

August 24, 2014
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Galatians
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study Galatians 6:11-18.

1. What does verse eleven tell us about Paul's large letter(s)?
2. What was the ultimate motivation behind the false teachers' desire to do Jewish kinds of works?
3. How does Christ's branding appear in your life?
4. Explain how the cross of Christ crucifies us to the world and the world to us.

WHY SUCH LARGE LETTERS? Galatians 6:11-18

God's plan was that the men of His chosen nation, the nation of Israel, would be identified by the rite of circumcision. It began with Abraham, the man who God picked out of all the men in creation, to be the father of the nation. As an adult, God required him to be circumcised. He taught this important sign to his son Isaac, who taught it to his son Jacob, who taught it to his sons. Over the generations, it was necessary to renew the covenant because the significance got lost in the details of life.

This mark of identification, like most God-given signs, eventually became a matter of external, physical practice that had no internal spiritual ramifications. Therefore, one of God's repeated challenges in the Old Testament was, "*Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn*" (Deuteronomy

10:16). When people who did not trust God, and, therefore, did not obey God, submitted to the outward sign, it really did not serve as an indication that they were truly a part of God's chosen people. Therefore, Paul argued that there is difference between citizens of the nation of Israel and the people whose hearts were right before God, which makes up true Israel.

That conflict did not go away when Rome plundered the nation of Israel and scattered the citizens. There is still conflict between those who are proud to mark themselves as "religious" and those who bear in their bodies the marks of the cross. Throughout the Church age this conflict has been – and remains to be – obvious. There are many, many people who identify themselves with any number of religious organizations, denominations, churches, or movements. But there are comparatively few people who are so clearly identified with the cross of Jesus Christ that they bear the marks of persecution because of that identification.

Paul's argument throughout this letter has been that keeping religious rules, even rules that require physical marking, are no proof of salvation. Proof of the regenerated heart is the rejection, avoidance, and sometimes persecution a person receives from the world who rejects the cross of Jesus. It is impossible to be truly identified with Jesus Christ and not be treated in some measure as He was. The matter was so dear to Paul that he wrote a letter to the Christians in the Galatian churches with his own hand.

Boasting in the Flesh, Though Normal, Accomplishes Nothing of Value (vv.11-13).

As Paul began to wind down this letter to Galatian Christians, he wrote, *See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand (v.11)*. An expected question will be, "Why did Paul write with large letters?" The simple answer might be that he had to write large letters because he wrote with his own hand. We know that Paul typically dictated letters through an amanuensis. That is a secretary who wrote on the parchment what Paul dictated. We see evidence of that practice in the letter to the Roman Christians where a man named Tertius identified himself as the writer (16:22). Some scholars are of the opinion that Luke was typically the secretary.

But here it appears that Paul himself wrote the letter, though not everyone agrees that the text says that. There is a translation that allows for Paul having written only the closing greeting. If so, it would be like another statement in the New Testament that reads: *I Paul write this greeting with my own hand*. The problem with this translation is that the Greek word *gramma* is never translated “greeting” anywhere else in the New Testament. Paul did make that confession in 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:18, and 2 Thessalonians 3:17. But in all those cases, we find the word *aspasmas* which does indeed mean “salutation” or “greeting.”

Others say that this statement in our text is Paul’s admission that he believes that this letter to the Galatians is large or too long. It would be like a preacher apologizing for a long sermon. However, the word *letters* is clearly in the plural number in the Greek which means “letters” just like it says.

Therefore, we conclude that Paul probably struggled with poor eyesight (at least temporarily) and that is why he wrote with large letters. Maybe this was his offensive bodily ailment that he mentioned in 4:13. That might also explain Paul’s illustration right after he made that statement referring to their willingness to pluck out their eyes and give them to him (4:15). Furthermore, that is also a very good reason why he typically used a secretary.

But most significant it seems that Paul wrote with large letters with his own hand because He had something very important to share. Paul’s drift seems to be that this issue he wrote about in this letter is so important to him that he took quill in hand, squinting to see, and writing as well as he could, he poured his heart out on parchment. He forcefully argued that no human activity, no outward signs ever forces God to grant salvation to a sinner. But when God does grant salvation through His grace, there will be some very confirming signs of the change.

In the process, as he did throughout the letter, Paul aimed to expose hypocrisy (vv.12-13). He argues that a fleshly attitude reveals a coward’s heart. These teachers who insisted on law-keeping tried to put a good face on the flesh. Paul wrote, *It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised (v.12a)*. The teachers were putting great pressure on Christians to submit to their heresy. They were like Peter who by his

example was forcing the Christians to be duplicitous by separating from the Gentile believers. They did what other Christians refused to do regarding Titus (2:3) who was not forced to be circumcised.

The driving force behind the Judaizers’ pressure was an attempt to make things look good outwardly. *A good showing in the flesh* was simply putting on a good face. The more people who jumped on their bandwagon, the more it would appear that they were the ones teaching truth. I have lived long enough to see several of these ecclesiastical attempts to make a good showing in the flesh. A pastor or a school will hit on a new idea or sometimes a novel theological slant. They push it and push it until others begin to agree with them. Then they begin to promote their conferences or teachings by advertising them with the evidence that so many thousands have “joined us.” How can you knock growth? How can you criticize something that works? Here is a church that adds thousands of new members every year. That alone is evidence that this pastor must be right! But if we wait long enough, we discover in all these cases that it was an outward showing. It was putting a good face on the works of the flesh.

The works of the flesh will eventually be exposed for what they are regardless of how good a face we put on them. God never makes His plans in light of fleshly works nor does He do His work for His glory in response to fleshly works. God and His word is the standard for ministry – Period! Human efforts either submit to God’s teaching and humbly come under His standard or they stand in opposition to His righteousness. Religious teachers and leaders who want to make a good showing in the flesh are human centered, not God centered, and therefore living in rebellion to God.

Some years ago I was with a group of men who I count to be concerned to honor God with their lives and in their ministries. I mentioned the name of a particular and popular preacher asking if they were familiar with the ministry. Two of the men said they had listened to the man preach a couple of times and agreed that he demonstrated a penchant toward carnality. Within about two years of that conversation, this man’s ministry began to unravel due to his emphasis on the flesh. He tried to put a good face on that which was opposed to God.

The real desire of the false teachers was an attempt to avoid the shame of the cross. Paul pulled back the curtain and revealed, *and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ (v.12b)*. At the time this controversy was brewing in Galatia, the Zealot movement was gaining ground in much of the Roman Empire. This was an uprising to purify traditional Judaism. It was not a movement to exalt God, encourage obedience to Him, or even to encourage temple sacrifices. Rather the Zealot movement was more political as it sought to identify and maintain strong distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. Probably this movement ultimately led to Rome's destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Obviously, to identify with Jesus at a time like that was to ask for trouble. The cross of Jesus was like the albatross hung round the neck for the Jews. They vehemently refused to admit that Jesus was God the Son. They stubbornly insisted that He was guilty and deserved to die. Of course they denied the resurrection. No well-meaning Jew wanted to be identified with the cross.

Therefore, even so-called Christians who wanted to avoid persecution taught the need to live like a Jew. In this way, they could be acceptable to the popular Zealot movement. But if they emphasized keeping Jewish law, they would deny true association with the cross of Jesus. That was okay with them because it made them acceptable to their peers. This ought to cause us to wonder if it is not possible that professing Christians today order their lives in such a way that they can be less obvious, less associated with the shame of the cross, and more acceptable to their peers.

Well, the problem with all of this according to Paul is that hypocrites cannot practice what they preach. They insist that others keep a law they cannot keep themselves. *For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law (v.13a)*. Oh sure they endured the outward act of circumcision. But if they insist that this law must be kept in order to be saved or satisfying to God, then they obligate themselves to the entire law. Paul argued earlier in the letter, *I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law (Galatians 5:3)*. They preached circumcision just fine, but how did they do with the "great" two-part command? Jesus defined the great command, *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with*

all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31).

Obviously, the Judaizers weren't doing that big command well at all. So if they themselves are inconsistent, why do they put so much pressure on the Gentiles to submit to this one aspect of the law? They consider you to be a notch in their gunbelt. Paul accused them like this, *But they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh (v.13b)*. Again, this is all part of making a good showing in human effort. It is nothing short of pride even though they talk about God and even claim to give Him glory in the process. They know the result is that they will receive the praise of men.

Douglas Moo, in his commentary on Galatians, mentioned a gruesome illustration that sheds light on the false teachers' practice. David negotiated with King Saul for the hand of his daughter Michal. Saul thought he might be able to get David killed if he sent him to get a marriage price of 100 Philistine foreskins. David and his men went out and circumcised 200 Philistines, after they killed them of course. We can conclude that this kind of activity that made the women sing, "Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands." When we allow motivations like that in ministry, we have denied the faith, yielded to the desires of the flesh, and rob God of His glory.

Boasting in the Cross Is of Eternal Value (vv.14-18).

It is never good to boast in the flesh. In contrast, the cross of Christ is the proper object for boasting. The cross? Isn't the cross the instrument of crucifixion? Paul's confession was, *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 (v.14)*. He did this in spite of the fact that the cross of our Lord is the point of crucifixion. On it God put His Beloved Son to death. It was the most heinous travesty in human history. Not only did wicked men put the only perfect man to death, but wicked men killed God the Son through the most vile and inhumane method of execution devised by perverse humanity. There is no excuse acceptable.

Natural human wisdom will not boast in that. But even more painful to us might be the truth that on the cross God figuratively puts

our flesh to death. Paul taught this earlier in the letter when he wrote, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20)*. Because we identify with the cross, we consider the desires of our flesh to have been killed with Christ. This allows us to live a life wholly dependent upon His power and grace. And here is what it looks like in real life according to Paul: The world has been crucified to me and I have been crucified to the world. This means that we do not do what we do because of worldly motivations. We do not do good works in our world because we long for the praise of peers in the world. We do not attempt to gain the things of the world in order to heap it on our own pleasures. We do not govern our ministry for the Lord in a way that will please the world and gain their approval. In short, we really don't care whether people approve of us.

In that we should boast. This is almost humanly impossible to believe or accept. To boast in the cross of Christ is like saying, "I take pride in the work of lethal injections or the work of electric chairs." The cross was used only for capital punishment in legal cases. Even more, it was because of the cross of Christ that we truly desire to be dead to the desires of our flesh and alive to live for God's glory. No sensible person thinks like that! In fact, modern psychology truly believes that if you attempt to repress your natural desires, not only will it damage your self-esteem, but it proves that there is something haywire in your mental faculties. Of course our hedonistic, narcissistic culture of crime and chaos proves how right the psychologists have been for the past three generations.

Now here is the shocker. We boast in the cross of Christ because being identified with it, we are crucified in relation to the world and the world is crucified in relation to us. And at the same time, the cross is the source of new creation. That is the wonderful news for us. Paul wrote, *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (v.15)*. Whether a man has engaged in a particular physical rite is not the important question in life. Since the Gentiles never were subject to Jewish national laws, circumcision is a non-issue. The Jews who tried to force the Jewish rite on Gentiles did not understand God's purpose for the act from the beginning. The act certainly cannot save a man

and it certainly does not make him a better husband, father, employee, citizen, or church member. Such outward rites carry value for man-made, man-centered religion – but not in God's economy. Earlier Paul wrote, *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love (Galatians 5:6)*.

So the proper contrast to the error of human religion quite succinctly: ". . . *but a new creation . . .*" The conclusion flows from the negative, "outward acts don't count for anything." "New creation" – now that counts for something. This is much like Paul's conclusion to the Corinthians: "*If anyone is in Christ – new creation.*" (2 Cor. 5:17a). He finished that succinct thought with *the old went along; look! it has become new!* (2 Cor. 5:17b). Here in our text "new creation" is contrasted to the condition of things in the fallen world, the limitations and sins of the flesh. New creation is the fresh new condition that Jesus' crucifixion brings – now that is worth something!

If we are indeed a new creation, we have marks to prove it. The "marks" of the cross are marks of God's grace (vv.16-18). We find peace and mercy in the cross. *And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God (v.16)*. *This rule* that Paul mentioned here is God's standard for eternal life, the new creation. It is never achieved through human wisdom or efforts. It is by faith working through love. That kind of change, God's miraculous change, results in a life that seeks to live out the law of Christ (5:14).

People who live like that have the promise of peace and mercy. Christians in the Galatian churches who embraced the error of forcing God to justify them through their works will never know peace and mercy. We can never do enough to assuage even our own consciences much less cover the offense of our sin before God. Peace and mercy comes from resting securely in the work Christ has already done for us. It is for Gentiles who trust Christ alone. It is for the people of the Israel of God who trust Christ alone.

How does that work out in real life? We are branded by grace. A faithful servant of the Lord experiences branding according to verse seventeen. *From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus (v.17)*. Don't even try to convince

people like Paul that true identification with Christ comes through religious rituals. Rather, we, like him, should bear some marks of Jesus. Paul had literal “marks” because of the various beatings authorities gave him. Why did they beat him? Because he identified with the cross of Christ. The cross is about shame and suffering.

But that was okay with Paul who concluded, *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Colossians 1:24)*. If we are born again, we are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit; if we are indwelt by God, the evidence will come out; when the evidence comes out, the world proves that they still hate God. Paul, and people like him (which should include us) , merely fulfilled Christ’s words to the disciples: *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19)*.

People who seek to avoid the persecution of the world will attempt to hide the identifying brand of Jesus. Therefore, consider whether or how you attempt to hide the brand Jesus put on you at work, in the neighborhood, at school, whenever you are around your peers. A faithful servant does not try to avoid that result. We endure it because we also have the grace of God.

A faithful servant recommends God’s grace. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen (v.18)*. Only those people know God’s grace by experience. You will weakly recommend something you know only second hand. If you have read a great book, you will recommend it with much more confidence and zeal than if you have only heard others talk about the book or you simply read a book report about it.

Living by faith in Jesus alone was really important to Paul. Trying to impress God or others by externals was the kind of thing Paul really wanted to uncover because it is so deadly. So he wrote a letter that flowed from his heart to make the point. Did we get the point?