

## **The Marks of a True Shepherd**

Galatians 6:11-18

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### TRANSCRIPT:

Galatians Chapter 6:11-18 reads, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! 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. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But 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. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Lord, we come to You now asking that You would speak to our hearts through these ancient words that You have long preserved for us. Today, we believe, Lord God, that the words before us are the words of life, the words of the Living God. I pray You'll send Your Holy Spirit to communicate those words with power to our hearts, Lord God, that we might receive edification, comfort, and strength through the power of the Holy Spirit. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, this is Paul's conclusion to this epistle, and in his conclusion, he draws a comparison between himself and the false teachers that had been, if you could say, agitating the churches, the believers of the churches of Galatia. He is concerned, of course, that they would continue in the grace of God and has understood that another gospel would threaten them, threaten their souls, threaten their lives, threaten the community. And he understands, though, that these people have been so affected that they're not seeing clearly about the pathway forward and about the truth of God. This is the whole reason why he wrote this epistle. He has been writing it so that they might understand and be turned back to the true gospel and discern the difference between false shepherds and true shepherds, and

the true gospel and another gospel, and they might be able then to rejoice in Christ Jesus the Lord and continue walking in His way.

And this conclusion serves as a kind of lens. It's almost as if Paul sees them as those who have vision impairment. I've had glasses for a long time, maybe since I was 10. Didn't like wearing them, but I had to get to the point where it's like, you squinting at that whiteboard is not going to suffice, and yeah, no excuses for not paying attention in class. Anyhow, I had a problem without my glasses of interpreting the world around me. For example, if I take off my glasses right now, you're all a big blur. And so, for example, one of you could come up here and say to me, "I can say, 'What am I seeing over here?' and you can be like, 'Oh, well, this is what you're seeing over here,' and you can describe it to me." Then I can take your word for it and be like, "Okay, now I understand what's going on over here," and you can walk by my side the whole way and explain to me and help me with my vision impairment by just communicating to me those things that I can at least understand what's going on and interpret the world around me. Or you can give me a set of glasses that I can put on, and then I can now interpret the world around me by having corrective lenses.

I would say that this conclusion serves in that very way. Paul understands that he cannot stay by the side of the Galatians for all their lives and for generations to come and tell them, "Oh, this is the name of this false teacher, watch out," and "Oh, this is the false teaching that you never be aware of here," and go on and on and on and on and on explaining to them all the false teachings and teachers that will ever be. He knows eventually there will come a time where he will pass, and unless he gives them the right lenses by which they can interpret false teachers and false teaching, he would have to stay by their side, and they will be forever dependent on him to determine truth from error. And so, what Paul does, in one way here in this conclusion, is that he gives them the framework and the glasses by which they can now interpret the true from the false.

And in verse number 11, Paul says, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand." Look, this section here, Paul takes the pen off the scribe who's been dictating to this scribe about what he wants to write in this epistle, but at this very point, he takes the pen off the scribe, and he writes what he regards here as large letters. There's a lot of debate about this, and I'm not going to go into it, but the point that we need to understand about this is that Paul is trying to emphasize something here, and this is why he is using large letters. It's almost like underlining, making the words bold. He wants the church to realize, to understand, to listen up at the things which he's about to tell them because if they catch the things which he's about to tell them, they will put on a set of glasses which will protect them from future false teachers and false shepherds and false doc-

trines for many generations to come. And we also need to listen up because the false shepherds of Israel still plague the church today. And instead of me going through all the false teachers and teachings, which I could go on and on and on and spend months and months and months doing that thing, it's better off giving you a set of glasses like Paul does here that helps you understand and interpret the things that are before you.

The false shepherds which we are told to guard against in this passage are mentioned in verse number 12 and verse number 13. They are those who desire outward conformity above spiritual reality because in verse number 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. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh." You see the words there, "showing in the flesh," "boast in your flesh." The false shepherds are marked by a concern for the outward appearance of people. The NIV captures it very well in its translation; it says, "Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh." These false shepherds were concerned about the show. They were more concerned that things looked well, not concerned about how things truly are. It was all about appearances, and this applies in so many different ways, doesn't it? It applies in conservatism and in professionalism, despite which side of the spectrum you are in. For some, they think that the mark of spirituality is having your hair, you know, above the collar, or, you know, having your tie straight, and, you know, it's done up well. It's good below the knee to the T. Maybe they just like to quiz everybody and make sure that everyone gives the right answers to things, and then like, you know, what that means, we're all good, we're good, everything's fine. This is the mark of a faithful church. Not so, says Paul. Outward externalism is not the signs of true spiritual life. Quite easily can be manufactured.

Well, this is also true in, if you could say, not only in conservative circles where there's legalism at points, but it also can be true in hyper-grace movements where there's mega churches that are concerned more about professionalism. So, it's all about the appearances. Everything has to be pin-perfect and proper. The meet-and-greet team can't miss a person. You better have that smile, right? We practice it in the mirror in the mornings, I hope you know. The atmosphere has to be lively and positive. Don't you dare bring your burden to church and expect someone to carry that for you. You might just cramp the atmosphere. You see, it's about the show. It's still about the external, isn't it? It's not about the hearts of men. It's not about the joy of man. It's not about man's relationship primarily to God. It's showing in professional circles that we need to show that there's no room for improvement.

Now, don't get me wrong, the Bible deals with externals. There's no question about that. The Bible talks about forms of worship. It talks about kneeling in prayer, raising your hands in prayer. It talks about all different kinds of forms. Baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality, but it is known nonetheless an outward rite and, if we could say, ritual. You can't deny the fact that modesty is taught in the scriptures, which regards to apparel and clothing and all these things. But you have to understand that the way that the Bible gets to the external is through the heart. The way that God reaches to the body is through the heart, and all these things are realities that are internal primarily. But the false shepherds are not concerned primarily about the internal. They are more concerned about everything looking well. They're concerned primarily about the show.

You see, it says in this text of scripture that as they desire to make a good showing in the flesh, they're concerned about appearances primarily. And they do this so that they might boast in your flesh. What they're concerned about is you being confirmed and conformed to their tradition so that all looks well and reflects well on them. They also desire self-comfort. These people, they desire that what they do, it says in verse number 12, they compel you to be circumcised, and it says only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. So they're concerned that not only that everything looks well, but they're concerned that things look well so that they can have self-comfort because if things aren't going according to the rest of the community of legalistic Pharisees, they will soon catch up with them and say, "Hey, what's wrong? Your disciples, they're not circumcised. What's going on here? You're not doing a great job." So they want to tow the party line. They want to avoid persecution. The Judaizers stood between the Jews and Judaism and Christianity. They were like Christians that still were not going to part with Judaism, but they were not true Christians at all because they were bringing legalism and law into grace. And so, they wanted to avoid persecution, and the cross of Jesus Christ proclaims freedom from legalism, from the bondage of the law. It proclaims a freedom that disrupts the status quo of religiosity, and they're like, "If we let this thing in, it's going to disrupt everything, and we're going to end up being persecuted just like Paul. We better tow the party line."

And false teachers are that way. They're more concerned about their self-comfort than they are about the proclamation of truth, than they are about the glory of God in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They want to boast in people's flesh, but they also want to live a life by which they might say, "We have no trouble around here. We don't want any trouble." None of us should want any trouble, but if the filter by which you assess truth from error is whether or not you're going to get in trouble or not, then you've lost it. You'll find yourself very quickly compromising. If you think that the appropriate course of action is the course that doesn't lead to any trouble,

and that's the pathway you take, and that is actually the sign of a false shepherd rather than a true shepherd.

What if souls are in danger? What if people's lives are at stake? What if souls will perish because they are lacking the truth of God's Word and the truth of the gospel? Should we just leave them be? Should we just not want any trouble, or should we proclaim to them the truth of Jesus Christ, whether it means we suffer persecution or not? You see, these people, they were afraid to suffer persecution for the cross of Christ, so they did not preach the cross of Christ. They were avoiding the wounds that come as a result of the truth of the gospel, those wounds that marked Paul's back. They didn't want to mark their own.

But also, these people are self-hypocritical and self-contradicting. Look at what it says in verse 13, "For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh." Paul states what he has been stating time and time again: no one can be justified by the works of the law because all men fail at keeping the law perfectly. And so here are these legalists that are trying to get you under the law, these false shepherds that are trying to make you right with God by reason of circumcision, but they themselves don't keep the law. They want to bring you into bondage of something that they themselves are in bondage to also. They don't keep the law; they're hypocrites. But they preach a law-works gospel so that they won't suffer persecution for the cross of Christ and so that they can boast in your flesh and in your appearances.

And Paul says this is the mark of a false shepherd. Jesus called out these kinds of false shepherds also with the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." This is in another place, in verse number four of the same chapter, "You bind heavy burdens upon people, but you won't lift your finger to carry one of someone else." The mark of hypocrisy is here in religiosity. It will always be there in legalism. You always find the stream of major hypocrisy because those who command people to live under the bondage of the law, they themselves can never live up to it. And they will cleanse the outside of the cup to make it look clean, but inside will be corruption and vile and every evil thing.

But the false teachers and the false shepherds that Paul is warning these people about is saying, "Put these glasses on. Understand that if you see anyone who wants to boast in your flesh, if you know anyone who avoids persecution that they might be self-comforted, and if you see such hypo-

criticalness and contradictoriness in someone's own commands that you keep this law which they themselves cannot keep, you can be sure that you're coming face to face with someone who is to be warned against, a false shepherd."

But then Paul contrasts the false shepherds with the true shepherd himself, or true shepherds which are like himself. And in verse number 14, he says, "But 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." What is Paul saying here? He says, "They boast in your flesh, but my boast is in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." How radical is a statement like that? "Cursed is everyone that hangs upon a tree." To the Jews, this is utter stumbling block craziness. How are we going to accept a Messiah crucified? To the Greeks, this is foolishness. Every hero of Greek mythology, they were mighty men. Here is a weak man that is hanging, fixed to a cross, gasping for breath, and crying out and dying. And Paul says, "I boast not in your flesh, not in circumcision, not in your obedience to the particular Jewish commandments and traditions that have been done away with now in Christ Jesus, but I glory in one thing and one thing alone, and that is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is my rejoicing. This is my boasting. Not the cutting off of the flesh in circumcision, but one who was cut off from God and man and hung there upon a cross, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. In Him, I boast. In Him, I glory."

Why, Paul? Because in Him is true freedom. In Him is salvation. In Him is hope. In the message of that cross, which the Judaizers despise, the gospel of free grace is a power, a saving power, that took me from that road to Damascus, an enemy of the cross, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. In Him, I boast because I counted all things but dung and rubbish that I might win Him because all the righteousness which of the law, which could never satisfy my guilty conscience before a holy God, He paid it all. He lived that righteous life. He imputed to me a righteousness not on my own, that I might be justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And Paul's saying, "I boast in Him. In Him, I make my boast. The one by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Think about it for a moment. Jesus on the cross, the world was crucified to Him, and He to the world. And Paul says, "By Him, I also am the same. I have fellowship in the cross." What do you think for a moment there, when Jesus is hanging on the cross, He is not concerned about the world's approval, neither is He concerned about the world's applause. He's not concerned about keeping up appearances in any way, shape, or form. Here is a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Here is a man despised and rejected of men. Here is one who is forsaken of God, stricken, smitten, and afflicted, wounded for our transgressions. Here is one hanging there,

if you could say, there's shame in His nakedness as He hangs there on the cross, all declaring to us that He was crucified to the world, and the world was crucified to Him. The world despised Him, the world rejected Him, the world did not esteem Him very highly, and He died as it were to by that show that He was dead to the world's applause.

Obviously, He was motivated by something much deeper, wasn't it? The glory of God, His Father. "My meat is still, my food is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work. I do all that pleases the Father. I do all that in accords with His will." And here is our Lord Jesus Christ, by His cross, in ways that could never be, if we could say, replicated to the same way, He died to the world, and the world to Him. And Paul is saying the same thing. It has also happened to me. "I fellowship with this crucified Lord, and so I'm not concerned about whether the Judaizers accept me, and I'm not concerned whether the people in Jerusalem are plotting to kill me for my testimony of the truth of God and the preaching of the cross of Jesus Christ. I'm not concerned about boasting in people's flesh so I can avoid persecution and tow party lines. I am concerned of one thing and one thing alone, that Christ Jesus and His gospel might be made known, and His glory might shine."

What a motivation. Paul said, "I'm not in it for self-comfort. I'm not in it for man's approval. I am not in it to avoid persecution. In fact," he says, "that no man trouble me," in verse 17, "for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ." He could almost just pull his shirt off, as it were, and say, "Look at my back and ask me who I am a follower of. There are battle scars for my testimony of the truth of Jesus. I'm all in," he's saying. "I'm all in."

This is why I could say in Galatians 1:10, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I would not be the bondservant of Jesus Christ." And this was the mark of a true shepherd found here in Paul, one whose boast is alone in the cross of Jesus Christ, who is not in it for self-comfort, not in it for man's approval, nor in it for the avoidance of persecution. He is one who is willing to identify with Christ and His gospel, no matter what. But also, in verse number 15, a true shepherd is one who understands what Paul understands. Look in verse number 15, for what he says here, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation."

You know, Paul is saying in this passage, what matters most is not outward conformity but inward transformation. A true shepherd is looking for the signs and marks of regeneration, not outward conformity. Not looking the part is not what he's concerned about. He understands that God saves men and makes sinners alive. The dead come to life, and they preach

a gospel which affects this change in hearts and lives. And what Paul is saying here, nothing else counts except for this. He says, "Not circumcision or uncircumcision avails for anything or counts for anything." You know, on the final analysis, when you stand before God, it is not going to matter about the clothing you wore to church. You know what's going to matter? Are you born again? Have you been regenerated? Because the Pharisees were dead in trespasses and in sins, and they knew not God, just as the publican and sinners were. But Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He came to give His life for His sheep. He came to restore the dead to life. And Paul understood this. He wasn't concerned about when he walks into the church whether everyone would be circumcised or uncircumcised. He's like, "That's not even an issue to be concerned about. What we are to be concerned about is, do you know the Lord? Are you a Christian? Have you been regenerated?" Not about the box-ticking, not about the law-keeping, not even about your intellectualism, being able to understand certain things and say certain things right about certain questions that are asked you concerning the gospel. No, but is the life of God in your soul?

This is what he was most concerned about. He says, "Nothing else actually counts." Of course, he's not saying nothing else is important, but what he's trying to help us understand and emphasize is that a true minister of the gospel is concerned that their people are alive. They've come to life. The greatest concern is that those under their care are born again. Does their life prove and show that they are new creatures in Christ? Their attitudes, their conduct, their thinking, their love for God's Word, and fellowship for the Saints, and you know, for brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. This is what he's most concerned about. What he is actually concerned about, it could be phrased also in this way, or in this question: Is heaven in the hearts of my people?

You see, there is coming a day with what the Bible calls will be the regeneration, when God will create a new heavens and a new earth, where God will restore the creation that has been broken and corrupted by sin, and death has crept into this creation because of sin and has permeated the whole. And all the believers of all the ages have looked forward to that day when Jesus Christ will come, and that dying, decaying creation will be restored. And what the gospel does, it is the beginning of that work right now here. You see, there is coming a day, the Bible says, where there will be a new heavens and a new earth, and this is what the word says, "in which righteousness dwells." This is when the world will be reconciled to God. This is when, through the blood of the cross, all things were made new, and we will inhabit a world in which righteousness will forever exist.

But you know what Paul says of this? This work has begun now. "There-

fore, if anyone be in Christ, he's a new creation. All things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." And all things are of God, who is reconciling us to Himself through the word of reconciliation, through the message of reconciliation which Paul preaches. And he's saying, "You want to know what new creation looks like? It looks like a believer who's come to faith in Jesus Christ and has been made alive. This is new creation. This is regeneration. This is what it means to be born again." And it is an amazing truth that Paul is saying, "This is what the true ministers are concerned about. Is heaven in the heart of my people? Do they have fellowship with God? Are they alive? Are they living?"

So you compare the false shepherds to the life of Paul, and you see a vast difference, isn't it? You take those categories, you start working through any teacher that is before you, and you start to see, of course, imperfections in all these things, but you can see motivations, emphasis, and you can be warned, and you can be discerned. But the beautiful thing is, although true shepherds will always fail to be all that God has called them to be, God has raised up one true shepherd, Jesus Christ, David's son, my servant, who will never fail, who will never fail in fulfilling the will of God and in gathering His sheep together and feeding them. He is the supreme minister of righteousness. He is the true answer, the only actual true answer to Israel's false shepherds. The answer is found in Jesus Christ. The answer is found here.

The false shepherds that feed themselves and clothe themselves for selfish gain are no different from the Judaizers, those that did not strengthen the weak, nor heal the sick, nor bound up the injured, nor brought back the straying. They are no different from the Judaizer and other false shepherds in the world. Those that ruled with harshness and have scattered the sheep, other marks of false shepherds, definitely, you will find, though, that weakness in every shepherd to some extent because we're all flesh. But there is one whom is God's true, final, faithful chief shepherd. And in the passage that was read to us in the Bible reading comes these most encouraging words, "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out." What they're not doing, I will do it. "I'll do it myself. They're not rescuing them from all the places where they've been scattered, but I will rescue them," says the Lord. "I will bring them out of the peoples and gather them. I will feed them," He says. "I will be the shepherd of my sheep. I will seek the lost," He says. "I will bring back the stray. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak. I will feed them in justice. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them, and he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God."

This is Jesus Christ, the true shepherd, the one who knows His sheep, loves His sheep, lays down His life for the sheep, and by His death, He

gathers together His sheep from all over the world to be one flock. And there is one shepherd, the chief shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the shepherd of His sheep. And under shepherds are to pattern their ministry after Him. But you know what the beauty is? Even though the under shepherds may fail, there is one chief shepherd that will never fail.

You see, what Paul's concerned about primarily is not that these are people that have many pastors to look after them. He's concerned that they are new creations in Jesus because he knows if they have their gospel right, there is one chief shepherd that will never fail them, that will continue to feed them, that will guide them, and that will lead them, despite the many discouragements from those shepherds that fail them and will fail them. And the question this morning is, do you know this shepherd of righteousness? Do you know this good shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ? How may I know that I know this shepherd? Well, is heaven in your heart? Are you a new creation? "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

He's not asking, do you know Him merely intellectually? No, do you know Him as your Lord and Savior? Do you know Him personally? It's not asking, do you serve Him, or do you work for Him? No, that's not the question. Is heaven in your heart? Is a far richer and deeper question than just mere service. Is the life of God in your soul is the question. Have you tasted that this shepherd is gracious and that He does not fail to save and to deliver and to feed and to rescue and to gather? Have you been gathered to God through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ?

You see, Paul says, "No, the circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything, but this one thing really is that you are a new creation." Now, being Father's Day, it's appropriate that this word comes to fathers as well in application because what are fathers but shepherds of their own household, right? God has entrusted to your care your children, your wife. You're a shepherd. And if Paul's boast as a true shepherd was in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, should not that be the boast of every father in this room? What is our boast? What is our rejoicing? Is it primarily in our child's education? Is it in our children's social status or in their likeness to you? Is it their alignment to all your preferences in which you boast? What causes you to glory most? The fact that they have good-paying jobs and live and drive nice cars and live in nice houses and enjoy a measure of respectability in the community?

These things are all good things and things to be happy for your children, but circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but a new creation. Our boasts for our children should be in the cross of our Lord Jesus

Christ. Like I said, not about particular standards or particular professionalism. It is about our children knowing God. This should be our boast. This should be the thing that we glory in. This is the thing that we should work towards. This is the thing that we should labor in prayer for, that our children will know the Lord, not "Lord, make them rich," but "Lord, make them alive." "Lord, raise them from the dead that they might worship You and know You and love You and live all their days for Your glory and for Your name."

As Jeremiah says, "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,' says the Lord."

May God give us eyes to see this really is all that counts. This should be our glory, and this should be our boasting, that our children and our community and our church is made up of people who know the Living God and to be made alive. May God keep us from our focus on other things that will take away the reality and the importance of this thing, this one thing. The great sacrifice of Jesus Christ needs to be always before us as true shepherds of God's sheep.

Let me finish with this verse of scripture. Paul, when he came to Corinth, the place where there was so much emphasis upon oratory and philosophy and wisdom, he says in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

"For God forbid that we should glory, except only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us pray.