

New Creation

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church, and happy Mother's Day. It's good to see you all this morning. Would you turn with me to Galatians chapter 6, verses 11 through 18. We've come to the end of our series in Galatians today.

Galatians 6, verses 11 through 18. Let me pray for us as we come to God's Word. Father, what a thing to sing that all of our wealth is in the cross. Lord, the cross to our human eyes looks like weakness and defeat.

Lord, so many things we'd love to hold up as our trophies of accomplishment and boast. And yet, truly, Your cross is where real wisdom and real power are found.

So, as we come again to this mighty book of Galatians, as we come again to Your living Word, help us to see Christ in all of His beauty, the crucified and risen One.

Lord, that we might behold Him, worship Him, become more like Him, and serve Him to the glory of Your name. Amen. All right, Galatians 6, 11 through 18. Paul writes this, And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God.

[2 : 04] From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with Your spirit, brothers. Amen.

All right, well, as Paul brings this letter to a close, he takes up the pen and starts writing with his own hand. In the first century, most letters were written by dictation. In other words, Paul would speak, and one of his associates would write it down, and that was the letter that they would send off.

And often at the end of his letters, Paul would take up the pen from his scribe and write a final word. Often it was sort of a short word of blessing or a short word of greeting. But here in Galatians, this final writing from Paul is much fuller and much more emphatic.

He says, Now, some have speculated that maybe Paul had really bad handwriting, or maybe he had bad eyesight, and that's why he had to write his letters so large.

So, you know, if your penmanship isn't so good, well, perhaps you're in good apostolic company, you know. But I actually think the real reason Paul is writing with such large letters is because he really wants to drive these final words home.

[3 : 26] It's as if he's writing an email, and he kind of comes to the end, and he hits, you know, all caps and just starts typing away. Don't miss this. This is bold. This is underlined. This is all caps.

See with what large letters I'm writing to you. And what does, what does Paul want ringing in our ears and in our minds as he draws this passionate letter of Galatians to a close?

Well, no surprise. It's nothing less than the heart of the gospel itself. One more time, Paul wants to highlight the wonderful good news of what Jesus has done so that we might not be taken captive by a false gospel, by a false gospel that says circumcision or any other human work could possibly justify us before God.

In fact, Paul ends by drawing a contrast, a contrast between legalism and the gospel, so that we might spot this deadly legalism before it takes us captive, and so that we might rejoice and rest in the peace and mercy and grace that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring.

So I wonder, having listened to us teach Galatians for the last three, four, five months, can you tell the difference?

[4 : 55] Can you tell the difference when a message or a community or your own heart, perhaps, is operating out of one of these two radically different principles?

Can you tell the difference when you're living out of legalism and works righteousness or when you're living out of the gospel? Well, Paul's going to help us one last time in these final verses.

First, first thing he emphasizes is that there's a difference in what you boast in. There's a difference in what you boast in. A legalistic heart boasts only in the flesh, whereas a gospel-shaped heart boasts only in the cross of Jesus Christ.

In verses 12 and 13, Paul highlights that the teachers who are troubling the Galatians only, what? Want to make a good showing in the flesh. That is, they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

But by contrast, Paul says in verse 14, far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, a legalistic heart is going to boast in what our human efforts can accomplish.

[6 : 05] That's what's going to excite it. That's what's going to energize it. And it's all going to be about our ego and our pride. Look at what I've done. Look at what I deserve.

But the gospel-shaped heart stands not on a resume, not on a list of accomplishments, but it stands before the cross of Jesus Christ. And before the cross, we realize that our human efforts and our human good works can never be good enough to reconcile us to a holy God.

After all, if the labors of our hands could reconcile us to God, if obedience to the law could justify us, then why did Christ have to die? Well, the answer that Paul's been saying again and again in this book is clear.

He says, our works could never atone for our sins, and that's exactly why Jesus came and died in our place. At the cross, the wrath of God that stood over our sins was fully absorbed by Jesus, who took our sins upon Himself and paid our penalty of death in full.

So the gospel doesn't say, God helps those who help themselves. The gospel says, God rescues the helpless by His grace alone. And that's why our boast is not in ourselves or in our righteousness.

[7 : 23] Our boast is in the cross of Jesus Christ, because at the cross, the battle was won, and the debt was paid. And at the cross, the final verdict was cast that declares sinners righteous.

You know, imagine that you're out at sea, and a storm rises up, and your little ship's being battered by the waves, and the sun suddenly goes dark behind the clouds, and then your boat capsizes, and you're flung overboard, and you're floundering in the waves, trying to keep your head above water, but the current's pulling you down, and you know you're lost.

But suddenly, you hear a helicopter overhead, and a diver plunges down into the water after you, ties a rope around your waist, pulls you above the water in the waves, secures your lift into the helicopter, and you're brought to safety.

Now, when you get back to land, what will be your boast? Wow, I did a pretty good job back there. My backstroke practically saved my life, right?

Of course not. Your boast isn't going to be in yourself. Your boast is going to be in your rescuer.

Friends, that's the message of the Bible.

[8 : 38] That's the good news. The triune God has rescued us through the cross. We were dead in our sins, and God made us alive with Christ.

So the cross, not ourselves, will always be our boast. That's why we talk so much about the cross at Trinity, because it is the center of everything.

So we ask ourselves, is it your boast today? Or are you still trying to stand on your own righteousness and your own good works?

Perhaps today is the day when you finally admit that before a holy and perfectly good God, you're actually like a person sinking in the waves.

And with every stroke to save yourself, you sink simply deeper down. Friend, call upon Christ. He's descended into the waters of death and hell on the cross to save all who place their faith in Him.

[9 : 45] Everyone who calls upon Him will be saved. He died and rose again on the third day to atone for all your sins and to secure a perfect and complete salvation. And He'll lift you above the storm of sin and judgment and carry you to safety, to eternal life in His righteousness.

And for those of us who are Christians, who have placed our faith in Christ, isn't it true that we sometimes slip back into that old form of boasting?

Surely we do. Pride comes lurking in. Our old sinful nature wants to steal the glory that only Christ deserves. Ah, look at what I've done, our old self says.

God sure is lucky to have a follower like me. Brothers and sisters, let us return to the foot of the cross. Let our pride be washed away again by the cleansing waters that flow from Calvary and the crucified one.

Let's be freed from that self-centeredness and that selfishness, not so that we might think very little of ourselves, but that we might stop thinking about ourselves at all and focus on God and His great love for us and focus on serving and loving those around us.

[11:05] It was my sin that held Him there, we sing, until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, but I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. So that's the first contrast that Paul wants to drive home in all caps, the big difference between the gospel and legalism is what we boast in.

And the second contrast is this. Paul emphasizes the difference here between whose opinion matters most to us. Whose opinion matters most.

You see, in the legalistic, works, righteousness, heart, it's human opinion that takes center stage. But in the gospel-shaped heart, only God's opinion finally matters.

Again, in verse 12, Paul's opponents are those who want to make a good showing in the flesh. They want other people to notice and applaud. But listen to what Paul says in verse 14.

[12:16] He says, By the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. What the world thinks, the world's opinion, Paul says, has lost all power over me.

Let them applaud. Let them jeer and mock. It doesn't matter to me anymore. Only God's opinion matters now. After all, what does the cross show us?

What does the cross show us? It shows us that the fallen world cannot possibly give us a reliable standard by which we live our lives.

Why so? Because when the King of glory walked among us in the flesh, the embodiment of perfect wisdom and love and truth and righteousness, what did the world do?

The world crucified Him. That was the world's opinion of Jesus. Here's the summit of the world's opinion. Perfect righteousness, truth, glory, love, and justice.

[13:30] Let's kill Him. Now, I don't know about you, but that doesn't seem like a very reliable system to base your life on, does it? Right? You see, when Christ was crucified, the fallen world was exposed as a sham.

Its spell was broken. It comes to us in waves and says, think this way, act this way, believe this way, value this way, love this way, and then Christ was crucified.

And the house of cards came down and we saw it for what it really was. No longer does the world's opinion of what is wise or beautiful or just or true hold any persuasive power when we stand before the cross.

For there, before the crucified and risen Jesus, there is where we behold the fullness of wisdom and power and truth and love. And we live only on the basis of His opinion now.

Can you imagine, can you imagine living a life that isn't blown and tossed by the approval or disapproval of the world? Can you imagine living a life that isn't thrown around by the latest fad of thinking, by the latest, you know, trend of popular opinion?

[14:50] Can you imagine being able to rise above the game of people-pleasing, of flattery, of favor-currying, and peer pressure? Can you imagine not having to ride the rollercoaster of elation when people like and approve of you or of devastation when you get disapproval and rejection?

You know, trying to live your life on the opinion and approval of the world is like trying to build a house on a floating dock in the middle of a storm. Part of my growing up, I lived near a small lake in upstate New York and you could swim out to this little, like, floating dock that was big enough for maybe, like, four or five kids, right?

And, of course, we'd always get that thing really rocking back and forth and then you'd fall off, you know. Imagine a little dock like that in the middle of a storm. Just rocks back and forth and back and forth and, you know, basing your life on the opinion of the world is like trying to build a little house on a dock like that.

You think you build up a wall here, you think you secure a door there, the whole thing rocks again and it all falls down. How many of our lives are like that? But through the cross of Jesus Christ, you don't have to build your life on the fleeting opinions of the world.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

[16:19] On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. You see, by the cross of Jesus, Paul can say, you can say, the world's been crucified to me and I to the world.

So, Christian, do the opinions of the world take up too much real estate in your heart? Are there certain aspects of following Jesus that you're afraid or embarrassed to maybe profess or believe because you're worried of how the world will respond, what your friends, your colleagues, your neighbors will think if you really followed Christ in this area of your life?

Are you blown and tossed by the opinions of the world? Come, let us reason together, God once said through the prophet Isaiah.

Though your sins be like scarlet, I will make them white as snow. Friend, consider all that the triune God has done to prove to you His love and faithfulness.

The Father gave His only Son on the cross to grant you eternal life. He's demonstrated His love for you in a measure beyond human comprehension.

[17 : 32] And if that's how much God loves you, if that's the lengths God has gone to save you, then surely here is a God that you can trust. All His words are true.

All His ways are good. His kingdom may run counter to the cultures of this world, but His kingdom is the only place of lasting and true flourishing. Surely, this God would only be giving you His words and His ways for your flourishing.

When Christ died on the cross, God's love was displayed for you in undeniable glory. So now, how could the world hold anything that could charm us?

I mean, think about it. Has the world ever loved you like Jesus loves you? I mean, I know how fun it is to flip through YouTube and see all those fun videos of like people telling me how I can be fit and happy and wise and wealthy and all these things, right?

But no one has loved us like Christ. And only His ways are good. So why would we now look? Why would we now look to the world's opinions to tell us how money or sex or power should really be used?

[18 : 56] Why would we look to the world's opinions to determine whether we're living a full and robust life? Now, surely, every culture has echoes of God's common grace, and we're grateful for those echoes.

God has not led Himself without a witness in any human culture. But we should not rest content merely with those echoes. Let us press on to the fountainhead.

From God, the one from whom these streams of goodness and truth and beauty flow, let the opinions of Almighty God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, be the lens through which we can really know what is true and good and beautiful.

Now, of course, living for the opinion of God rather than for the opinion of the world, it won't always be easy in this life. It may bring difficulty.

It may even bring conflict. You see, Paul realized that the false teachers in Galatia were preaching circumcision so that they might not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

[20 : 05] Now, what does that mean? Well, in context, you see, in the first century Roman Empire, Judaism was a religion that had legal status and legal protection because it was so ancient and so old.

But many Christians were persecuted because Rome considered Christianity this sort of new and dangerous ideology. They didn't understand that Christianity was simply the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

And given that context, it would have been very tempting for Gentile believers to want to come back under the Old Covenant and get circumcised because then they might not have to face persecution from the Roman authorities.

So, a big draw of this false gospel in the first century was that it allowed you to kind of skirt out of persecution and ostracization and all this stuff.

And friends, it is very much the same today. Most false gospels are shaped in part, consciously or unconsciously, to avoid tension and conflict with the world around us.

[21 : 14] But notice what Paul says in verse 17. From now on, let no one cause me trouble. That is, let no one question this truth that I am bringing to you.

For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. What are these marks of Jesus that Paul is talking about? Well, I think pretty obviously they were the scars that Paul had acquired through being persecuted because he proclaimed to all that he meant that the crucified Jesus was the world's true king.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul recounts how he faced many physical beatings and hardships for the sake of the gospel. The false teachers wanted the Galatians to mark their bodies with circumcision so they could avoid persecution.

But Paul says, don't you see? A willingness to suffer for Christ, those are some of the only true outward marks of the gospel. So, brothers and sisters, don't be afraid to face hardship or rejection for the name of Christ.

Yes, we might be ostracized, we might be ridiculed for following Jesus as Lord, but you need not be afraid. If we suffer with Him, what does the Bible say?

[22 : 31] We will be raised with Him. What did Jesus Himself say? He said, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

God's opinion is the only opinion that matters. So, the first contrast is about what we boast in.

Second contrast is about whose opinion matters most.

Finally, the third contrast is about how real change happens. A legalistic heart tries to change from the outside in, but a gospel-shaped heart changes from the inside out.

In verse 13, Paul points out, he says, even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law. You see, this was the great irony of the false teacher's position. They were saying, well, you have to get circumcised and keep the law to be saved.

[23 : 39] But in reality, even though they were circumcised, they couldn't keep the law, they couldn't keep the whole law. They were just like everybody else, stuck in the old patterns of life.

Outward circumcision could never create an internal change. So, look at what Paul says in verse 15. He says, for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. What really counts isn't external markers, but internal regeneration. That's what it means, really, to be a Christian.

Circumcision could never make you a redeemed child of God. And the same thing is true today.

External symbols and signs don't make you a Christian, a child of God.

We're going to celebrate baptism in just a minute, but baptism doesn't cause you to be a Christian.

We celebrate the Lord's Supper every month. The Lord's Supper doesn't cause you to be a Christian.

[24 : 51] Rather, these things are beautiful, powerful, signs and seals of what God does through faith from the inside out.

What matters is a new creation. Through the Holy Spirit, by faith in Christ, have you been made alive spiritually, internally?

Has your old heart of stone been replaced with a heart of flesh? Have the eyes of your heart been opened to see the gravity of your sin before a holy God and the wonder of God's grace and forgiveness freely offered through Christ as your substitute and Savior?

Have you been born again? That's what matters. Not whether you're Jew or Gentile or male or female, college-educated or self-educated.

Have you been made a new creation? Have you been regenerated? Have you been born again?

Did you know that nearly every major writer in the New Testament, Paul, John, Peter, James, they all describe genuine Christianity, real Christianity, what it means to be a Christian at all as being regenerated, born again, being a new creation in Christ.

[26 : 19] We sometimes think that born again is sort of this label for weird Christians, right?

There's like the born again types over there than there's us serious types over here. The New Testament knows no such distinction.

Every single writer practically in the New Testament says, real, genuine Christianity is being made new. In fact, this is how Jesus himself talks about what he came to do.

He didn't come to give us more rules. He didn't come to give us more examples. He didn't come to give us more ethical principles. That's not ultimately why Jesus came. He came to give us new hearts.

It's not circumcision that matters. It's not your uncircumcision that matters. It's a new creation. And that's where real change comes from. Not from outside in, but from inside out.

Now, you see, it wasn't just in first century Galatia, but it has really been throughout much of Christian history that there have been those who have said, you know, if you really believe that

salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, if you really believe that and preach that, then you know you're just giving people no incentive at all to obey God.

[27 : 42] If you preach that kind of message, people will just be content to stay in their old sinful patterns. That's how people will critique the biblical gospel.

But what this critique misses, completely misses, is that adding more law or requiring more obedience to be saved or more requirements and rituals, that doesn't make us holy either. Only an internal change of heart can begin to bear the fruit of a holy life. And this internal change of heart doesn't come from us, from the outside.

It comes as a gift from God to all who believe in Christ. Real change only happens when our loves begin to be reordered and reshaped by God's love from the inside out.

Pastor Matt mentioned this writer a few weeks ago. A guy named Thomas Chalmers, who was a Scottish pastor many years ago, he wrote an essay called *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*.

[28 : 57] Big words. Preachers in the, you know, 19th century, they liked long titles, you know. I should have called this sermon something cool like that, but I just call it some stuff about the end of Galatians.

The Expulsive Power of a New Affection. What does he mean? He means that when you have a new affection, a new love, that's what has the expulsive power, the power to drive out the old loves. What makes a greedy person generous? What makes a fearful person confident? I mean, think about that. You can tell a fearful person stop being afraid a hundred times over, and it won't move their fear one inch.

Right? But when the fearful heart catches a glimpse of Jesus Christ, the lover of their soul, standing sovereignly amidst the storms of their life, the one who calmed the storms and said, peace be still to the wind and the waves.

You see, let the fearful soul feel the embrace of Christ in all His power and love. And then the words, don't be afraid, suddenly begin to melt the cold hands of fear, and the warm confidence of being a child of God begins to rise in the soul.

[30 : 23] Whom shall I fear? says the heart who sees the God of heavenly hosts, the one who commands the armies of heaven, that God, seeing that God bow low to take up our sinful flesh, bearing away our sins on the cross, rising again in victory over all the worst that hell and death could possibly throw against us?

Indeed, whom shall we fear? That's the expulsive power of a new affection.

Change comes not from outside in, but from inside out. So here are the contrasts that Paul puts in bold at the end of his great letter to the Galatians.

We boast in the cross, not in our flesh. We live for God's opinion, not the world's. And we change from his power inside out, not from the outside in.

And what's the result of all this? Well, interestingly, look at verse 16. And that's for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them and upon the Israel of God.

[31 : 46] In fact, the way that last phrase should be translated is, even upon the Israel of God. Paul isn't distinguishing two groups here. He's saying, this is the real people of God.

That's what Paul's saying. The people of God is no longer defined by circumcision or any external marker, but only by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And in this community defined by faith, what is there? What reigns? Peace and mercy.

You see, where the gospel reigns, there is peace and there is mercy. Peace because we no longer live under the condemning voice of the law, and mercy because we have been forgiven.

And a community like that, a community, a church that lives in peace and mercy, will be a community that extends peace and mercy.

[32 : 50] Friends, being a people of the gospel means being a people of peace and not violence. Being a people of mercy and not hatred and bitterness.

That's a place where the gospel reigns. And what makes that possible is what Paul's been talking about throughout this entire book. Grace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.

May our church be a church of grace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then our Lord Jesus Christ will get all the praise that He deserves.

Let's pray together. O Lord, as we come to the end of this book of Galatians, Lord, as it seems, like Luther said so many years ago, we've been just hammering the gospel into our heads week after

week.

O Lord, would it descend from our heads into our hearts, and would you give us a fresh taste by your spirit of how sweet and good and lovely is our Savior, Jesus Christ?

[34 : 07] Would we be a church that lives by His grace, that lives in peace and mercy, that boasts in the cross? Would we be a church where we say, oh, the world is crucified to us and us to the world?

And out of that place, Lord, where we no longer need the opinions of the world, would we be equipped by Your Spirit to truly love this world that You have loved so much and to go forth to serve and to proclaim Jesus is Lord.

We ask all this in Your mighty name, Jesus. Amen.