

FAITHFUL TO THE END

Galatians 6:11-18

Introduction:

We've finally come to the end of the book of Galatians. This is the 19th week we have looked into this letter of Paul to the churches in Galatia.

Advance notice – at the end of the message today I am going to ask you to share something significant that has stood out to you from this book. But first we are going to look at the last few verses of Galatians 6.

This section is a personal note from Paul. His letters would usually be dictated to a scribe who would write them down for him. At the end it was common that he would add a personal note written with his own hand, as a kind of personal greeting.

Read v. 11 – an interesting note – large letters. Perhaps connected to Paul's comment in 4:15. It would appear that Paul was suffering from some kind of eye complication when he was in the region of Galatia.

In this final closing note Paul makes a number of statements which really summarize the arguments he has made throughout his letter. He addresses the error of the Judaizers and reminds his readers of his love and concern for them.

Let's take a quick look at what he says. Then I am going to open it up for you to share your thoughts regarding the things you have learned from this letter.

The Motives of the Judaizers v. 12

It is always a dangerous thing to try to judge the motives and intentions of others. But that is what Paul does in this verse – read v. 12. Paul's analysis of the motives of these false teachers leads him to a couple of important conclusions – both indicating a self-serving attitude.

First, he says, what they really want is to look good in the flesh. They are not concerned for you. They are out for themselves. They want

to be able to say they got another convert. You are nothing more than another notch on their belt. They want you to be circumcised, so it looks good on their record.

Second, he says they are concerned about saving their own skin. You see, the Jewish establishment was not at all happy about the shift that was taking place. The converts to this new religious sect, known as Christians, were persecuted and harassed, even tortured for leaving the Judaic religion.

Paul himself was one of those who had, in previous years, wreaked havoc among the Jewish believers in Jesus Christ. It was on his way to Damascus to seek out followers of the new Way, in order to incarcerate them, that he met the Lord and was saved.

But, these Judaizers, who were insisting that the new Gentile believers in Galatia be circumcised, were Jewish leaders who wanted to identify with Jesus Christ. They wanted to be Christians, yet they wanted to appease the Jewish establishment—the Pharisees and the council of the Sanhedrin—by showing that they were not breaking away from the Law and the OT requirements of circumcision and special days and other such expectations.

Paul says, they are only concerned about avoiding persecution. They want to claim the cross of Christ, yet at the same time they want to keep their other foot in the OT system of Law. But there is a problem that becomes clear in the following verse.

The Failure of the Judaizers v. 13

Read v. 13 – there you have the problem. These Judaizers, who were Jews themselves, could not keep the law of God. They grew up with the Law, they studied the Law, they had been circumcised as a sign of their covenant relationship with God, but they could never keep the Law perfectly.

Yet, in spite of that, they were insisting that these Gentile believers submit to the Law by being circumcised. They wanted to bring new believers under the Law of God. They were ignorant of the Law, had come out of pagan practices, and had turned to God in faith.

But these Judaizers wanted to impose the Law on them and make their salvation subject to the requirement to keep the Law, even though they were unable to keep the Law themselves.

What a contradiction! What hypocrisy! If your life, lived under the Law could not measure up, then why would you try to impose that law on someone who had never even tried to live by the Law. It was a classic case of saying, “Do what I say, not what I do.”

Paul again points out that the only reason they do this is so that they can boast about the number of converts to Judaism they have made. You are only another number in their statistics. They are after you because it looks good on their monthly report.

Paul’s Personal Testimony v. 14

Well, Paul is clear that his thoughts are very different from the Judaizers. His purpose is not to boast about the Galatian believers as though they were some kind of trophy highlights a conquest. Listen to what he says in verse 14 – read it.

Paul’s claim is this: My only boast is in what Jesus Christ has done on the cross at Calvary. He died there to secure our forgiveness and eternal life.

Not only that, but the cross of Christ is also the source of my death—death to the world and to sin. Remember Paul’s words in Galatians 2:20 – quote it. That is a key statement regarding the Christian life. The Christian is one who has died to the world, to sin and to self. The life we live is a crucified life—dead to the world but alive to God.

Paul’s Summary Statement v. 15

Read v. 16 – there, in a few words you have Paul’s summary of the whole truth which he has proclaimed over the past 6 chapters. The issue is not whether or not you have been circumcised. The issue is whether or not you have been born again.

Being a new creation – 2 Cor. 5:17 – “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...” That is what matters, being a new creature. Having the life of the Lord Jesus within. That is the theme of this entire epistle.

Submitting to circumcision, as it was required by the Judaizers, was to place oneself under the Law and become accountable for the entire law. That could only bring condemnation.

What Paul wanted for his children in the Lord was not bondage to the Law, but freedom in Christ.

Well, we are just about done. Just a few more verses...

An Invocation of Blessing v. 16

Read v. 16 – “...all who walk by this rule...” What rule? The truth that salvation and the Christian life are based on a new life, produced by a new birth, not on some outward ritual like circumcision or anything else.

For such people, who truly know God, and are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul’s desire is that they would know the peace of God and the mercy of God.

Then he adds, “...and upon the Israel of God.” Calvin says of this phrase,

“This is an indirect ridicule of the vain boasting of the false apostles, who boasted of being the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh. There are two classes who bear this name, a pretended Israel, which appears to be so in the sight of men, and the Israel of God. Circumcision was a disguise before men, but regeneration is a truth before God. In a word, he gives the designation of *the Israel of God* to those whom he earlier called the children of Abraham by faith, (Ga 3:29), and thus includes all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church.”

Paul’s Final Defense v. 17

In v. 17 we have Paul’s final defense against those who would criticize or condemn him as a heretic. He spent the first two chapters of this epistle explaining and defending the authority of his apostleship and the authenticity of his message.

Here he has a final word for his detractors. **Read v. 17.** Paul had a simple but powerful message for those who would question his right to speak for God. He knew that his life was surrendered to the Saviour and he had the marks to prove it.

It was not unusual in Paul's day, for a slave—one who was bound to a master—to be branded with a mark either cut or burned into their body, identifying the one to whom they belonged. Paul said, my ownership is clear. I bear in my body the marks of Jesus.

What were those marks? The scars he had received from many persecutions. He had been beaten with rods, lashed with whips, stoned and left for dead in Lystra. He says, my scars are my brand. They are the indicators that I belong to Jesus and I am faithful to him.

The Benediction v. 18

And we end with a benediction – read v. 18

Conclusion

So there you have the book of Galatians—a powerful reminder of the simple but profound gospel. There is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus Christ. There is salvation no other way than through faith in Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the cross.

It is by grace alone through repentance and faith alone. It is not faith plus circumcision or faith plus baptism or faith plus church attendance. The message of Galatians is that we cannot attain God's favor by the Law or good deeds, but must come to him in repentance and faith, and then live out our lives by faith.

So, what has stood out to you from our studies in this letter over the past months?