

Scripture, Galatians 6:11-18

¹¹ See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. ¹² 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. ¹⁷ From now on 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.

Our Study

Verse 11. *See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.*

It was a normal practice for Paul to use an amanuensis (secretary) to write down his thoughts as he dictated his epistles. If you read his letters carefully, one can discern the spoken flavor of his communication. This likely explains why he often regresses or takes a side-path in the narrative.

The large sized characters of Paul may refer to the hardy endorsement he is giving to all that has been said in the letter. Or, another often mentioned possibility is this is evidence for poor eyesight and hence he makes large words. It has been suggested without proof that poor eyesight might be Paul's thorn in the flesh that he asked God to remove.

Verse 12. *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.*

Here we have a succinct problem statement that assuredly explains the error of the false teachers that had been bothering the Galatian church. They wanted to force the Galatians to be circumcised.

This is wrong on several levels. First, it was just bad theology that the gospel required any observance of the ceremonial regulations that had been in place before Christ.

Second, the false teachers were requiring this out of their own misguided desire to make a good showing to others who were applauding them on.

Third, this was not a suggestion, but rather an attempted imposition of force which is tyrannical in nature, and not loving.

Fourth, behind all of their misinformation and coercive tactics was a fear of persecution. We can speculate that the Judaizers were Jews who believed Christ was the Messiah, but in order to escape persecution they dressed up their views in more conventional garb; and all of this was done to escape the hostile Jews. So, at the bottom of the false teaching was fear.

Believing in the cross has a way of attracting disfavor and even persecution. Believers must understand that Christianity cannot always be in agreement with the surrounding culture. Scripture tells us that the worldly person desires to live according to a personal set of morals that are inconsistent with much of what Scripture says. Most find the cross a stumbling block to the false idea that our salvation is a matter of our good works.

Verse 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.*

There are two main ideas in this verse. First, those false teachers who required the keeping of some particular points of the law were not able to keep the law themselves. Try as we might, none of us can go very long without breaking God's law either by commission or omission. We can look very good in our moral appearance, but few of us would want others to know what we are really thinking.

Also, a large part of the passion of the Judaizers was their desire to boast in the circumcisions they were able to accomplish among the Galatians. This seems as if they were keeping a circumcision score card to show the other Jews that they were zealous for the law.

Verse 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.*

In contrast to the empty boasting of the false teachers, Paul's boast is in the cross of Jesus. The idea of the word "boast" is to glory or revel in something that occupies all of your attention. It could almost be seen as a proper obsession. The false teachers wanted to glory in what they were accomplishing among the Galatians, but Paul wanted to glory in what Christ had accomplished.

Boasting in the normal human sense is something done to build yourself up. We boast in many things, but the end goal is often an attempt to rise above others or to look acceptable to others.

Christian boasting in the cross elevates Jesus as Lord and, if anything, debases the self to be servants of Christ and others.

Verse 15. *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*

No matter what outward manifestations of religion we keep, these rules have no value in themselves. The only thing that ultimately matters to any of us is, "Are we new creations of the Holy Spirit through the redemption of Christ?"

We are drawn to the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. This is a basic and foundational truth the Judaizers had forgotten or not known to begin with.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Verse 16. *And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*

Peace and mercy is a wonderful thing. Those who know that salvation has been accomplished by Christ, and have received His good works by faith, have also received peace and mercy. Those who try hard and have only a vague hope of pleasing God have no real peace or mercy.

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

The false teachers could not stand up to persecution as their motive was to escape the trials of true belief. Paul, on the other hand could not be dissuaded from the truth even if it meant suffering physically, demonstrated by the marks of torture in his flesh.

In Acts 14:8-20 we read the account of Paul's stoning and being left for dead in Lystra, which was in or near the region of Galatia. It is even possible he was actually killed and brought back to life by the Lord to continue his ministry. After being stoned, Paul headed right back into the city, and continued his work of proclaiming the cross of Jesus. One way we know the Apostles truly believed, is how they would endure all hardships and even death to preserve the message of the gospel.

Verse 18. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit brothers. Amen.*

Paul closes with an appropriate salutation for his letter. But even in this expected format we find another expression of grace and the Lordship of Christ. We are reminded that even our routine conversation and communication should lift up the gospel. Amen—may it truly be so!

