

January 27, 2008

“The Rule of the Gospel” Galatians 6:11-18

FCF: Ever present danger of losing sight of the gospel (the most vital thing)

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The “rule of the gospel” is unlike any other.

(magnet) And it transforms our view on the most significant issues before us.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Fanny Crosby wrote more than 9,000 hymns, so many she used use pen names to keep the hymnals from being overcrowded with her own. What you may not know is that all this was despite a blindness that came quite early in life ([READ Crosby quotes](#)):

“I think it is a great pity that the Master did not give you sight when he showered so many other gifts upon you,” someone once said. She quickly responded, *“Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I was born blind? Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior.”*

Fanny became ill before she was even two months old. Unfortunately, the family doctor was away, and another man, pretending to be a certified physician, treated her by prescribing hot mustard poultices to be applied to her eyes. Her illness eventually relented, but the treatment left her blind. And the supposed doctor disappeared.

There are still such supposed treatments that can do great damage – not just in the physical realm but in the spiritual as well. And they do immeasurable harm to our souls. Such is Paul’s concern here in the final words of his letter to the church of Galatia.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Galatians 6:11-18](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

January, being the cold, dark, wet month it is, often has its depressing effects. Especially following the warmth and jubilation of Christmas. Not to worry! Dr. Cliff Arnalls has found the solution – a formula that calculates these effects and frees us to ward off such wintry blues ([READ formula](#)): $1/8W + (D-d)3/8 \times TQM \times NA$. Just plug in the weather, your debt, January income, time since Christmas, time since your last failed attempt to quit a bad habit, your general motivational levels, and then your need to take action and you are set. Prepared and ready to survive this especially dangerous month.

I have no idea if there’s any validity to that formula and whether we should pay any attention to it. I do know there’s overwhelming validity to these words from Galatians and we should pay attention to it. Paul has more in mind than just our survival. And he gives us far more than a formula. He sets before us a person and His work in whom and in which we are called to trust – Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

We come to the end of the letter. And at the end, Paul makes a shift. Thus far, he had been dictating to a secretary. But now, adding a personal postscript, he takes the pen, writing “large letters” in his own hand. The point of those large letters was for emphasis, to draw attention to what it was he was about to say – a summary of the letter and, in fact, a summary of the gospel itself ([READ Galatians 6:16](#)). This is the “rule” of the gospel – a “canon,” a measuring line, a standard, a path on which and by which to walk. It is the gospel – a message unlike any other, bringing rest, joy, and hope unlike any other. It is the message of God’s transforming grace that had made Paul “the apostle of the heart set free.” And, longing to see the hearts of others set free as well, Paul then sets this out before us yet one more time. And in doing so, he shows us that this rule – again, unlike any other, transforms our views on the most significant issues we could consider.

I. WHAT IS IMPORTANT

The first being simply this – what is important. A point made all the more vital considering the great confusion and complications that come with such confusion. In our relationship with God, what is important? What does He place the priority upon?

A) *The Place of the Outward*

What is important? More specifically, what is the place of the outward? (READ Galatians 6:12-13) The outward act here is obviously the Jewish rite of circumcision.

1. What circumcision was for

What was it for? What did it represent? It was given to Abraham by God to serve as a sign of the covenant. It was to represent a “circumcision of the heart” – a constant reminder of who and whose that person was and the promises that were theirs.

2. How it was being abused

And, as such, it was a good thing. A good thing being abused and mishandled. The Judaizers, the teachers of this “Jesus plus” message that one could be saved “*by grace almost, through faith almost, in Christ almost,*” were keeping score. They were tallying how many they could swing to their side so as to prove their zeal. And in doing so, they were confusing people – appealing to their desire for an easier, more palatable message, but leaving them with nothing more than a flawed self-help program. “Jesus plus.”

B) *The Need for the Inward*

Now, there is a place for such outward signs – so long as they serve as outward symbols of inward realities. But they are not solutions. So with the place of the outward, Paul then goes on to address the need for the inward (READ Galatians 6:15).

1. Rebirth

A new creation – rebirth, regeneration (READ 2 Corinthians 5:17). That’s what matters.

2. Renewal

A renewal that is at work and moving from the inside out. A new creation making us new creatures, coming to fulfillment in the future but beginning now. (READ Galatians 2:20) The idea is that we are depending so much on Christ, He then is living through us.

And Paul’s point is that anything else is just an empty dead shell.

Illustration:

The *Queen Mary* was the largest ship to cross the oceans when it was launched in 1936. Through four decades and a world war she served until she was retired, anchored as a floating hotel and museum in California. During the conversion, her three massive smokestacks were taken off to be scraped down and repainted. But on the dock they crumbled. Nothing was left of the $\frac{3}{4}$ ” steel plate from which the stacks had been formed. All that remained were more than 30 coats of paint. The steel had just rusted away.

Application:

Jesus rescues us from this, from living as though it was just the outward that mattered, lives of paint. Yet we do struggle here. Think of ancient Israel and her reliance on forms. Think of the Pharisees in Jesus’ day. Or the medieval church. Or Roman Catholicism. Or Protestantism today. Liberal churches focus on the externals – poverty, racism, and the environment – all things worth addressing. Conservative churches focus on the externals too – theology, piety, and standards of morality. And despite what either says, it’s still the same thing – a focus on the externals. But what of the internal? It’s all just more layers of paint – different colors, perhaps, but just more layers of paint.

It’s our default mode. Why? It’s easier. We decide what they’ll be. We attain what we decide. And then we settle. And struggle, wondering, “*Is this it?*” And all the

while, Jesus is saying, “*NO! I’ve come that you might be engaged in those things and so much more! I’ve come to free you from the paint, to secure your standing in heaven, and to bring change even on this earth. To work into you ever increasing measures of* (READ Galatians 5:22-23). The rule of the gospel is unlike any other. And it transforms our view of the most significant issues before us, showing us what God says is important.

II. WHO DOES THE WORK

But there’s a second aspect to this rule Paul shows. Not only “what is important” but “who does the work.” And here the apostle makes crystal clear not only who does the work but who then gets all the credit, and thus who gets all the praise. And it’s not us.

A) *The Call of the Gospel*

And you can see this in two ways. First, in the call of the gospel itself (READ Galatians 6:14-15). What is this call? What is it to believe this good news?

1. To spurn “the world”

It means to spurn “the world” – not to say creation, the affairs, or the people of the world but the ways of this world – our self-dependence, self-sufficiency, self-rule, and self-righteousness. Others might rely upon popularity, intellect, influence, appearance, income, job performance. No more. Paul alludes to this in what he himself had laid aside (READ Philippians 3:4b-9). Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. Why? They’re essentially the same. Neither amounts to anything. There’s no “boasting” to be had there. For there’s nothing to be found, nothing there to boast in.

2. To embrace “the cross”

To believe the gospel, to accept this news, is to spurn such things. And to embrace the cross. Now this concept was so shocking to a 1st century hearer – not only because of what was being spurned but because of what was being embraced. The cross. It was an object unmentionable in polite Roman society. Even the sentence of crucifixion was pronounced in the form of a euphemism, “*Hang him on the unlucky tree.*” People did not even speak of it. And yet Paul calls us to “boast” in it. We need to recapture something of that. That in which we are to glory, trust, revel, rejoice, and live for was the most shameful despicable thing imaginable. And yet it’s higher than anything we have to give.

B) *The Hostility to the Gospel*

Which then takes us from the call of the gospel to the hostility towards the gospel (READ Galatians 6:17). To follow Christ is to walk on the road to Calvary. And that is a road upon which you will be jeered, mocked, ostracized, and perhaps far worse.

1. Evidence

We see evidence of it even here in this text. Paul challenged the claims of the Judaizers and their shallow understanding of the law. He also challenged their motives. As one writer put it, they wanted “*to avoid pokes and win strokes.*” This middle road they were trying to take between the gospel and the works-righteousness of 1st century Judaism was an attempt to avoid persecution from the Jews. The sort of thing Paul had encountered planting the churches in that area (READ 2 Corinthians 11:21b-28). The marks they held high were not the same marks Paul bore on his body. But his marks were inevitable.

2. Explanation

They were inevitable when you consider the offense, what was called the “scandal” of the cross. To speak of “*monergism,*” to say God does the work in making a sinner right with Him and we do none of it is offensive. It doesn’t go down easy. Not then. Not now.

Illustration:

Americans love Mexican food. Or at least we think we do. Once upon a time, small companies marketed an authentic-style Mexican food that even a native could love. But those companies have been bought out. And the recipes have changed, made more appealing to the market. (READ quotes) “*Heat has to be carefully rationed at Old El Paso,*” said one spokesperson. So now we have “cool salsa.” Industry experts call this “gringo food.” One writer noted, “*About the only thing missing from the boom is Mexicans...In 20 years, you won’t even recognize what they’ll be calling Mexican food.*”

The point? We need to beware of a “gringo gospel” – an inauthentic message made more palatable, more pleasing to the market. Such a false gospel may be soothing to the taste. But it is powerless to save. We need to let it stand – offense and all.

Application:

(READ Galatians 6:17) Here Paul is giving a warning. To the Judaizers, he’s saying, in essence, “*Buzz off and get out.*” But there is a warning for the Galatians here as well. And for us. “*Be prepared.*” This is what it means to follow Christ, to walk the road of Calvary. Be prepared to bear such marks – if not literally, certainly figuratively.

“*Be prepared. And be offended.*” This message is “by grace alone” and not by your merit. This message is “through faith alone” and not through your works. This message is “in Christ alone” and nothing in you. If you are His, it is despite you and not because of you. Be prepared to be marked and be prepared to be offended. For when you have, then you’ve heard. “*Oh, but Jesus! Nothing in my hand I bring? Simply to the cross I cling? Naked, come to thee for dress? Helpless, look to thee for grace? Foul, I to the fountain fly? Wash me, Savior, or I die?*” “*Yes. Now you’ve heard Me.*”

CONCLUSION:

(READ Galatians 6:16) To hear and heed these things, to embrace this rule and teaching, is to find peace and mercy. It is to discover the very things with which our empty hearts long to be filled. “Peace” – harkening back to the Hebrew concept of “shalom” – a sense of rightness, completeness, fullness, the way things were actually meant to be. We are hardwired for this. We long for it. Yet those longings are so frustrated as we try to work something, to do something, that’s already been done.

I heard a story this past week of the great escape artist, Harry Houdini. Houdini had an astounding ability to free himself from handcuffs, ropes, locked trunks, and bonds of any sort. And he traveled about the country demonstrating this. One of the things he would do as he arrived in a city was to visit the local jail, invite the guards to lock him in a cell, and then escape. And he did this time and time again with great success. Except for one occasion when, no matter what he did, he could not get the lock to turn and he finally gave up. “*How did you do it?*” he asked. “*We left the door unlocked,*” the guards replied. “*All you had to do was push.*” Houdini was trying to do something for himself that had already been done for him. And he was wearing himself out in the process.

It’s no stretch to say some of us this morning are in that very place – trying to do something for ourselves that has already been done for us. And wearing ourselves out in the process. With the rule of the gospel, with the finished work of Christ, peace has come. Peace by mercy. The peace you seek is found in the mercy of God. The longing within your heart for peace within you and peace with others is found in your greatest and deepest longing of all – peace with God. And that is found in Jesus and in Jesus alone. Stop trying to do for yourself what’s already been done (READ Galatians 6:11; 18).

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