

Sermon 2008 Lent Midweek 6
Text: Galatians 6: 12-16
Theme: Shame and Glory

Galatians 6:12-16 (ESV)

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. [13] For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. [14] But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. [15] For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. [16] And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

St. Paul writes to the Galatians about circumcision because that practice which had once marked a man as one who belonged to God was no longer valid. Now Baptism had replaced circumcision but some of the Christians in Galatia had decided that rather than upset the Jews, they would require that all Christian men be continue to be circumcised. They did what many Christians over the ages have done. They began to require something as though it were commanded by the Word of God even though it was not and they used shame to enforce their will.

Shame and guilt go hand in hand even though they are not identical. Guilt is the fact of breaking a rule and shame is the bad feeling one gets from guilt. So the circumcised Christians in Galatia convinced the uncircumcised Christians that they were offending God by refusing to be circumcised and that they should therefore be ashamed of themselves.

Understand that shame motivates people to do many things, but shame is never a good motivation. St. Paul was on a mission to eliminate shame from the Christian life. If there is no guilt then there can be no shame and there is no guilt in the life of a Christian. Guilt is incongruous with Christianity. If we are filled with guilt over breaking rules, then we doubt the work of Christ. Do we not confess that Christ died for all sins? If every sin I commit has been paid off by the life and soul of Christ, what have I to be guilty about? And if there is no guilt, there can be no shame.

This scares many people. Many of us have built our whole lives around guilt and shame. Every good thing we do is done to

avoid guilt so that we don't feel shame. If we take all the guilt and shame out of the equation, what's to make people toe the line, shape up, do the right thing? NOTHING. If you take guilt and shame out of the equation, you have to have confidence in the Gospel.

What St. Paul tells us is "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." We are the new creation. We have been washed clean in the waters of Baptism and fed with the body and blood of Christ. The Gospel flows through our veins and THAT is what motivates us to live holy and righteous lives.

No amount of shame can do what the Gospel can do and that undoes a great many systems that are well rutted in place. To trust in the Gospel instead of shaming with guilt goes completely against the grain for the average Christian. But to trust in the Gospel is the way of Christ. See, when we trust in guilt and shame we are trying to save the glory for ourselves.

“Look how good I have been. Look at how guilty you are!” The Gospel takes the spotlight off of us and puts it squarely on Jesus. When we live righteously and make holy choices, all the glory goes to Christ. St. Paul says.

“For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” We boast only in what Christ has done for us. We boast in the forgiveness he has won for us. We boast in the paradise he has bought with his own blood. We give all glory to Christ for empowering us to make holier and holier choices until that day we cross from this sinful and broken world into paradise, the paradise that is already ours and awaits us. AMEN.