes pen in hand and finishes off the letter in his own handwriting. *“See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.”*
  - **It was common practice in those days for letters to be transcribed by secretaries.** Most of Paul's letters were probably written that way (1 Cor 16:21). And at the end of the letter, he usually signs off with a personal greeting in his own handwriting. Just a verse or two expressing his love or well wishes. So this is rare for him to write so much. And notice how he draws attention to how he's writing with large letters. **It's like he's increasing the font size so these last verses really stand out.**
    - That signals how important these last few verses are. These are his final thoughts. He's no longer dictating. **He's carefully writing out these verses in order to recap his whole argument.** So even if you're new to HCC and just joining us at the tail end of this series, you're fine. **You're getting Paul's own summary of the book of Galatians in his own handwriting.**
  
- ❖ **So remember, the main point of the contention he's dealing with is the question of whether or not Gentile converts to Christianity also need to embrace Judaism.** Scholars date Galatians as one of the earliest of Paul's letters. So at this point, the gospel was just beginning to spread beyond Judea and into Gentile territory. **And one of the earliest controversies in the church revolved around this influx of Gentile converts.** If Jesus is the Jewish Messiah who came to fulfill all the covenant promises that the LORD made to Abraham and his kin – then do these Gentile believers need to adopt Jewish customs and identity markers like circumcision?
  - These false teachers in Galatia teaching that you're not yet in a right relationship with God; you're not a part of the covenant community; you're not in the household of faith – **until you supplement your faith in Christ with some works of the law.** No one is denying the cross of Christ. Of course, your sins are forgiven and you have new life because Jesus died for you on the cross. But to be a disciple of a Jewish Messiah should mean adopting the Jewish practices of your new Lord. That's the false gospel being taught to the Galatians.

- ❖ In response, Paul has been reinforcing the gospel that he originally preached to them. That no one is justified by works of the law (2:16). That Gentile believers can be saved as Gentiles. You don't need to convert to Judaism or adopt Jewish customs. **The good news of the gospel is *not* that there's enough room for you Gentiles within the old covenant.** It's not a welcome into the arms of the Mosaic Law.
  - **No, the good news of the gospel is a welcome to all into the arms of Christ.** That he's established a new covenant available to all people, all nations. **Where the only common denominator is our common faith in Christ** (3:9). Where we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. That's the gospel Paul preached.
- ❖ So in wrapping up his letter, he's going to exhort believers in a local church to respond in three ways. Because you embrace this gospel: (1) Sow your resources generously into the gospel ministries of your church. (2) Reject the fleshly impulse to look impressive in the eyes of the world. (3) Embrace a single-minded devotion to living a cruciform life.

### **Sow Your Resources Generously**

- ❖ The first exhortation that Paul gives is to sow your resources generously into the gospel ministries of your church. **Because of the presence of these false teachers and their heterodox gospel, it's all the more urgent to invest deeply in gospel-centered ministers and ministries in the church.** That's his emphasis in vv6-10. Look at v6, "*Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.*"
  - If you recall from last week, Paul was exhorting those who are walking by the Spirit – as a community of Spirit-led believers – to bear each other's burdens. **That leads Paul to think of the unique burdens of the gospel teachers in their community.** In the early church, there were believers – gifted by God and called by fellow church members – to give primary attention to the preaching and teaching of God's Word.
    - Now no one would've called them the pastoral staff. They weren't employees of the church as we understand it today. In fact, they were likely bi-vocational. **But the point is that they were, in some way, materially supported.** They received some degree of financial compensation, which was funded by the generosity of church members.
- ❖ **And this arrangement is meant to be mutually beneficial for both the teacher and those being taught.** Because by helping lighten the burdens of their shepherd-teacher, believers are making it possible for that man to dedicate adequate time and energy to the study of Scripture and the preparation of rich, hearty sermons that feed your soul.
  - This is standard teaching for Paul in his letters. Take for example **1 Corinthians 9:11** where he reminds them of his own right, as an apostle, to receive material support. "*If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?*" Or listen to his instructions in **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, "<sup>17</sup>*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.* <sup>18</sup>*For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."*"

- ❖ What I find interesting is that word “*share*” in v6. It’s clearly referring to some kind of financial support. But the actual Greek verb is *koinoneo*, which is related to *koinonia* – the noun for fellowship. **So, in other words, to support a pastor financially – to share your good things with him – is a way to have fellowship with him.**
  - That’s significant. Because that suggests that paying your pastoral staff is not just a business decision. Their salaries are not purely to be seen as payment for work performed. No, your pastors are **sharing spiritual blessings with you** (out of the spiritual gifts God gave to them). And you, in turn, are **sharing material blessings with them** (out of the financial resources God has given to you).
  
- ❖ Please don’t come to church with a consumer mindset. **Your giving to the church should not be measured by how well you feel the church is doing in meeting your needs.** By how much you’re being fed with the sermons. By how much you connect with the music. By how nice the people are and how much you feel cared for. That’s *not* the reason to share your good things with the church. You should give as, first and foremost, an act of worship to God. And secondly, as an act of fellowship with the pastors laboring for your spiritual good.
  - Paul’s point here is that when those called to teach you the Word are freed from the financial burdens of caring for themselves or a family – **then they can dedicate the best of their week to teaching sound doctrine and guarding against false gospels.** That’s what the Galatians needed. More gospel-centered ministers who have the time and capacity to resist this false gospel going around and to proclaim the true one.
  
- ❖ Now Paul goes on, in vv7-8, to connect his exhortation to invest in the long-term support and care of gospel-centered ministers in your church with the more general principle of sowing and reaping. It’s a biblical principle reinforced throughout Scripture. “*For whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*”
  - That, on one hand, is **a warning to the false teachers.** Don’t think you can preach a false gospel and get away with it. “*God is not mocked.*” You will reap his judgment in due time. But, on the other hand, this same principle is **an encouragement to believers** who sow their resources generously in the gospel ministries of their church. It’s worth the investment. Your church will reap the benefits in due season.
  
- ❖ But let’s think about this principle of sowing and reaping more generally. **Essentially, it’s saying that whatever you sow is what you will reap.** If you’re going to sow barley seeds, then don’t expect to reap wheat when the harvest comes. You’re not going to get results different than what you put in. So that forces us to stop and ask ourselves: **What exactly are we investing our time and energy in?**
  - If what you hope to reap is a fruitful and loving marriage or family life, then are you investing in those relationships at home? Or is all your time being focused outside the home on your career? Or if it’s a fulfilling career you hope to reap one day, then are you investing in the efforts and disciplines that contribute to that goal? Or are you wasting your time on your phone, on mindless entertainment?

- ❖ Don't expect to get results different than what you put in. *Whatever* you sow is what you will reap. That's how the principle works. **But here's another way to look at it – to encourage you – whatever you sow will be reaped.** Even if you don't know exactly how or how long. It *will* come to fruition. It's inevitable. Whatever you sow *will* be reaped.
  - Now you could take that again as a warning. **Whatever you sow will be reaped – even if it's a result you don't want or you hope to avoid.** Paul states the warning like this in v8, *“For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.”* So take that to heart and make any necessary changes to what you've been sowing – what you've been investing your time and energy in.
  
- ❖ **But this is also an encouragement – especially to those who are growing weary in waiting for the harvest.** Waiting for the fruit of all their faithful investments. I'm thinking of parents who have spiritually invested so much in their children, but they have yet to see spiritual fruit in their lives or even worse their kids have fallen away from God. I'm thinking of believers who have been investing in relationships with non-Christians or those struggling with deep hurts or addictions – and they have yet to see any change or transformation.
  - Take heart and don't give up. **Whatever you sow will be reaped – even if it takes longer than you expected. Even if the desired outcome looks next to impossible.** Listen to how Paul phrases this encouragement. Keep reading in v8, *“But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”*
  
- ❖ **This is where those of us without a green thumb could learn a thing or two from those of you who are into gardening and growing your own fruits and vegetables.** You know how important it is to be patient. To not so quickly give up on the tree if harvest season comes and goes and the buds have yet to blossom. You know your job is to sow the seeds. To water the plants. To protect them from pests and critters. But you know you can't cause the sun to shine. You can't hold back the storms. You can't make the fruit to grow. **So you just faithfully do your part, and you patiently wait for God to do the rest.**
  - That's the lesson the rest of us need to learn. That whatever you sow *will* be reaped in due season. So don't lose heart. Don't grow weary from doing good. **And when it comes to doing good, notice, in v10, how Paul expects us to be both broad and narrow in our scope.** *“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*
  
- ❖ In context, that means we should be investing our time, energy, and resources in serving the wider community. Doing good to everyone and anyone who has need. **But notice how Paul is unashamed to narrow that focus and to prioritize doing good for fellow Christians.** Especially those in our own church. That term *“household of faith”* would've been understood as referring to your church. Which is the family of God. **We're part of the same household – related not by blood but by faith.** So make sure to take care of your own spiritual family first.

- ❖ I know that might sound self-serving. **But churches that prioritize their support and care for their own members do it out of a missional mindset.** It's about our corporate witness. For it was Jesus who said, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (Jn 13:35) If the world doesn't see our church as a loving community that cares for its own members, then why would they want to be a part of it?
  - Brothers and sisters, I want to challenge you to do good to all – and especially to our church. **And keeping in line with Paul's emphasis on financial support – I want to challenge all believers, who call HCC your spiritual home, to give an annual tithe of your income.**
- ❖ Look, we know based on our study of Galatians that we are no longer under Mosaic Law. **So we're not under a legal obligation to give a tithe.** But even in the OT, it was never about gritting your teeth and just giving a tenth of your income while your heart remains cold to the idea. So if the OT saints, under the old covenant, freely gave a tenth. How much more should we – the inheritors of a better covenant with a more sure inheritance awaiting us – **how much more willing should we be to give a tithe or more?**
  - And I appreciate how many of you understand that you need to prioritize your own household of faith. **So you give a full tenth (or more) to your church and then give to other good causes with a gift over and above your tithe.** I encourage more of you to do the same. As you have the opportunity, do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

### **Reject the Fleshly Impulse to Look Impressive**

- ❖ Now as we've already mentioned, in v11, Paul takes pen in hand and offers a final summary of his overall argument. **And he's going to expose the selfish motivations of these false teachers in the church.** And he's going to pit them against the selfless, loving motivations of those who have crucified their flesh and have a heart to do good to everyone, especially to their own fellow church members.
  - This leads to our second exhortation. **If we embrace the gospel of Christ crucified, then we ought to reject the fleshly impulse to look impressive in the eyes of the world.** That's Paul's point in vv12-13. Look at v12, *“<sup>12</sup>It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup>For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.”*
- ❖ Paul is saying that these Judaizers who are trying to force Gentile Christians to get circumcised are motivated, on one hand, by **a desire to avoid persecution.** And, on the other hand, by **a desire to boast in their success** at getting Gentile Christians to convert to Judaism. They want to boast in your flesh. **They wanted to impress and look impressive – especially in the eyes of their fellow Jews.** We know from the book of Acts that during Paul's missionary journeys in Gentile territory that he received lots of opposition from the Jewish community in these various Greco-Roman cities.

- ❖ **That's because they were hearing news of Jewish Christians like Paul and Barnabas sharing table fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles and encouraging others to do the same.** That was scandalous. That's why Jewish persecution against the early church was particularly severe in predominantly Gentile cities.
  - So you can see what motivated these false teachers to preach a gospel that required circumcision. **Because if anyone accused them of not keeping the Law of Moses, they could point to the circumcision of their Gentile disciples as proof of their devotion to the Law.** They could make a good showing in the eyes of others and avoid any potential persecution for the cross of Christ.
  
- ❖ But Paul would argue that if you preach the true gospel – if you faithfully proclaim the cross of Christ – there's no guarantee you'll make a good showing. **In fact, you're more than likely to offend. Especially if you're preaching it to morally-upright, religious people.** Because those who are pious, who keep their hands clean, who try their best – they don't like being told they're in the same boat as the unrighteous, ungodly, unclean sinners of the world. Equally condemned before a holy God.
  - They don't like being told they're so sinful – so enslaved to the flesh – that they can't do anything to contribute to their salvation. That they have to be saved by grace alone. That message flies right in the face of our fleshly impulse to look impressive.
  
- ❖ **If you're goal is to impress, then a gospel centered on the cross of Christ is not going to help.** It won't make you look good. Now it would be different if the gospel *was* centered on law-keeping – on how well you keep the rules and avoided sin. Because then you *could* have a reason to boast. You really *could* impress if you managed to maintain the works of the law.
  - But that's what's wrong with the false gospel of the Judaizers. It's all about appearances. By stressing circumcision, they give off the appearance that they're genuinely devoted to the Law. But Paul points out in v13 that they don't keep the Law themselves. **It was never about devotion to the Law. It was always about gaining the praise and acceptance of others.** That's why they were obsessed with external behaviors like circumcision, which can be seen and praised.
  
- ❖ What Paul's rivals failed to get – what many people in the church today fail to get – **is that the gospel is not about behavior modification. It's about inner heart transformation.** The Spirit of God enters your heart, changes out the soil and sows gospel seeds that take time to grow. So your change may not be immediately detectable. There may not be anything particularly impressive about you.
  - **But if the gospel you cling to is a gospel centered on the cross of Christ, then why would you – the disciple of a crucified Savior – expect to impress anyone?** Your own Lord failed to impress the world. *“<sup>2</sup>For...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”* (Isa 53:2-3)

- ❖ But because of his obedience on the cross – because he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities – because he was chastised to bring us peace and wounded that we might be healed – God esteemed Jesus and accepted him as our perfect substitute.
  - **And now you and I can be equally accepted by God if we put on Christ and put all our hope in him.** If any of you are unsure if you have God’s praise and acceptance – if you feel the pull of that fleshly impulse to impress others – then I urge you to turn away from this world and find your all in all in Christ Jesus our Lord. The invitation stands. But you have to accept it.

### **Embrace a Single-Minded Devotion**

- ❖ So, again, if we embrace the gospel of Christ crucified, then we ought to reject the fleshly impulse to look impressive in the eyes of the world. **And then, in turn, embrace a single-minded devotion to living a cruciform life.** In other words, a cross-shaped life. This leads to our third point in vv14-18. Look at v14, *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*
  - **So in contrast to the false teachers, Paul says he won’t boast in anything but the cross of Christ.** Because nothing in this world is worth his boast. The world has been crucified to him and he to the world. Which is another way of saying they’re dead to each other. The world has no claim on him. And he’s not beholden to the world.
    - That’s what Paul means. **He’s been crucified to the world – he’s died to it – so there is nothing in this world that he ultimately depends on or needs for significance, for purpose, for ultimate meaning.** So you can take it away – take his career, take his reputation, take his health, take his wealth, even take away the people he loves – and it won’t destroy him. **Because there’s only one thing he’s depending on and no one can take it away – the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- ❖ So instead of living a life endlessly chasing after other people’s praise and acceptance, Paul exhorts us to live a cruciform life with single-minded devotion – boasting only in the cross. Because whatever you boast in is what you truly worship.
  - So ask yourself: **When you’re faced with discouragement and disappointment – when you’re confronted by the weightiness of your sin and shame – what ultimately assures you of God’s love and acceptance? What ultimately comforts you that you’re in a right relationship with him?** Whatever the answer is – that’s what you’ll boast in. And that’s what you truly worship.
- ❖ So if you’re comfort and assurance ultimately lies in the thought, *“Well, I tried my best. I’m not perfect. But I’m not as bad as I once was or I could be. And I’m certainly not as bad as those people over there.”* **If that’s what you’re banking on, then you have yet to be crucified to the world.** You’re still operating according to the world – boasting in the things of the world.

- ❖ **The Christian is the one whose comfort and assurance ultimately lies in the thought that, “*My only hope in life and death is the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ.*”** That’s my only boast. That’s where my sins were ultimately exposed as sinful. And where they were ultimately paid for by the blood of Christ. That’s why my only boast is in the cross of Christ.
  - **And that’s not just a one-time decision you make. Boasting in the cross is a complete lifestyle.** It’s all about living a cruciform life – a cross-shaped life. Meaning all your decisions, all your priorities, all your actions are intended to communicate that same message – that the cross of Christ is your only hope. That you are single-mindedly devoted to a crucified Savior.
    - **So what message is your life sending?** If someone were to observe how you’re spending your time, how you’re treating your relationships, how you’re handling your money and resources – **is it obvious that you’re boasting in the cross?** That your life is cruciform – shaped by the cross of Christ. What might need to change? What might need to look different from now on?
  
- ❖ Before Christ, in the old order of things, the people of God classified the world into two categories – between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Whether your flesh bore the marks of circumcision made a difference. **But everything has changed now that Christ has come. His cross was the decisive turning point in human history.** Where the old order of things came to an end and a new creation was inaugurated. And in this new creation, a work of the law like circumcision bears no more significance.
  - Listen to v15, “*15For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*” In this new age, in this new creation, people are no longer classified between circumcised and uncircumcised. The only meaningful difference is between those *in* Christ and those still *outside* of Christ. **But, because of the cross, what’s changed is that anyone can be in Christ.** The gospel doesn’t distinguish between ethnicity, race, class, or gender. Remember **Galatians 3:28**, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” Anyone can be in Christ by simply trusting in him.
  
- ❖ **To Paul, circumcision is nothing; uncircumcision is nothing; but the new creation is everything.** He goes on to say in v16 that if you live by that same mindset – if you walk by this same rule – you’ll live out your days under God’s peace and mercy. “*And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*”
  - I like how Paul concludes, in vv17-18, by basically saying don’t mess with me, “*for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.*” Now that’s not a boast in the fleshly sense. **When Paul boasts, he doesn’t boast in things that make him look impressive. He boasts in the things that make him look weak and in need of a Savior (2 Cor 11:30).** Those “*marks of Jesus*” probably refer to the scars he received from all the persecution he experienced for preaching Christ crucified.
    - **The point is that the sign of a cruciform life is not the praise and applaud of this world. It’s the suffering and scorn associated with the cross.** Are you willing to bear them – for the One who bore them for you?