

Closing Remarks

Galatians 6.11-18

Introduction

Galatians ends much in the way it began. Paul begins and ends his epistle by commending his readers to God's grace, 1.3; 6.18, showing his deep concern for their spiritual wellbeing. Unlike his other writings, this one does not contain personal pleasantries. The closing benediction of verse 18 is an exception to the message contained in verses 11-17, which is mostly another contrast between the gospel and the Judaizers. It was their heretical activities that had initially triggered the letter. They were promoting a false, man-made gospel of salvation through works and living under law. This was in stark contrast to Paul's divine gospel of salvation by grace and living by the Spirit, which he had preached during his time in Galatia.

In verse 11, he speaks of writing this section of the letter with his own hand and in a large format. It was common for Paul to dictate his letters to an assistant, who would write down the words for him. When he did this, he usually wrote out a short salutation in his own handwriting, 1 Corinthians 16.21; Colossians 4.18; 2 Thessalonians 3.17. This was to prove the authenticity of the letter. There have been suggestions that Paul wrote in large letters due to poor eyesight or an unsteady hand. However, there is little evidence to back these theories. A more plausible explanation is that Paul wanted to highlight the key points of his letter to the Galatian congregations in his concluding summary, hence the use of large letters. In modern times, we might use boldface type or double underlining to emphasize main points.

6.12-17: The Way of the World verses the Way of the Cross

6.12-13: The motives of Paul's opponents:

Pride

Paul asserts the Judaizers were driven by religious pride and a desire to outwardly demonstrate their faith. *Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh are the ones who would compel you to be circumcised*, 6.12a. Here, the term 'flesh' refers to their human self-efforts, separate from the Spirit. Their focus was not on pleasing God through inner righteousness, but rather on impressing others through external legalism. Legalism obsesses over outward uniformity. This often hides proud, unrepentant hearts.

Fear

The Judaizers advocated their viewpoints to diminish any persecution directed towards them, indicating that their primary focus was on self-

Galatians 6:12-13

12 Those who want to make a good impression in the flesh are the ones who would compel you to be circumcised—but only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

13 For even the circumcised don't keep the law themselves, and yet they want you to be circumcised in order to boast about your flesh.

preservation and safety rather than the propagation of Christ's gospel, *...but solely to evade persecution for Christ's cross*, 6.12b. The Judaizers preached conformity to the Mosaic law and the ritual of circumcision to sidestep potential disapproval and estrangement from their Jewish friends and community. Jewish converts to Christianity were often confronted with social isolation and economic adversity, having been expelled from their synagogues and households, with others boycotting commercial interactions with them. Consequently, their primary concern was not their faith in Jesus, but their rapport with their Jewish counterparts. If Jewish Christians persuaded Gentile Christians to adopt Jewish customs such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and adherence to dietary laws, their passionate Jewish acquaintances would be more likely to commend rather than disparage their interactions with Gentiles.

In addition, the Judaizers endeavored to sustain the privileged status Jews enjoyed within the Roman Empire by aligning themselves with the Mosaic law. Christians were frequently regarded with skepticism by Roman authorities due to their leader's execution under Roman jurisdiction, which often incited harassment, a plight from which Jews were exempt.

Nationalistic Pride and Hypocrisy

In verse 13 he says:

For even the circumcised don't keep the law themselves, and yet they want you to be circumcised in order to boast about your flesh.

The Judaizers had no authentic interest in the spiritual transformation of Galatian Christians. Their own inconsistent compliance to the law emphasized that their fundamental motive was *not* the reverence for the law. Their actual objective was to vaunt to their Jewish peers that they were pious Jews. "Look at all the Gentiles we have circumcised and assimilated into the Jewish nation," they would have declared. For them, national identity was everything.

Here Paul exposes them as being insincere Jews and they were certainly not genuine Christians. Their religion was a mere facade, a manipulated spectacle arranged for their own benefit. They were profoundly invested in converting others to their warped rendition of the gospel, symbolized by circumcision rather than baptism. "They desire to see you circumcised," Paul advised the Galatians, "so they can revel in your physical compliance." They partook in the superficial, external rituals with each other, but never practiced the remainder of God's law.

6.14-16: The way of the cross:

These verses contrast all the selfishness and pride described in the previous two verses.

6.14a: Paul only boasted in the cross

But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The world is defined by pretentious pride in national identity, social standing, and religious rituals. People love to seem more important, intelligent, or high-class than they actually are, often by using language, behavior, or appearance that is intended to impress others. The world often exaggerates its own value or importance in a grandiose manner. Living in such a world, God's people are bound to partake in such vanity, if no effort is made to resist.

Galatians 6:14–15

14 But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world.

15 For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation.

Paul esteemed the cross for it was through Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross that he, and every believer, found righteousness and acceptance before God, ending any futile attempts to reach God through deeds. God *made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him,*" 2 Corinthians 5.21. Christians laud the cross, as Christ's sacrifice there offered redemption and eternal life, making it *the* symbol of the gospel, *the religion of divine achievement*. Regardless of a person's relative goodness achieved through their own efforts, they fall significantly short of the absolute moral and spiritual perfection demanded by God. Jesus declared that the divine expectation for mankind is to be as perfect as God, Matthew 5.48, and it is solely through the cross that divine

perfection is graciously bestowed upon believers, who are made righteous through Jesus' shed blood.

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from God's wrath through Him, Romans 5.8–9.

Our faith in Christ's cross signifies not only the understanding that He sacrificed Himself to absolve us from divine judgment but also our perpetual consciousness that we must consider myself as having died alongside Him, 2.20; Colossians 3.3; Romans 6.1-12. Our involvement in Christ's death implies that we no longer have grounds for self-glorification, as the former self, molded by worldly values, is deceased. This decisive renouncement of all vain boasting, owing to complete identification with the crucified Messiah, is the goal of every genuine believer.

The crucifixion of Jesus was essential because humanity is lost in sin and destined for death, Romans 6.23. There was no alternate route to mankind's salvation. The cross's power cleanses us from our sin and makes us acceptable to God.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, 1 Peter 2.24.

When we align ourselves with Christ's death on the cross, the Father declares us as righteous.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ, Ephesians 2.13.

Sons and daughters of God have been:

... justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God presented him as the mercy seat by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed, Romans 3.24-25.

Because of this we have been set free from God's judgment and condemnation for our sin because Jesus was judged and condemned in our place.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, Romans 8.1-3.

6.14b – Paul had been liberated from the world

Belonging to Jesus Christ liberates one from the world's wickedness and despair. Such a person knows his sins—past, present, and future—are forgiven through Christ's death. Their current life is under the care of the Holy Spirit, and their future life in heaven is secure by His promise. The Christian's most valued treasures are in heaven, Matthew 6.21. Their greatest hopes are there, assured and secured by the Lord.

I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus, Philippians 1.6.

We also experience blessings in the present, through the recognition of God's love and peace. God is alive and we live under the constant realization that our life what it is due to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We have been blessed “*with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*” chosen “*in Him before the foundation of the world, [to] be holy and blameless before Him,*” predestined for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, and have redemption and forgiveness, Ephesians 1.3–8.

Paul says that the world has been crucified to him, and he to the world. He had been freed from the world's corruption and judgment. Everything that once was, he now considered dead. The world's dominion had been broken and he was no longer in total bondage to it. Likewise, our citizenship is no longer in the world, but in heaven, as we eagerly wait for Christ's return.

The world has been crucified to the believer and the believer to the world. There is to be no more compelling interest in worldly things, even though we may still fall prey to its lusts. We become dead to these things as they become dead to us. This is why Paul reminded the Colossians to keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and to set their minds on heavenly things, not on earthly ones, Colossians 2.20–22; 3.1–3.

6.15 – The cross did what the flesh cannot do

Secondly, Paul extolled the cross for its power to accomplish what the flesh, debilitated and tainted by sin, cannot. As a Jew, Paul had done everything within his capacity to please God, only to discover that he was, in fact, persecuting God's own Son, Acts 9.5. Here Paul said:

For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation, 6.15.

Circumcision and uncircumcision together symbolize the world's religious systems, comprised of legalistic Judaism and every form of manmade religion. All these systems depend on the flesh (works) and hold no value for salvation.

But the cross's power transforms the Christian into a new creation in Jesus Christ. Jesus told the deeply religious and moral Nicodemus,

“Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” John 3.3.

The old life cannot be revamped, even by God, because there is nothing good in the flesh, Romans 7.18, to build upon. Humanity requires a completely new life, a new birth, a new creation, 2 Corinthians 5.17. Our new life in Christ is suitable for fellowship with our heavenly Father and for citizenship in his kingdom.

6.16 – The cross brings salvation

May peace come to all those who follow this standard, and mercy even to the Israel of God, 6.16.

“Standard” in verse 16 implies a principle or rule (NASB). To walk by this standard means to accept the gospel of divine achievement through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and to walk by faith in the Spirit’s power, rather than relying on the power of the flesh, 5.16–17. *Peace* and *mercy* symbolize salvation. Our acceptance of this gospel brings *peace* in our relationship with God. *Mercy* describes the divine action of forgiving our sins. *Peace* is the positive aspect of salvation, marking the establishment of a new and right relationship with God. *Mercy*, on the other hand, is the negative aspect, forgiving all a believer’s sins and waiving his judgment.

Galatians 6:16

16 May peace come to all those who follow this standard, and mercy even to the Israel of God!

Throughout Galatians, Paul consistently refers to the gospel as the guiding principle to follow in our relationship with God and others. Those who abide by this standard will undoubtedly experience peace and mercy in their divine relationship and interpersonal relationships. The gospel grants peace with God based on His mercy, while encouraging those who have experienced the gospel to strive for peace with others, demonstrating the same empathy they have received from God through Christ.

Regardless of religious beliefs or achievements, those who are without Christ are hostile toward God, Romans 8.7; cf. 5.10, and are *sons of disobedience*, Ephesians 2.2. Every unbeliever is at war with God and can only find peace in the cross of Jesus Christ.

What does Paul mean by using the term “Israel of God?” Here, it seems Paul is using it as a title for the Galatian believers. This summarizes his arguments that they are indeed the true descendants of Abraham, 3.6–29, and the children of the free woman, akin to Isaac, 4.21–31. While the false teachers claimed that only law followers belonged to Israel, Paul asserts that all Christians are the true Israel of God.

6.17-18: Final Remarks

Galatians 6:17–18

17 From now on, let no one cause me trouble, because I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

18 Brothers and sisters, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

From now on, let no one cause me trouble, because I bear on my body the marks of Jesus, 6.17.

In terms of Paul’s authority, 6.17, he offers a stern warning against those disrupting the churches. Paul personalizes their church attacks and justifies his authority to cease their assault. Paul’s body carried the scars from his sufferings as an apostle of Christ, a testament to his unflinching loyalty to the gospel. While the false teachers focused on the mark of circumcision, Paul highlighted the marks from serving Christ, a proof of devotion that should silence all critics.

The final benediction encapsulates the letter’s message: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers*. The grace of Jesus Christ, experienced in the Spirit, unites all sons and daughters of God as true siblings in God’s family.

For Class Interaction and Discussion

Lesson Outline

1. **Introduction:** The significance of Paul's letter to Galatians (Galatians 6:11-18)
2. **The motives of Paul's opponents:** (Galatians 6:12-13)
 - Pride
 - Fear
 - Nationalistic Pride and Hypocrisy
3. **The way of the cross:** (Galatians 6:14-16)
 - Paul's boasting
 - liberation from the world
 - the power of cross
 - salvation
4. **Final Remarks:** Authority of Paul and the final benediction (Galatians 6:17-18)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul chose to write this section of the letter in large letters?
2. What does it mean to you to boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. How can we apply Paul's teachings about being liberated from the world in our modern lives?
4. What does the phrase "new creation" mean to you personally?
5. How can we resist the worldly desire to impress others and focus more on pleasing God?
6. What are some practical ways we can demonstrate our faith in Christ's sacrifice?
7. How do Paul's final remarks resonate with your understanding of Christianity?

8. What lessons can we learn from Paul's authority and his approach to handling opposition?

Group Activities:

1. Break into small groups and discuss personal experiences that resonate with Paul's teachings in this passage. Share how these experiences have shaped your understanding of faith and salvation.
2. In pairs, brainstorm practical ways to live as 'new creations' in Christ, focusing on actions that demonstrate inner righteousness rather than external legalism.
3. As a group, discuss what it means to 'boast in the cross' and 'be a new creation'. Share your conclusions with the entire class.

Final Encouraging Word:

Remember that our faith is rooted in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. We are new creations, no longer bound by worldly standards or expectations, but free to live in the Spirit. Let us strive to embody the teachings of Paul, focusing not on external appearances but on the transformation of our hearts.