

**Galatians 6: 11-13; “The Boast of the Flesh”, Message # 61 in the series –
“Christ has Set us Free”, a Bible Study conducted on November 30th, 2016,
by Pastor Paul Rendall at his home.**

Paul is now coming to the end of his letter. He is now going to give us the peroration (the ending summary of his discourse) to this mighty letter which he wrote to the churches of Galatia. He begins it by an explanation which may seem like a boast when it is first read – “See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!” We should understand that there were a number of Paul’s letters which were written by means of an amanuensis; someone to whom he would dictate the very word of God, and have that helper write down the exact words which the Holy Spirit would bring to his mind. When he needed a helper of this kind, he personally appointed someone to the task. In Romans 16: 22, we read of such a man: “I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. If it is true that the “trial of Paul’s flesh”, which he mentions in Galatians 4: 13 and 14 was some kind of bodily weakness, such as weakness in his physical vision, we may suppose that it was a great labor indeed for him to sit and write a long letter; especially one which involved so much doctrinal delineation and precision. This is the reason that Paul makes this boast. It is a boasting in the Lord’s help to him to write this whole long letter with his own hand. He is boasting in his infirmity in order that the power of Christ might rest upon him. He took pleasure in these infirmities of his physical flesh, for Christ’s sake, he says in 2nd Corinthians 12: 10.

This is a good introduction to what follows in verses 12 and 13 where we find Paul speaking of the danger of boasting in an outward religion. He is warning against that kind of boasting where you falsely think yourself to be righteous and approved by God because you go to church which is called Christian, and you have participated in certain outward observances and ceremonies. Paul is stating here that the false teachers who promote an outward ceremonial religion as the essence of what it means to be a Christian, will try to impress other people with their own supposed wisdom through their preaching the false doctrine of a works-righteousness. And they will try to compel other people to believe in their false conclusions. Paul says in verse 12: “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 persecution for the cross of Christ.” So, this evening I would like to make 4 observations on what characterizes false teachers. 1st – False teachers desire to make a good showing in the flesh. 2nd – False teachers would compel you observe outward ordinances and ceremonies in order to avoid persecution. 3rd – False teachers do not really keep the law in a way that pleases God. 4th – False Teachers would boast in your flesh.

1st of all – False teachers desire to make a good showing in the flesh.

It seems to be the greatest desire of those who would justify themselves as righteous in the sight of God, that they would make a good showing in the flesh. Truly, they are more concerned with how they look in other people’s eyes and in their own eyes, than how they really look in God’s eyes. The sins of the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus’s day were the same sins that Paul was dealing with in his day, and to some extent, they are the same in our own day. Turn with me over to Matthew chapter 23, verses 1-12. “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.” “For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” “But all their works they do to be seen by men.” “They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.” “They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher,

the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.” “And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.” “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

To make a good showing in the flesh is to exalt yourself. It is to promote yourself, and to attempt to look as though you are the best and the greatest before men, in all the situations of your life. You can see here from verse 5 that the Pharisees and the scribes did all of their works to be seen by men. This is making true religion to supposedly consist in externals; things that men see, rather than in thinking about God and how he sees you as a person in the way that you live your life. They wanted to be seen as being great and godly men. But this was all an outward show. They loved having the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the market-places, and to be called Rabbi and father and teacher. But Jesus knocks all of this “good show” in the flesh down. This good show in the flesh is related to pride and wanting to be seen as great. But Jesus says that the one who is greatest would be their servant, and the person who humbles himself will be exalted. To put forth a good showing in the flesh means that you want to be seen by men and looked up to by men as being someone great; as a very religious person or a teacher. But Jesus says that One is your teacher; that is He Himself.

I wonder how many professed Christians really see things in this way? It appears that many want to promote themselves and their own greatness, and it appears that they have not understood that God is the One who promotes people to positions of true greatness. Turn with me over to Psalm 75: 1-6. “We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks!” “For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near. “When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly.” “The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly. Selah “I said to the boastful, ‘Do not deal boastfully,’ And to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up the horn.” “Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck.” “For exaltation (or promotion, it says in the King James) comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south.” “But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.” Instead of trying to make a good showing in the flesh, let us humble ourselves in the sight of God that we might be exalted at the proper time.

2nd – False teachers would compel you to observe outward ordinances and ceremonies in order to avoid persecution.

Verse 12 says, “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 persecution for the cross of Christ.” To compel, in this case, does not mean necessarily to use force to bring about this conformity of becoming a circumcised person, but it rather means that the person refusing to go along with the teaching of the legalists would surely not be able to remain within the number of those who stood approved by the leaders of the Jewish nation and synagogues in that day. And they would be spoken against, and they would be excommunicated. In the churches of Galatia it took a slightly different form since these churches had been founded by the preaching and teaching of the apostle Paul.

Turn with me over to 2nd Corinthians 11, verses 18-30. “Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!” “For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.” “To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold – I speak foolishly – I am bold also.” “Are they Hebrews?” “So am I.” “Are they Israelites?” “So am I.” Are they the seed of Abraham?” “So am I.” “Are they ministers of Christ?” – “I speak as a fool – I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.” “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.” “Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in

perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” “Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.”

Here we see that Paul knew that there was a problem with fleshly boasting in these churches that he was writing to. They had been put into a spiritual bondage by the false teachers who had come to them. These men had declared themselves to know better than Paul what constituted salvation. They had taught the churches of both Corinth and Galatia that circumcision had to be added to faith in Christ in order to be saved. They attempt to use fleshly methods in enforcing their teaching. They would devour them, take from them, exalt themselves, even strike those who resisted their teaching on the face. Paul says that he used no such means. He and those with him were too weak to use fleshly methods and means to accomplish their objectives. He tells them of all of the persecution that he had endured, the perils that he had placed himself in, to be able to show those whom he was preaching to, the genuineness of his faith and the truth that he preached to them. He endured sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, and took to fasting often. He suffered all kinds of physical deprivation; cold, nakedness, and sleeplessness as he toiled. What a contrast to the false teachers in their midst. The false teachers preached circumcision as the way to be saved; a ceremony. But Paul preached Christ. His glorying was a different kind of glorying from theirs. His was boasting not in ceremonies and ordinances, but in what the Spirit had produced in his life and what he was enabled to do to keep the commandments of God, by the Spirit’s help and working. He would glory in that.

3rd – False teachers do not really keep the law in a way that pleases God.

Verse 13 says: “For not even those who are circumcised keep the law.....” These Judaizing teachers claimed to be keeping the law, but Paul states here that they really were not keeping it. Look over at 1st Corinthians 7: 18 and 19. “Was anyone called while circumcised?” “Let him not become uncircumcised.” “Was anyone called while uncircumcised?” “Let him not be circumcised.” “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.” It ought to be evident to us by now that no one except Christ has perfectly kept the commandments of God. And Paul has been telling us that it is not by observing outward ordinances that salvation is found, or that God is pleased with your obedience to Him. How then does this “keeping of the commandments of God” take place?

Well, it does not take place legalistically, as if we inherently have the power to keep them, or the wisdom to know how to go about to do them to the glory of God. Rather, the commandments of God are kept by the true Christian by faith in what Christ has done for him, and by the grace of what Christ is doing for him after he is converted to God; after he has come to know Him. Philippians 3: 1-3 – “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” “For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.” “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!” “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” It is when the believer in Christ is rejoicing in what Christ has done for Him and what He is continually doing for him in supplying him with righteousness and strength, that is when He can by the Spirit’s power keep the commandments of God in a way that pleases God. God has accepted the perfect obedience of Christ in the place of your rendering to Him a perfect obedience. He imputes Christ’s righteousness to your person, and to all of your good works. And thus you are enabled by Christ’s grace to do those things which please him; your many deficiencies and sins not excepted. Truly, you should continually rejoice in God’s way of looking at these things, and make it your own.

4th – False Teachers would boast in your flesh.

“For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.” Religious but unsaved people desire that you would follow their thoughts and their lead. False teachers want to take you in, with the things which they impose upon the true gospel and the word of God. They want you to take your cues from them as regards spiritual things, so that they might boast in your flesh. They want to boast in your having accepted their view that a sacramental religion will save, and that it is not necessary for you to be converted to Christ in order to be saved. They want you to believe that Christ’s sufferings were not absolutely necessary for your salvation; that you actually can merit favor with God by Your good works, and your attempts to do what is right according to your own definition of what is right. But Paul says – “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.” The world’s view of salvation, has been crucified to you, if you have believed in Jesus Christ. And you have been crucified to it. Let us close with these verses from Colossians 2: 6-10a. “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him.”