

Nothing but the Blood (Part 21)

Galatians 6:11-18

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What motivations do you have when you look for a spiritual community? When I was in college, I settled for the first church I visited because it reminded me of my home church. It was the sense of familiarity that motivated me. Maybe some of you are motivated by the music, the quality of the sermons, or the children's program. In today's passage Paul tells us which are improper motivations and which things we should be motivated by.

Recall that Paul founded the church in Galatia. He taught them the true gospel, that faith in Jesus is all that is required for salvation. But after he left agitators rose up and began to teach that circumcision and following the Law were also required. Paul spent the entire letter combatting this false teaching, and now he tells us what the motivations of these false teachers were. In v. 11 he mentions the large letters written in his own hand. Usually a scribe would help write letters; but when Paul writes in his own hand in large letters, it means he really wants to emphasize it. He then goes on to give three motives the agitators have for preaching circumcision.

First, in v. 12 he states that they are trying to make a good outward impression. The original word in Greek is a compound word combining "good" and "face." They cared about looking good, not about spiritual things or about others in the church. It's clear that these agitators are bad examples for us. But how often do we follow their lead? How often are we overly concerned about putting on a good face? On social media everyone tries to paint such a rosy picture of their lives to impress everyone else or make them jealous. They seldom reveal the problems they are facing or show any vulnerability. As Asians, we are used to this mentality of saving face. When my father was on peritoneal dialysis, he stopped going to church because he was embarrassed about his catheter. Often we are driven by embarrassment and the need to save face. But Paul tells us that these are not proper motivations.

In v. 12 Paul also mentions that the agitators are trying to avoid persecution. They are motivated by their comfort. Being Christian in a Jewish region was difficult and Christians were often persecuted. To avoid suffering, these agitators preached adherence to the old Jewish Law. How often are we driven by comfort or the need to feel good? This type of motivations leads some to complain about things like the chairs at church being uncomfortable. But this motivation

is ultimately a selfish one and is not concerned with others. So we see the false teachers cared about looking good and feeling good.

The third motivation they had for preaching circumcision was that it gave them the opportunity to boast about their influence on the congregation (v. 13). For pastors it is hard to resist comparing the size of our congregations. It shouldn't matter, but it often does to most pastors. I once guest spoke at a church with only six members. To pastor a church that small is deflating and sometimes discouraging. It requires extreme dedication. We prepare sermons because we want to be heard. If barely anyone shows up, it is discouraging. But we must always strive to think not about the number of people in attendance, but about the people themselves. It's tempting to boast about having a large congregation and to elevate one's self. But like the other two bad motivations, this one is ultimately selfish, and not concerned with others.

In contrast, Paul states in v. 14 that he boasts in the cross of Jesus Christ, through which he has been crucified with Christ, and crucified to the world. These worldly motivations should be set aside. The world is dead to us now. We belong to the kingdom of God now, and we must be motivated by doing the work of the kingdom so that Jesus may find us doing so when He returns. I'm alright if someone wants to leave the church to find something that suits them better. I'll help them find something that fits them because ultimately the motivation should be their spiritual growth. This is what matters eternally. We are new creations (v. 15), with new motivations. And when we stop the exhausting obsession with our outward appearance, our own comfort, and our influence, then we will have peace (v. 16). Sometimes it means we have to accept not looking our best, or suffering trials and persecution. It's not easy, and we often struggle with having the same motivations as the agitators. So let us never stop seeking strength from Jesus and encouraging each other in this, that we may live lives that seek to do the will of God.