

# Galatians

## A New Creation (Galatians 6:11-18)

*11 See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! 12 Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. 14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. 17 Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.*

We have finally come to the end of Galatians. We have seen over the previous weeks of how Paul has had to deal with Jewish believers (or was it “believers”) who sought to tell them that not only did they need to trust Christ for salvation, but they needed to become Jewish proselytes too and keep the law.

Paul’s message was a simple one. Trusting in Christ and His finished work on the cross was all they needed. He uses a number of arguments to prove their folly - God had revealed truth to Paul and the other apostles, God had revealed that to them too and they had once walked in the power of the Spirit. He demonstrated through scripture that walking under the law was a curse and that Abraham was justified by faith in what God had promised. He demonstrated that they were free people and that God had freed them to walk with His Spirit and not according to law.

We studied this because even today there are those who would want us to go under the bondage of the law, whether that is religious conventions, the church or just our behaviour. God has made us free to walk according to His Spirit. In our church of decline we see that the main agenda is our buildings, our forms of worship, our music, what version of the Bible we read, what we wear, how “reverend” we think we are what or who we consider to be sound. What of the suffering church - they just cry out to Him and we see His church growing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

You tell me which sort of church we should be. You tell me what sort of church God honours. The argument Paul had hasn’t gone away. Law is one of the ingredients that has helped the church decline because it has enslaved us into practices and attitudes that does not call on the Spirit of God, to walk with Him, to rely on Him and see His power. I hope that in the last two years that we have started to escape that bondage as a church as we have seen God provide practically, as we have seen new people come into the church, particularly families. We couldn’t have planned it - they just came.

Paul closes Galatians with a personal appeal. His letter was probably scribed so the last words are left to him to write: *11 See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! 12 Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised.*

“Look at my fancy writing. I’ve written big to impress you!” A personal signature from Paul. I bet the framed that. “Paul wrote to us - here’s his writing!” Actually he did it to make a point. “So you’re impressed that I’ve signed this personally - beware those who try to do things outwardly to impress!” The Jewish believers came with their impressive arguments and it didn’t wash with Paul:

*The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh*

And I think I'm cynical occasionally! By pretending to be Jews meant in that day and at that time they didn't get persecuted so much by the Jews who we read in Acts really stirred it from Paul because he accepted Gentile believers. Worse, they couldn't obey the law themselves, yet they boasted about all those they had snared into proselytism. Paul is basically saying that they are a bunch of hypocrites who do things to save their own necks.

*14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.*

Paul, having used his big letters as an example, gives us these famous words, *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* In the end Paul only had one boast and that was in Christ.

What is our spiritual boast? Is it what I've achieved? Is it what I do and who I influence? I've become more conscious in the last few months how easy it is to slip into the mentality of thinking that things are done because I or we are indispensable. Right down the ages we can see instances of people who started in the Spirit and ended up in the flesh. What do we boast in? The Galatians were prime examples. Perhaps some of the Judaizers who opposed Paul were like that too.

When it comes to our spiritual life all we can say is: Jesus has done it all. All that we have done is embrace Him by faith. It's not what we have made, but what Jesus has made us.

Paul sums it all up here. That we are a new creation. The only thing that matters in is what we have been made in Christ. Salvation is acquired the same way and only one way. There is only one way. That is Galatians. That phrase sums it up. There is only one way and that is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It isn't membership of the Jewish race by birth or proselytism, it isn't by our performing the acts of the law. It's through faith in Christ. And whether men and women are Jewish or not makes no difference. They have no special way of getting to heaven - it's the same way the Gentiles get there. What counts is a new creation and that is achieved through Christ.

*Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.*

A simple benediction - peace and mercy to all who follow this rule. Because it is the only way in which we are going to know peace with God and God's mercy upon us. It's no surprise to find this statement from Paul - even to the Israel of God. Why this statement? Because the problem that was caused in Galatia was a Jewish one and Paul was a Jew. Paul desired not that Jews insisted that Gentile believers became proselytes, but that Jewish people came to genuinely know their Messiah, because there was and remains only one way in which they will know peace with God.

A lot said about Israel and that is even true right to this day. Israel still features in the purposes of God because they are to be gathered back into the land and one day they will have to recognise their Messiah when He appears. That is an earthly future. The only way they can guarantee their eternal future is the same way as us, through faith in Christ not through their birth. Whether we be Jew or whatever, we find salvation in only one way - Jesus. There is only one way. Let's never lose sight of that and desire that all men come to Christ whilst they still have the opportunity..

***17 Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.***

This is a wonderful end in the light of what we have examined in Galatians and what we have considered today. In the end the proof of the pudding is the marks of following Christ. How could these people continue to criticise Paul because he had already suffered for Christ. He had already taken the risks. Take a look in 2 Corinthians

***2 Cor 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?***

Whatever we may learn from Galatians, let's learn this. We may think doctrine and soundness and all that sort of thing is important and we can spend a lot of time arguing our doctrinal integrity. But if we have a Saviour who we think is life-changing, a Saviour who has dealt with our sin, if the world has been crucified to me and I with the cross; then we will be life-changing people here in Swaffham and in Norfolk. That's at the heart of Galatians because it's that Saviour in whom we boast - or should boast - who can use us to honour Him as we see God's kingdom extended here.



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