

July 27, 2025

Galatians 6

This last month we have been talking about the Gospel. The Gospel of Christianity is not that if you obey God or become like him, then he'll accept and love you. The message of Christianity is that all of us are so sinful, so unworthy, so lost, so blind, that none of our law-keeping or efforts could ever be good enough for God's love. The Gospel is not a way to earn anything from Jesus. It's not a rule or a guide. The Gospel is *news*. God himself came and became a human being. He was the perfect human being in our place, and died in our place, and if you believe in him, believe in what he's done for you, which we call "faith," his perfect obedience, his goodness, his holiness, is put on you like a beautiful robe. That is the Gospel. No rules. No conditions. No "buts." Just the grace of God given to you at the cost of Jesus' blood. But Paul made it clear last week that this Gospel produces good works, love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, compassion, generosity, self-control in our hearts- and in doing so, we actually become what God has wanted all along- obedient to him not out of fear or pride, but love. And in chapter six, Paul then gives specific examples and instructions on how the Gospel plays out in our lives. The Church doesn't simply believe or teach the Gospel. **"The Church Lives the Gospel"**

Most of you have been members of a church long enough that it's possible for a church to talk about love and kindness, but not actually have love and kindness as a part of its culture. It's very possible for a church to teach love, kindness, respect, and all these nice things from the pulpit, but be just as slanderous, spiteful, bitter, selfish, and mean in the way that people actually deal with each other. So, what does a Gospel-driven church, a church that not only preaches the Gospel, but believes the Gospel, loves the Gospel, and LIVES the Gospel, look like? *Firstly, they restore sinners gently.* Paul talks about someone who is trapped by a sin, perhaps a Christian who has a character flaw- they are prone to anger, or a Christian who is in a sin they shouldn't be in. If the Gospel is true, then that means that this person is in danger and needs to be addressed, but it's also true that I am just as sinful, just as deserving of eternal wrath, just as desperate for God's forgiveness, so I'm going to be gentle, kind, but honest. Often, churches are either incredibly harsh toward people who are caught in a public sin as if they are better, or they just ignore it as if it's not a big deal. Neither is right. Sin condemns, but Christ has died for all of our sin, therefore, we honestly and gently and kindly restore sinners to repentance. *Secondly, Christians bear each other's burdens sacrificially.* The picture Paul is painting is that a person has a 100 pound weight on their shoulders, and it's heavy, and a person comes and says, "let me bear that with you," so both have 50 pounds. In order for that to happen, however, the other person does have to take on a burden, and that's a sacrifice. When a person is grieving the loss of a loved one, it's one thing to say, "We're praying for you," or "You're in our thoughts." It's another thing to visit them, cry with them, grieve with them, listen to them. At that moment, you start grieving too, but it makes the pain more manageable. Another situation- when a person is a bit immature and can be a lot to deal with, many Christians will be nice, but not actually become friends with that kind of person because it's difficult! It's inconvenient! But if the Gospel is true, and Jesus Christ bore our sins

on his shoulders, then it's a privilege to bear with each other and purposely be friends with Christians who have flaws and difficulties, and in doing so, they grow. Luther said that Christians need to have "*broad shoulders and husky bones in order to bear each other's burdens.*" That takes real friendship, real love, and real sacrifice.

A Gospel-driven church *thinks humbly*. One of the first and most obvious signs of forgetting the Gospel is *arrogance, ego, and pride*: "I'm really important, and everyone else should think that I am, too." When a person embraces self-righteousness, they are saying, "I can earn my way to God by my goodness and accomplishments." What happens, however, is that they become at the same time conceited because of all the people who aren't as good as them, and insecure because of all the people more moral, successful, and worthy than them. So, they have to boast about their goodness, their accomplishments, their kids, their followers, their beauty, their everything good- and they assume that when enough people think highly of them, they will finally be worthy. Luther responds: "*It is the height of insanity to look for the ground of your boasting in others, not in yourself. For in your death struggle and at the Last Judgment it will not help you at all that others praised you. Others will not bear your load, but you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and bear your own load alone. There your partisans will not be able to help you at all; for when we die, the voices of those who praise us will be stilled. The Testimony of your conscience will stand either for you or against you.*" Christians who know they are saved by grace alone know that it doesn't matter what others think about them, which makes them both humble, and confident. The Gospel-driven church is *generous* and invests in the Gospel- they are generous with their church because they know how generous Christ has been with them, and they view that Gospel message as something worth supporting. The Gospel-driven church *sows fearfully*. We are forgiven and saved by faith alone, not by our good works. God is infinitely compassionate, gracious, merciful, patient, and kind- more than we would ever dare imagine. But he will not be mocked. Actions have consequences here on earth. When Christians don't take God's Word seriously, don't take church seriously, don't worship seriously, don't take raising their children in the Lord seriously, don't give seriously, don't take fighting temptation seriously, that will have consequences. But the Gospel-driven church also *endures joyfully and never gives up*. Because if the Gospel is true, and Jesus has conquered sin and death forever, that means nothing we do for him is ever a waste of time- it always produces a harvest. Teaching your children and grandchildren to love Jesus is never a waste, inviting your friends to hear about their savior is never a waste, showing love and kindness and investing yourself into your brothers and sisters and your church is never a waste because the Gospel of Jesus is powerful. Does that mean your work gets immediate results? Does planting seeds in the field get immediate results? Of course not- but with time, God provides.

A good example of the power of a Gospel-driven church is a woman named Rosaria Butterfield. In the 90's she was a rabidly anti-Christian English professor at Syracuse University who hated the Bible, hated Christians, and was the last person you'd ever expect to become a Christian. One

day, she received a letter from a local pastor. He had seen some of the words she wrote published in the paper bashing the Bible and churches that teach it, and he said, “Here are all the arguments that prove you wrong.” No, instead, he said, “I’d like to learn more about your experiences, and perhaps you’d like to know what I think. You should come to our house for dinner.” So she did. And over time, Rosaria, Pastor Smith, and his wife became close friends, and invited Rosaria to church. It took patience- Rosaria had many questions and doubts and years of simmering anger. It took perseverance- she declined their invitation to church several times. It took generosity- hours and hours of conversation, prayer, and relationship-building and dinners. It took gentleness and listening to her concerns and questions. It took humility, not assuming that because Rosaria was a radical, feminist, anti-Christian zealot, she was automatically stupid, but instead treating her with respect and honesty. No, they never compromised the truth, they were very clear about what the Bible said, but they were kind, gentle, and patient. And over time, the Holy Spirit caused Rosaria to see that she was arrogant, selfish, and in desperate need for a Savior. And she trusted in Jesus and was saved. Looking back on her experience, she said this: *“Our post-Christian neighbors need to hear and see and taste and feel authentic Christianity, hospitality spreading from every Christian home that includes neighbors in prayer, food, friendship, childcare, dog walking, and all the daily matters upon which friendships are built.”* Christians must *live* the Gospel.

Lastly, **Christians suffer for the Gospel and boast in the Cross.** We’ve talked about *what* the false teachers were teaching in the Galatian Churches- “Jesus’ blood on the cross isn’t enough, you need to be circumcised, eat kosher, and so on if you *really* want to be saved.” But we haven’t quite asked that question: why? Why would they teach something like that? Were they purposely trying to subvert and destroy the central truth of Jesus? Probably not. So, why did they do this? *Fear.* At this time in the Roman Empire, there was a great deal of violence toward the Jewish people. The Jewish people retaliated, often performing acts of violence toward Gentiles and even Jews weren’t Jewish enough- which would often include Jewish Christians who would dare eat with Gentiles, or allow Gentiles to think they could be a part of God’s people without becoming Jewish first- like Stephen, Paul, Peter, and other Christian leaders. These false teachers were afraid of being hated, being dismissed, and being mocked by their Jewish peers, and they were using the Galatian Christians, these brand new converts to the Faith to make themselves look good to the powerful Jewish people at home. They wanted to be able to boast, to have confidence, to be something by their ability to make these Gentile “heathens” into circumcised Jews- oh, and if they believe in Jesus as well, that’s fine, too.

Paul exposes them: They were hypocrites- they hadn’t obeyed the Law of Moses well enough to be accepted by God, they had to be forgiven by Jesus’ sacrifice, and yet they were making Galatian Christians earn their place in God’s house by these works. Pure hypocrisy, cowardice, and pride. And then Paul says something astounding- he boasts in nothing but the Cross of Jesus. What he means is this: Paul was a brilliant teacher and theologian. Paul was a powerful

miracle-worker and authoritative leader chosen by Christ himself. Paul was the most successful church planter and greatest pastor to ever live. But that's not *who* he is. That is not where his worth, value, esteem, or boasting comes from. It comes from the fact that Jesus has declared him absolutely holy and perfect- that is why he is confident. Therefore, it *simply does not matter* what anyone thinks about him. If a perfect God declares you to be perfect, it really doesn't matter what anyone else thinks about you. If the King of the Universe declares you to be infinitely valuable and worth dying for, then who cares if others reject you? If the God of Love loves you, who cares if anyone else hates you? If the God of Wisdom who is intelligence itself teaches you to believe something, who cares if others think you're foolish? And the thing is, they will. The world hated Jesus, mocked Jesus, rejected Jesus, crucified Jesus. What will it do to those who follow him faithfully? Jesus was different. His Gospel is different. His doctrine is different. We are called to be different. We are graciously called by Jesus to trust in him, and believe his Gospel, to teach his Gospel, to defend his Gospel, to define his Gospel, to study his Gospel, and to live his Gospel. It's a Gospel worth everything. Amen.