

CHAPTER VI

GALATIANS 6:11-18 CONCLUSION AND ENCAPSULATION OF PAUL'S MESSAGE

A. GOSPEL SANCTIFICATION UNDERLINED FOR EMPHASIS, 6:11.

“See with what large [πηλίκος, pēlikos pro dpn] letters [γράμμα, gamma n dpn] I wrote/have written [γράφω, graphō v aais] to you with my own hand.” Having moved from doctrine to duty, from precept to practice, from being to doing, from justification to sanctification, Paul now concludes by reverting to the essence of his teaching, his gospel doctrine which is the ground of ongoing Christian sanctification. To those who minimize doctrine, it may seem as though Paul is being picky, even narrow. They might say: “As long as these Galatians believe in Christ, that is what really matters; if they have an emphasis on circumcision, so let them be; don’t disturb the church unnecessarily.” But to Paul the truth of the gospel is at stake, and no quarter will be yielded, 2:5.

It was Paul’s custom to use an amanuensis to write his epistles through dictation (Rom. 16:22), but nevertheless to conclude with his own hand, for the purpose of authentication (I Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; II Thess. 3:17). This may be implicit here, yet a more explicit and significant truth is being emphasized. Literally Paul writes: “Look with what large letters I wrote/have written to you with my hand.” He may be obliquely referring to his poor eyesight (4:15; II Cor. 12:7). But the following context suggests a more significant reason, namely that the “large letters” are the Apostle’s way of underlining, or underscoring his final and emphatic gospel thrust.

Notice that in vs. 12-17, the tension between Paul and Jewish legalists, between the gospel of pure free grace and sullied, contaminated grace, originally described (1:6-9; 2:4-5, 11-16; 3:1-3), is confronted once again. There are, “those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh,” v. 12, “those who are [zealously] circumcised,” v. 13, and in contrast, “those who boast in Christ,” v. 14. “those who walk by the rule of a new creation [through the Holy Spirit],” vs. 15-16. This is the timeless conflict between religion and redemption, between divinely assisted self-improvement and God’s pure sovereign mercy.

B. GOSPEL SANCTIFICATION THROUGH BOASTING FAITH, 6:12-17.

The key word in what Paul now teaches is the verb “to glory/boast,” καυχάομαι, kauchaomai, vs. 13-14. It is used in Romans 2:23 to describe the Jew’s boasting in the Law of Moses in contrast with the Christian who, “exults [boasts] in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5:11; cf. I Cor. 1:29-31; Phil. 3:3). It means to extol, to uphold with praise and confidence and admiration, though it can have reference to that which is bad, as in v. 13, or good, as in v. 14. It is distinct from mere trust or reliance since it also suggests exuberance, enthusiasm, excitement, and supreme certitude. Thus Paul suggests here that everyone is boasting or glorying in someone or something, especially in terms of one’s ultimate destiny or relationship with God.

So the *atheist* boasts in himself and humanity. The *communist* boasts in material determinism, Marx and Engels. The *hedonist* boasts in pleasure and sensuality. The *materialist* boasts in possessions and economic achievement. The *religious person* boasts in pious performance and conformity, especially at a moral level. The *Christian* boasts exclusively in Jesus Christ as the Savior of his soul. Here the introvert is included just as much as the extrovert; personality is not a distinguishing feature since the boasting that Paul describes is seated in the heart. However it is difficult to conceive of “boasting” that is void of some degree of vocal and physical expression. For Paul there is no middle ground. In every person there is that which reigns over us, and to which we give supreme allegiance. Jesus Christ taught that: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Luke 16:13). So the Apostle similarly reduces the field to two masters in terms of our destiny; either we trust in the flesh, human initiative, or redemption through Jesus Christ, His sovereign initiative.

1. Boasting in the flesh, vs. 12-13.

Paul reverts to criticism of his opponents who are in reality opponents of the only true gospel of God’s sovereign saving grace. They are those, “who are disturbing . . . and want to distort the gospel of Christ,” 1:7, the “false brethren,” 2:4. They profess faith in Jesus as the Christ/Messiah. They are not openly immoral. But they demean God’s plan of salvation by teaching that we must add our works, supposedly aroused through conformity to the Mosaic administration, as a supplement to Christ’s atonement; we must do our part in obtaining God’s saving favor. Hence it is not surprising that they are proud of their ritualistic conformity and deeds, boastful of them, and zealous in seeking converts who submit to their Judaic direction.

a. The principle of hand righteousness, v. 12a.

“Whoever desires to impress/make a boastful show [εὐπροσωπέω, euprosōpeō inf aa] in the flesh, these [try to] compel/coerce [ἀναγκάζω, anakazō v paip] you to be circumcised.” There is a zealotry here for outward performance that overshadows any concern for the attitude of the heart. Ceremony and ritual are essential, even primary, to the point of being the objects of trust. Outward ordinances accrue saving merit. Circumcision (also baptism?) is not merely significant, but saving, efficacious. Thus a legalist spirit, a compulsion accompanies this blind passion. Hence local church membership is determined more by outward conformity rather than inward transformation. But worse is the neglect of inward righteousness, the renewed heart and soul and mind and affections, that Christ has fully obtained (Rom. 14:17. This is carnal, veneer religion. Any attempt to promote heart righteousness, because of profound heart corruption, is met with the derisive charge of pietistic extremism, of puritanical morbidity!

b. The principle of self-interest, v. 12b.

“Only for the purpose that they will not be persecuted [διώκω, diōkō v ppsp] for the cross [σταυρός, stauros n dsm] of Christ.” In such a performance oriented gospel, the zealots inevitably become self-centered, as Christ described: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a

son of hell as yourselves” (Matt. 23:15). So these Judaisers, while nominally believing in Christ, yet desire acceptance by the broad Jewish populace. So they make a display of their zeal for the Law as well, and in so doing attempt to nullify any charge that they are no longer subject to Moses. Hence they are very concerned about what others say and think and would do to them, rather than God. Like the hireling of John 10:12-13, they care only for themselves, not the sheep. They want to align themselves with Christianity and the Jewish world, and for the sake of personal comfort and peace, they promote a mediating conformity with Judaism; they “make a good showing in the flesh,” that will quieten the normally expected opposition.

c. The principle of legal hypocrisy, v. 13a.

“For those being circumcised themselves do not keep/obey [φυλάσσω, phulassō v paip] the Law.” Remember that at the Council at Jerusalem: “Some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them [the Gentile Christians] and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5). Hence circumcision was entrance into and commitment to the whole Mosaic system. There was no wriggle room for selective obedience to the Law. So here Paul makes the same point concerning this absolute demand of God, as well as in 5:3. Hence the shame is that the zealots for circumcision do not keep the Law that circumcision calls for. As Christ indicated, they emphasize tithing, ritual, ordinances, etc., but neglect the weightier matters of the Law that are to originate from the heart such as justice, mercy, faith (Matt. 23:23). In practical matters they expect sixteen ounces to the pound, but only give eight ounces. In religious matters they press the demands of the Sabbath with exactitude, concerning buying gas, eating in a restaurant, taking a nap, using lights, but do not come near to keeping the details of the Sabbath at home, and especially the death penalty for Sabbath breakers! Such hypocrisy is proud elitism that wretchedly pontificates: “For myself only eight ounces need be paid, but for you the full pound of flesh must be paid, as Shylock in the Merchant of Venice demanded”!

Perhaps the worst feature of this double-standard is our boasting in our own limited compliance. Our blindness to our shabby, even sneaky nonconformity seems to escape us, while we proclaim with merciless exactitude the lawlessness of others. We rightly decry divorce, yet our own marriage is everywhere fractured. Hence we demonstrate that we know little of repentance and grace!

d. The principle of self-gratification, v. 13b.

“But they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast/glory [καυχάομαι, kauchaomai v amsp] in your flesh.” If then hypocrisy involves a double standard that especially boasts in mere outward conformity, then the justification of self at this external level inevitably leads to the exaltation of self, often in a grandiose manner. So Jesus exposed this hypocrisy as follows: “They [the Scribes and the Pharisees] do all their deeds to be noticed by men; . . . they love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places” (Matthew 23:5-7). Then He made a scathing denunciation of this religious posturing by means of raining down a barrage of eight blistering “woes” that conclude: You serpents, you brood of

vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?” This exposure of religious hypocrisy ought to have made any Judaizer in Galatia tremble!

So here, they “seek your circumcision [baptism] so that they may boast in your flesh;” they manipulate with legal power for their own aggrandizement. Thus they are in the Christian ministry for the glory of themselves, not the setting of the captive free. For them, “Grace, tis an empty sound, trivial to the ear”! Why? Because such people are blind to their own thorough pollution, their inner decadence. As a result they boast in human performance, religious accomplishment, which Paul, based upon past experience, defines in Philippians as “loss” and “rubbish,” or “human waste” σκῦβαλον, skubalon (Phil. 3:7-8; cf. Gal. 1:14)!

2. Boasting in Jesus Christ, vs. 14-17.

However Paul, in contrast with his past intoxication with self and religious idolatry, now has a radically different kind of boasting, which utterly repudiates the flesh, self-sufficiency, humanism, etc. Psalm 60:11 declares that, “deliverance by man is in vain.” David sadly learned that: “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Ps. 41:9). Jeremiah declares: “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD” (Jer. 17:5). But it is not enough to awaken to the flesh as a broken reed, as human waste, as a cracked cistern, as a house of cards. It is not enough to know that I am adrift in a raging storm. What I need is an anchor, a port in a storm, and this Paul declares to be the Lord Jesus Christ. So the fearful disciples, in the midst of a Galilean tempest with Christ asleep on board, discovered that their contribution could not deliver them from the storm’s fury. Christ alone could rebuke the wind and command the sea, “Hush, be still.” Realizing their impotence the disciples exclaimed, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:36-41). So Paul declares concerning his earthly voyage as a Christian: “But as for me, may it never be that I am boasting [καυχάομαι, kauchaomai], except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I [have been crucified] to the world.”

a. Boasting in Christ and its consequences, v. 14.

“But as for me, may it never be that I am boasting/glorying [καυχάομαι, kauchaomai inf pm], except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified [σταυρώω stauroō v ppis] to me, and I [have been crucified] to the world.” Along with 2:20, here is the very essence of Paul’s doctrine of gospel sanctification.

(1) The exclusivity of boasting in Christ, v. 14a.

This world does not hold in high esteem those who have died by hanging, the gas chamber, the electric chair, or a firing squad. Likewise in Jesus’ day, the cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2). Paul has already spoken of the “curse” of the cross, 3:13, it being a “stumbling block,” 5:11 (cf. I Cor. 1:23 where the cross is also considered to be “foolishness”). The cross was so painful and degrading that it was reserved only for slaves and captives.

Alexander once crucified 1,000 captives from the city of Tyre. In 70 A.D., when Titus sacked Jerusalem, so many Jews were crucified that there was a shortage of wood and room for the crosses.

Why then should Paul, and we with him, boast, glory in, put our whole trust in this cross on which hung the son of a Nazarene carpenter? The world at large would claim to know better, boasting in self-sufficiency, sophisticated technology, intellectual advance, evolutionary optimism, progressive society. But for Paul, self, might, achievement, modernity, are as straw when compared to the incomparable worth of the cross of Christ? They are as reeds that pierce with many a sorrow. Why? For two main reasons? *First* because of who was on that cross. *Second* because of what was accomplished by that cross. Among innumerable crosses that terrified Palestine, this cross was unique in all of human history.

- (a) *First*, on that cross was the Son of the living God, the sinless lamb of God, while surrounding that cross was the sinful world. Here was he “who knew no sin [made] to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:21).
- (b) *Second*, on that cross there was accomplished the greatest of all transactions, which Peter so well describes: “Christ also died for sins [on that cross] once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (I Pet. 3:18).

Not surprisingly then, Paul uses the present tense of *καυχάομαι* *kauchaomai* here, since he ceaselessly, unendingly boasted in this divine work of redemption as the chief sanctifying principle of his life (cf. 2:20). But more importantly, it was the redemption of this learned Pharisee, he who vehemently pursued self-righteousness and militantly fought against this righteous Savior! Now he glories exclusively, joyously in this Christ, and sings:

When I survey the wondrous cross,
 On which the Prince of glory died,
 My richest gain I count but loss,
 And pour contempt on all my pride.
 Forbid it Lord, that I should boast
 Save in the death of Christ my God:
 All the vain things that charm me most,
 I sacrifice then to His blood.

Isaac Watts

So John Brown both warns us and makes plain the absolute exclusivity of this boasting in Christ.

In this glorying in the cross of Christ, the apostle sets an example which should be followed by every Christian, and especially by every Christian minister. Indeed, we are not Christians at all, in the true sense of that word, if we are not glorying in the cross, in the cross alone, as the ground of our hope. It is to be feared that multitudes are deceiving themselves on this all-important point.

They say they are depending on Christ; but, in many cases, if they would but "examine themselves," they would find that they are depending on themselves. They expect pardon and salvation, not solely because Christ, the just One, died in the room of the unjust, but entirely, or in part, on the ground of their not being so bad as others, or of their repentance, their reformation, their good intentions, their alms deeds. If they think of the Cross as a ground of reliance at all, it is only as something to have recourse to in order to supply the deficiencies of other grounds of hope. This is not to glory in the Cross; it is to do it foul dishonor.

The doctrine of the atonement ought not to be the sole theme of the Christian ministry, but every doctrine, and every precept, of Christianity should be exhibited in their connection with this great master principle; and the leading object of the preacher should be to keep the mind and the heart of his hearers steadily fixed on Christ Jesus, Christ Jesus crucified.¹

(2) The exclusion of boasting in Christ, v. 14b.

Biblical Christianity, especially from a practical standpoint, is about results rather than merely requirements. For Paul, the cross of Christ does not require that we give up the world, rather the forsaking of the world is a result of our boasting in that cross. Paul is not requiring that, as a Christian, I must with great effort and determination, resolve to give up many things, that *I* must crucify the world. Rather he is saying that the renunciation of the world is a response on account of the incomparable value that I place on the cross of Christ. Hence we translate, "through which [the cross] the world is crucified to me, and I am crucified to the world."

In the parable of the pearl of great price, the merchant discards his numerous inferior pearls without any regrets because of the matchless worth of that one great pearl (Matt. 13:45-46). In the parable of the prodigal son, when the son in the far country awakens to and appreciates the superiority of his father's home, he has no trouble leaving the pig-pens behind (Luke 15:11-32). Likewise when a believer truly glories in the cross of Christ, the best that this world offers recedes in importance and fades away (Phil. 3:7-8). Hence when people ask, "Do I have to give up this or that as a Christian?" they reflect their petty view of Christ. So we rightly sing:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full on his wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow
strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Helen H. Lemmel

(a) The exclusion of the world by the Christian.

So the cross of Christ, my boastful identification with it, leads me to estimate the world as a dead thing because it is so alien to my fondest concerns. Formerly it was Vanity Fair to me; I indulged in many of its

¹ John Brown, *An Exposition of Galatians*, p. 165.

promotions. But now it seems so phony, so plastic, so carnal, so egotistical, so much of a charade; its religion is so shallow; its fellowship is so selfish; its judgment is so certain! Now the world has become a mission field, not a theme park or retirement home; it is dark enemy territory, not paradise. Supremely, the world is a place that hates my Savior, and myself as a result; hence I have no affinity with the foe and his kingdom.

Sadly, many professing Christians do not demonstrate this inevitable result. They indicate allegiance to two masters, impossible, in reality, as is such a dual relationship (Luke 16:13). They commune with the world, and identify with its conversation, fashions, literature, and culture; they attend church and “believe in Jesus as some sort of fire insurance.” Hence this “faith” is merely one compartment in life. In professing to be a Christian, they have obviously failed to grasp the glory and grandeur and wonder of the cross of Christ and the Christ of the cross. They do not disesteem the world because they do not really esteem, or glory in the cross of Christ.

(b) The exclusion of the Christian by the world.

Earlier Paul emphasized the mutually exclusive conflict between the flesh and the Spirit; each opposes the other, 5:17. Likewise Paul now writes of the related antagonism between the world and the Christian. If we regard the world as dead, dark, and doomed, likewise the world will regard us as dead, deceived, and demented. To the world my belief is not intellectually defensible; to the world my belief is outdated, superceded, outmoded, irrelevant; to the world my belief is narrow, dogmatic, obscurantist; to the world my belief is disruptive, pessimistic, and should be discarded; the world cannot tolerate the opposition (Ps. 2:1-3). So in John 15:19 we read: “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” Again in John 17:14: “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

Here then is certain evidence as to whether I am truly boasting in the cross of Jesus Christ. What is my attitude toward the world? What is the world's attitude toward me? In other words, to truly glory in Christ is to discover inevitable results.

My Jesus, I Love Thee, I know Thou art mine;
 For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;
 My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;
 If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus 'tis now.

William R. Featherston

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
 All its joys are but a name;
 But His love abideth ever,
 Thro' eternal years the same.

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
 In His cross my trust shall be;
 Till, with clearer, brighter vision,
 Face to face my Lord I see.

Fanny J. Crosby

b. Boasting in Christ as the source of the new birth, vs. 15-16.

The Apostle Paul certainly believed in the teaching principle of repeated emphasis through variation in expression. Insofar as conversion and the gospel are concerned in Galatians, he proclaims the same truth over and over again, yet in a variety of ways. Here his closing presentation focuses on the dynamic product of the gospel, namely a “new creation/species” that operates according to a “new rule/canon.”

(1) Resulting in a new species, v. 15.

“For neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation/species [καινή adj nsf κτίσις n nsf, kainē ktisis].” The context here is not dissimilar with that of John 3:1-16. In that famous passage, Nicodemus represents formal, external, cerebral, perfunctory religion that is signified by circumcision, or for the Christian, water baptism. So here in Galatians, Paul’s concern is similar, namely the relative insignificance of circumcision, indeed baptism (I Cor. 1:14-17), or external religious conformity, when compared with the gospel, “the word of the cross” (I Cor. 1:18). However the Judaizers would zealously enforce circumcision as a “display of the flesh,” v. 12, in a manner that solicits their “approbation” as religious authoritarians.

Probably the dominant truth of John 3:1-16 is that not only is the new birth, or regeneration, an absolute imperative concerning seeing and entering the kingdom of God, vs. 3, 5, but also that Jesus Christ is the Son of Man/God from heaven, vs. 12-13, 16, who alone is the mediator of this new, eternal life, vs. 15-16. So here in v. 15 we see this same truth proclaimed, namely that becoming a “new creation/species” is indivisibly related to the animated soul boasting in Jesus Christ, specifically His atonement, v. 14.

Our chief concern then, as with Paul, is that of Christianity being distinctively a “new creation,” and not a mere renovation, a factory reconditioned or refurbished model of Mosaic Judaism. In v. 14 we have had described a revolutionary, exclusive attitude that is antithetical to the prevailing philosophy of the religion of this world, especially formal Judaism. It is described as fervent, soul-pulsating “boasting in the cross of Jesus Christ.” So here, this new cardinal principle is further described: “For [in Christ Jesus²] neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation [is everything.]”

² There is considerable manuscript evidence for the inclusion of this expression, although most scholars today exclude it on the grounds that it is simply an interpolation that brings agreement with 5:6, also 3:28-29; 6:14. So Alford, Burton, Hendriksen, Lightfoot.

- (a) The *vanity* of boasting in religious conformity.

Often people are born into a heavily religious environment, sometimes good, and often not so good, that is distinctive, as with Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, sectarianism, etc. It tends to have a performance and conformity mentality, whether in material or abstract matters. It places emphasis upon formal external rites such as circumcision, water baptism, hand imposition, ritualistic traditions, flamboyant display, that result in Pharisaism, elitism, authoritarianism, etc. It frequently boasts in mainstream denominational allegiance. It is intolerant of non-conformity. However Paul, raised in this environment, makes it plain that such a religious tilt will not save or sanctify the soul.

- (b) The *vanity* of boasting in religious nonconformity.

Often people are born into a heavily religious environment, sometimes good, and often not so good, that is distinctive, especially with Gentile religions. Represented here by uncircumcision, it tends to be the opposite of Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, etc. It is not mainstream, but rather dissenting, maverick like, iconoclastic, individualistic, radical. It downplays circumcision, baptism and externals, while promoting separation from the mainstream, asceticism, austerity, introversion, mysticism. It is reactionary, intolerant of establishment religion. Paul also makes it plain that such a religious tilt will not save or sanctify the soul (cf. 3:28).

- (c) The *vitality* of boasting in life through Christ.

Here is Paul in a nutshell. It means that being a “new creation,” *καινή κτίσις*, *kainē ktisis*, that is a “new creature/species/phylum,” is essential and everything! Of course Jesus Christ is the mediator of this transformation whereby we become a new Spiritual kind.

- 1) It is vitally new in contrast with our past (II Cor. 5:17-18).

The radical nature of this saving work is as follows: “Therefore if anyone *is in Christ* [again note the emphasis on Christ as the mediator], he is a new creature [*καινή κτίσις*, *kainē ktisis*]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.” Thus having been paupers in the far country, with all of the old baubles and ragged things, yet God has dressed us in fine robes of righteousness, placed a ring on our finger, asked us to dine by His side, and elevated us from servitude to sonship.

- 2) It is vitally new in its principle of operation (Heb. 7:16).

This life grounded upon boasting in Christ is, “not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to *the power of an*

indestructible/endless life.” This is the “rule/canon” of the Christian that bestows peace and mercy, v. 16. But what confusion we get when a person indwelt by “the power of an indestructible/endless life” is yet tempted to return to “a law of physical requirement”! (cf. 3:1-3). Rather here is the answer to the Galatian problem. It is the branches being dependently joined to the vine for life nourishment (John 15:5); it is members of Christ receiving the same life nourishment in being united in fellowship with His body (I Cor. 12:14-27).

- 3) It is vitally new in its produce (Eph. 2:10).

Hence what then is the lifestyle of this “new creation/ species?” He has not been brought into existence for mere exhibition as in a glass case. He has not been returned to his former master, Moses, to be employed according to his terrifying job description. Rather, he is, “[God’s] workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Certainly there is the necessity of further cultivation. Pruning and the passing seasons must add their luster and savor. However the new species is firmly established, being “firmly rooted and now being built up in Him [Christ Jesus the Lord]” (Col. 2:6-7; cf. Eph. 3:17). So Charles Wesley has written:

Finish then Thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see The great salvation,
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

- (2) Resulting in blessing on the Gentiles, v. 16a.

“And as many as will walk [στοιχέω, *stoicheō* v *faip*] by this rule [κανών, *kanōn* n *dsm*], peace and mercy [be] on them.” Have you ever known of the need of an operation, or dental treatment, but have kept postponing it until you are almost forced to receive attention? Afterward you remark: “What a relief, what peace of mind I now have since the treatment is concluded. I can now rest content.” Paul is similarly reflecting on the status of a true believer in this regard, who yet has been detoured by an incompatible rule of Christian living. Previously he was worrying, toiling, working, expending great effort. While a professing Christian, yet his “rule,” his principle of daily living, was considerable trust in religious legal compliance, self regulation, measuring up to performance standards, with consequent unrest, discontent, uncertainty over stumbling, and pride at conformity, 5:7; 6:12-13.

However for the Apostle, this is like attempting to place “new wine in old wineskins” which results in fracturing (Matt. 9:17). Rather new wine must be contained in new wineskins with resulting compatibility. In the same way a “new species/creation” must be directed by a “[new] rule,” rooted in a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 22:19-20; Heb. 8:7-13) that alone is productive of “peace and mercy,” and not a fractured existence.

What then is this “[new] rule,” exclusive of circumcision and uncircumcision, that has now possessed Paul and brought peace and rest to his soul and a new understanding of the mercy of God? What then is this “[new] rule” that he now commends to others, both Gentile and Jew? It is a “canon,” κανών, kanōn, a major standard or measure that has been repeatedly emphasized in every chapter in Galatians above all else.

- 1) It is the rule of rescue by sovereign grace (1:3-5, 15-16a).
- 2) It is the rule of justification by faith as the ground of salvation and sanctification (2:16, 20).
- 3) It is the rule of the Spirit working through faith (3:1-5, 11, 13-14, 22, 26, 29).
- 4) It is the rule of the Spirit of adoption, through faith (4:4-6, 19, 28-29).
- 5) It is the rule of emancipation by Christ under Christ (5:1, 5-6, 13, 16-18, 24).
- 6) It is the rule of consecration unto Christ alone with resultant blessing (6:14-16).

Hence, it is the “rule,” the major principle of singular boasting *in Christ crucified*, 5:6, 6:15; it is self-excluding, works excluding, faith in Jesus Christ crucified for me, activated by the Spirit. The result is union with Christ through the Spirit, hence peace and mercy from God, His benediction of rest and assurance on my life as a whole.

When a person has been delivered from the enslavement of drugs, drink, or the tyranny of a particular sin, there comes a resultant peace and appreciation of the mercy of God. Thus Paul is in effect inviting us to walk according to this “rule” of boasting, glorying faith in Christ that results in spiritual contentment. So, “the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). Jewish legalists in particular have assailed the Gentiles by suggesting that the “rule” of Moses must be followed along with the “rule” of Christ. So Paul addresses these Gentiles at Galatia first in this verse; Christ alone is their Lord and Master; they must heed His voice, His dominion and rule, alone, exclusive of the administration represented by Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:4-5; Romans 7:1-4).

(3) Resulting in blessing on Israel, v. 16b.

“And [καί, kai ptc] on the Israel of God.” So Paul remains the consummate Jew in that he continues to have his kinsmen in mind. Hence, what of the Jewish Christians? Do they also live by the same Gospel rule as the Gentiles? Yes, absolutely! Paul has an irrepressible, fond regard for them, as well as unbelieving Jews (Rom. 9:1-3; 11:1). But here he addresses authentic Jewish Christians, or as he describes them, “the Israel of God.” In Romans Paul describes them as “a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (Rom. 11:4-5). While retaining Jewish racial distinctives, provided they, as Messianic Christians, do not impose Moses on Christ, they too can walk by this same rule of exclusive boasting in Christ.

Sadly, the wrong interpretation of this verse has brought shameful results, that is “immeasurable pain for the Jews” throughout most of the history of the Christian church.³ Consequently a sharp distinction has to be made at this juncture. The translation, “even upon the Israel of God” NIV, has suited the view that the Christian church has replaced national Israel, so that the Christian church is the new Israel, and all Christians can now be designated as spiritual Israelites. Because this is such a key verse regarding this controversy, one recent book defending replacement or supercessionist theology is titled, “The Israel of God.”⁴ However the history of the Christian church over the centuries has mostly indicated a shameful record of anti-Semitism resulting from this interpretation. From Tertullian, Jerome, Chrysostom, Ambrose and Augustine on to Luther and even the twentieth century, with its legacy of the Holocaust, the influence of this teaching has been undiminished. Remember, the understanding of Israel and the church as now being one, of national Israel having been disenfranchised according to replacement theology or supercessionism, during the Reformation, was simply continuity with the past centuries of Augustinianism, not recovery of the truth of the first century. In brief response, we would point out the following.

- (a) The continuative “and,” καί, kai, is far more frequent than the ascensive “even.” A preponderance of scholars and translations confirms this. The sense here is really obvious, except when a presupposition that God is finished with Israel gets in the way.
- (b) When Paul speaks in 3:28 of being “all one in Christ Jesus,” and therefore there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female,” obviously he is not denying the ongoing distinction between the “male” and the “female.” Rather “male” and “female” Christians, or for that matter “slave” and “free man” Christians, remain one with each other in the midst of their distinctiveness!

³ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp. 574-576.

⁴ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 204 pp.

- (c) In other words functional differences remain, such as with national identification, while we are yet one under the encompassing reign of Jesus Christ. A distinction between a Jewish and a Gentile Christian does not invalidate overall unity in Christ. A future regenerated national Israel under Christ as Messiah (Ezek. 36-37), that offers leadership to Gentile nations under Christ, in no way invalidates future international union under Christ. There is a time coming when “the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one” (Zech. 14:9-11; cf. 12:10-14). However distinctive citizenship will be according to the same unifying “rule” that Paul here commends. Charles Wesley has well expressed this unity in diversity:

Move, and actuate, and guide:
 Divers gifts to each divide;
 Placed according to Thy will,
 Let us all our work fulfill.
 Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
 Rendered all distinctions void;
 Names, and sects, and parties fall;
 Thou, O Christ, art all in all.

- c. Boasting in Christ through the flesh, v. 17.

“For the rest/from now on, let no one cause [παρέχω, parechō v paims] me trouble [κόπος, kopos n apm], for I bear [βαστάζω, bastazō v pais] in/on my body the brand-marks/scars [στίγμα, stigma n apn] of Jesus.” It may seem ironic that, while the Christian has been described as one who repudiates the flesh and boasts exclusively in Jesus Christ, v. 14 (cf. Eph. 2:9), yet Paul concludes this epistle, not with a catalog of greetings as is usually common, but rather a final thrust of argument whereby he himself turns to boasting in his own flesh. In other words boasting in the flesh, although repudiated in vs. 12-13, is not absolutely excluded; it depends on the cause that we have in mind.

Most important here is recollection of the vigorous promotion of circumcision by the Judaisers troubling the churches of Galatia, even to the point where Paul declared, in exasperation: “I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate/castrate themselves,” 5:12. Strong language indeed! But it is necessary when religious zealots magnify carnal performance, mere religious form and ceremony, bodily posturing, with regard to the destiny of immortal souls!

- (1) Paul is at rest in his soul through the gospel, v. 17a.

“From now on [in the time that remains], do not continue to trouble me any more.” In other words, to the religious legalists he declares: “Leave me alone; desist from confronting me with your carnal doctrine. Don’t waste your breath disputing with me when, by revelation of Jesus Christ, apostolic authority and confirmation, as well as personal experience, I know of the emptiness of your teaching.”

Luther rightly describes here a degree of apostolic indignation. It is as if, after presenting his case so clearly, Paul concludes: “I have faithfully taught

the Gospel as I have received it by the revelation of Jesus Christ; whoso will not follow it, let him follow what he will, so that hereafter he trouble me no more. At a word, this is my sentence, that Christ which I have preached, is the only High Priest and Savior of the world.”⁵

- (2) Paul is at rest in his flesh for the gospel, v. 17b.

“For I am bearing in my body the brand marks of Jesus.” Paul currently has the *στίγματα*, *stigmata*, the insignias that identify him as an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ. Now Paul is a great fighter and disputer with words, and so he makes a final, cutting thrust. By implication Paul first charges his opponents: “When you, as males, were only eight days old, a small ritual operation was performed on your flesh, which you certainly cannot now remember. And it is this puny incision which you presently boast in.”

However, as if the Apostle was able to lift the shirt from off his back, he then asserts: “I am bearing in my body the lash marks, the rod stripes, the disfiguring scars, that are like those that identified my Savior. Look and see how they compare with your incision! Your boasting is relatively trivial; my boasting concerns a lifestyle of ongoing persecution for the cause of the Lord Jesus (cf. II Cor. 11:18, 22-28).” Further, says Paul, “You seek to get people circumcised to avoid offence within Judaism (6:12). On the other hand, I have preached only Christ yet reaped a body that visibly testifies to lashings, torture, brutality, and hardship.”

Thus Paul is prepared to back his doctrine with his life. Are you and I? How many believers today physically bare in their body the “stigmata,” the identifying marks of Jesus? You say you believe in salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ. But what if Christianity was outlawed and the penalty was torture and death unless you recanted? Would there be enough evidence to convict you? You may charge Paul with being doctrinal, and we thank God that he is. But you can’t deny that he is also intensely practical, so practical in fact that he is far ahead of us.

C. CONCLUDING BENEDICTION, 6:18.

1. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, [may it be] with your spirit, brethren. Amen [ἀμήν, amēn ptc]” It is as if the recollection of his suffering, in a manner like that of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 12:2), yet causes the Apostle to regard this as trifling compared with the riches of grace that are found in his Savior through His vicarious sufferings. So in II Corinthians 12:9-10 he comments: “He [the Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong [through grace].”

⁵ Martin Luther, *Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 556-7.

2. So Paul concludes by reverting to his grand theme: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen." This is not some trite benediction. It is at the very heart of his gospel teaching. Of course many will glibly speak of their belief also in the grace of God. But more often than not it is the grace of the Galatian error, synthetic grace, synergistic grace, negotiated grace, bilateral grace, cooperative grace. But here, for Paul, the grace of God involves the doctrines of the grace of God, that is *sola gratia* or grace alone, sovereign or reigning grace, particular grace, effectual grace, unalloyed grace, keeping grace, mediated effectually through Christ. It is this understanding of the gospel that causes boasting in religious trivia to evaporate, particularly in local church life, as here amongst the "brethren." So Paul, such a trophy of grace in the plan of God, was ever preoccupied with this doctrine of grace that so possessed his soul (I Cor. 15:10; I Tim. 1:13-17). He so longed for Jew and Gentile to comprehend the grace of God as he did, and thus he concludes with such a prayer. He was not untroubled in this life, but in becoming and living as a Christian he was assured by the Lord Jesus: "My grace is sufficient for you" (II Cor. 12:9). Knowing this to be true, Paul would have gladly sung:

Grace, 'tis a charming sound,
 Harmonious to mine ear;
 Heaven with the echo shall resound,
 And all the earth shall hear.

Grace first contrived the way
 To save rebellious man;
 And all the steps that grace display
 Which drew the wondrous plan.

Grace first inscribed my name
 In God's eternal book;
 'Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb,
 Who all my sorrows took.

Grace led my roving feet
 To tread the heavenly road;
 And new supplies each hour I meet,
 While pressing on to God.

Grace taught my soul to pray
 And made mine eyes o'erflow;
 'Twas grace which kept me to this day,
 And will not let me go.

Grace all the work shall crown,
 Through everlasting days;
 It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
 And well deserves the praise.

O let Thy grace inspire
 My soul with strength divine
 My all my powers to Thee aspire,
 And all my days be Thine.

Philip Doddridge & Augustus Toplady

CHAPTER VII

Concluding Essay

The obvious fact that Paul writes this epistle with such fervent animation of soul drives us to consider with exactness the essence of his inspired diatribe. If the Apostle “did not yield in subjection to them [the opposing Judaizers] for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain” (2:5), then surely it is incumbent upon the Christian reader to comprehend precisely the truth of the doctrine that is here so strenuously defended. Martin Luther declared of Galatians that it is “my own Epistle, to which I have plighted my troth. It is my Katie von Bora.”¹ Doubtless he was declaring that, in being intimately and happily wedded to a former nun, he was similarly wedded to this epistle because it so forcefully related the purity and implications of justification by faith alone, apart from the Law, for the believer. Surely it was Galatians that so challenged Luther on account of the perversion of the gospel by Roman Catholicism. Consequently, having been excommunicated by the Pope, for Luther this epistle so illuminated God’s only saving and sanctifying message, that vividly contrasted with another gospel, in fact in no way being the gospel, that his own lively spirit felt drawn to this short Scripture volume as with no other.

At its heart, the gospel of the Judaizers, who Paul so strenuously opposed, was a synthetic message, that is the combination of faith in Christ as the resurrected Son of God and Messiah with the mandatory fulfillment of the Mosaic administration, that is Torah, as signified by circumcision (Acts 15:5). However, in reality, such a confluence was intended to be more than a combination or amalgam, but rather an absorption of essential Christianity into Judaism. However concerning the true gospel, though new wine, it was erroneously proposed that, through circumcision, it should be contained within a temporal, conditional bilateral covenant, that is the old wineskin of Mosaic Judaism. So Christ taught that such a union between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant would inevitably fracture (Matt. 9:17), and this was likewise Paul’s concern in writing to the Christians at Galatia. He knew that pure sovereign grace could not be accommodated by the Judaism of his day since these two administrations were essentially incompatible. Hence, by its very nature, a synthetic gospel is in fact a dysfunctional, a disqualified gospel. Here then is a summary of the essential doctrine of Galatians.

1. There is only one precise, non-negotiable Christian gospel (Gal. 2:5), which is contrary to much modern Christian terminology whereby becoming a Christian is by means of a vaguely defined relationship with Jesus Christ. Hence the only biblical gospel is an exact message, even a sacred treasure and deposit (Gal. 2:7; cf. II Cor. 4:5-7; I Thess. 2:4), that allows no room for mediate understanding.
2. Many false gospels, all legal in nature in a variety of ways, subtly challenge the one true gospel, often within the confines of the local church. Yet none of these have any validity, notwithstanding forceful and beguiling claims. Rather they are all worthy only of consignment to hell itself (1:8-9). Consequently the true gospel must be preserved at all costs, otherwise a syncretic process in considering the accommodation of various gospels will result in the dissolution of authentic Christianity.

¹ Quoted by Philip S. Watson, editor, Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 5.

3. The gospel is justification before God through a sinner's faith alone in Jesus Christ crucified, wholly apart from the Law of Moses. The fundamental problem of sinfully polluted man, being alienated from the holy God of Abraham, finds its only resolution in the unique gospel of substitutionary atonement grace objectively embraced by the believing sinner solely through faith in Christ crucified (John 3:14-16).
4. The gospel of justification through faith alone apart from the Law is distinct from yet inseparable from regeneration through the Holy Spirit. The faith of justification is the faith that regeneration produces, the result being a regenerate believer (John 7:37-39; Gal. 3:1-5, 14; 4:6; 5:5, 16, 18). As a result, in true conversion the child of God becomes both judicially right with God and alive unto God through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:11).
5. Galatians is not primarily written as evangelistic proclamation for the unbeliever. To be sure, Galatians may be well employed for the preaching of the gospel to the unconverted. Nevertheless, in addressing those already saved by the gospel (Gal. 1:1-5), Paul's primary purpose is that the pure gospel might continue to be embraced as the ground of Christian sanctification (Gal. 2:20; 6:14).
6. Galatians is primarily written concerning the believer who, having been saved by the gospel, is also sanctified by the gospel apart from the admixture of the Law in any degree. Consequently Galatians is the death knell of the supposed "third use of the Law." As the gospel alone saves, so it alone sanctifies. The purpose of the Law, as a revelation of the righteousness of God, is to diagnose sin (Rom. 3:20; 5:20; Gal. 3:19). While effective as a diagnostic tool, the Law has no saving or sanctifying power (Rom. 8:3-4). In the course of human history, the Law of Moses was specifically given to Israel, not the Gentiles, as an interregnum, bilateral, conditional covenant (3:17), "until the seed [Jesus Christ] would come" (Gal. 3:19). But now that Christ has come, at the end of the Old Testament dispensation, "we are no longer under a tutor" (Gal. 3:25) during the subsequent Church age (Rom. 10:4). Rather we are under the administration of the promised Seed (3:26-29).
7. Galatians repeatedly emphasizes that Christian sanctification is continuously reliant upon the efficacy of the gospel. The gospel is not merely an inauguration agent through which the sinner commences his life as a Christian. Rather, as with the purpose of the Christian's repeated participation in the gospel ordinance of the Lord's table, so the gospel continues to save the saved, albeit secure Christian.
8. Christian sanctification, at its most practical level, is wholly spiritual fruit cultivation, based upon gospel grace and Holy Spirit life, quite apart from any recommended assistance by means of the Law of Moses. While Moses provides a summary of the righteous demands of God, yet he is void of any dynamic whereby the righteousness of the Law might be produced in the life of the Christian (Rom. 8:2-4). However Jesus Christ is not only the full embodiment of the righteousness of God (Col. 2:9), but He also supplies the dynamic whereby the righteousness of God might be fruitful in the life of the Christian (John 15:5).
9. The Christian gospel brings about essential spiritual unity with regard to every child of God, whether male or female, Jew or Gentile, while at the same time accommodating diversity within this unity. There is a unity amongst the true people of God as the seed of

Abraham, through saving faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:29). Yet this essential unity embraces diversity, as with the male Christian and the female Christian, as well as the Jewish Christian and the Gentile Christian (Gal. 3:28; 6:16).

In conclusion, we ought then to contemplate why the challenge of Galatians is no less vital for Christians in this twenty-first century, both individually and corporately in local church life. There are many modern variations of the Galatian heresy whereby the gospel is synthesized. For instance, there is believing in Christ as Savior and subsequently as Lord. There is acknowledgment that Christ is the atoning Son of God, being God's salvific provision and part, who yet must be decided upon or received according to independent human initiative, this being man's necessary part. There is believing in Christ as Savior and the necessary subsequent assistance of Mosaic Law for living the Christian life. There is believing in Christ as Savior and the subsequent baptism in the Holy Spirit. Hence, in making clear that, "Salvation [in its fullest sense, past, present and future] is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9), the following necessary emphases for today are recommended.

1. The biblical gospel must first be understood, not in abstract relational terms, but rather the specifics of biblical revelation. This proclamation will address the gross deficiency of so-called "gospel preaching" today, that includes an unsatisfactory revelation of the depth of human depravity. As a starting place, careful, applicatory exposition of Romans 3:9-26 is commended.
2. The biblical gospel must uphold the transcendent character of the person and work of Christ in such a way that there is not the slightest intimation of deficiency that requires the supplementary contribution of Moses, or indeed any other supposed additive, to the salvation and sanctification of the believing sinner. Consider Matthew 17:5; Romans 7:1-4; 10:4; Hebrews 3:1-6; 12:18-24.
3. Such proclamation of Christ must be more than a Bible lecture, as faithful as this mode might be. Rather there must be authoritative heralding of the gospel "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (I Cor. 2:4), that is, not "in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (I Thess. 1:5). By this means, men will recognize that God is personally addressing them with a dynamic gospel, and not merely the doctrine of soteriology in a teaching session. At this juncture, the believer will more readily appreciate gospel sanctification through the constraint of the Holy Spirit.
4. There will be a proper, diagnostic employment of the "Law" as a revelation of God's unchanging, infinite righteousness, in its most comprehensive, rather than a mere narrow, Mosaic sense. Refer to a careful consideration of "law" in Romans 3:19-20. Of course for the Christian, he has become subject to the righteousness of Christ under His law (II Cor. 9:21), and thus he focuses on learning about Christ (Matt. 11:29; I Pet. 2:21).
5. There will be the periodic preaching of salvation to the saved. In other words, the height and depth and breadth and eternal relevance of the gospel will be declared to Christians either through regular participation around the Lord's table or expository preaching ministry in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Hebrews, etc. By this means, those saved by the gospel will discover that they are also kept secure by the gospel and all of its accoutrements.

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