

The ending of Galatians

Galatians Explained

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Congregation, the text for this morning's hour sermon is from Galatians 6:11 through 18. Galatians 6:11 through 18. Let us read them together first. Verse 11,

11 Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.
12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. 13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. 14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. 18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

The ending of Galatians. Four thoughts. Showing off in the flesh. The Apostle Paul is accusing the Judaizers that they are trying to show off, to impress people, showing off in the flesh. "They, they," he accuses them. He's negative. Secondly, the glory in the cross. Verse 14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." What is that to glory in the cross? That's so strange, glory in the cross and only in the cross? In the third place, death to the world. 14B, "by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The world is dead to me and I'm dead to the world. And peace upon new creatures, 15 and 16. Not circumcision helps them to face anything, "but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them." So the ending of Galatians: showing off in the flesh; glory in the cross; death to the world; and peace upon new creatures.

Congregation, the Apostle Paul was smart, very educated, intelligent, gifted, anointed in the Spirit. He had a good education at the feet of Gamaliel, very knowledgeable man used by the Lord to write big pieces of the Bible. But he also had weaknesses. He couldn't see very well. He didn't have glasses, there were no glasses at that time. He needed glasses.

He really had to put effort into writing and reading so he had a secretary. As we see also in other pages of scripture, a secretary, an amanuensis. He dictated and that man wrote it quickly, beautifully but he couldn't do that. But often at the end of the letter when he was dictating, he said, "Titus," or someone else, "now give the pen to me." And then he wrote the last couple of verses with his own hand, but then he used big letters because he couldn't write the same small letters. He used big letters. Look at verse 11, "Ye see how large a letter," I have used, "how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand." So it's not the epistle of Galatians that's so large but his letters. The way he writes is big letters, big print. It was kind of his signature.

"So you see how large a letter I've written unto you with mine own hand," that is proof that he had written this letter so that people would recognize his handwriting. And then he himself with those big letters in the original text, writes the summary, the last piece of Galatians. It's quite intense. He summarizes. It's very personal and he goes to the bottom of it, hence he opens it up and he shows what the deepest motivations are of those Judaizers. He is not ashamed of telling them "they, you," very pointy, very direct, and then confessing that he can't glory in good works, he cannot glory in circumcision, he cannot glory in the law, but he glories only in Jesus Christ and him crucified because nothing else really counts but becoming a new creature, and if we walk in that rule, then blessing on us, then we belong to the people of Israel.

Now what does he say about the Judaizers? You remember them, right? They told them you have to be circumcised, you have to become Jewish. It's not enough to believe in Jesus, you also need to become Jewish. They were kind of nationalists. And he says, "No." Verse 12, that's kind of hurting them, "As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh." Some people desire to impress others, to make a fair show, to show off how good they are. That's their desire, they show off in the flesh. "I can't do that anymore," the Apostle Paul said. "I did in the past. I was proud of myself, proud of my Jewish ancestry, proud of my good works, proud of being a person in the church. I was doing really well and God destroyed it all, and I could not show off anymore." Because that's deep in our nature, to show off, to impress people, to impress congregations, to impress fellow Christians. "Look at me. Look at me." Fair show.

"They constrain you to be circumcised." They use constraint. They force people. They came from Jerusalem, they came to Turkey, they came to those congregations maybe existing of Galatians, and they forced people, they force-fed them and they said, "You need to be circumcised. You need to keep those food laws." And they applied pressure on them. It never works. That's not how God works, by applying pressure. That promotes all the religion, pressure, then it doesn't come from the heart. So he's saying, "No, I don't care for that show. I don't care for constraining people." Are you constraining others? Are you forcing others? Do you feel forced? May the Lord give wisdom in how to deal with that.

"As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised," and why, "only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ." So they force others because they fear themselves, they fear themselves, that they will

suffer, as you see here, persecution themselves. How do we explain that? Well, they were sent by people in Jerusalem and they feel forced to compel others and must report it back, and then don't like it if they are frowned upon. So they do this, they force others to look good themselves and some say that by aligning Christianity with Judaism through emphasizing circumcision and the law of Moses, men could escape the Roman persecution. To advocate circumcision was to align the new movement with Judaism, a religion that had status among the Romans. So in order to not suffer persecutions of the Roman government, they said Christianity is so close to Judaism, it's almost the same, it's the same, it's Judaism, so in that way they escape persecution.

"For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law." They are even inconsistent. It's a show. They force people. It's selfish. To prevent persecution. And they are inconsistent, they are flawed because they put so much emphasis on a few of those commandments and others they let go. Remember the Pharisees? "Woe unto the scribes and the Pharisees, hypocrites, for they make clean the outside of the cup but within they are full of extortion and excess. Woe unto the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like the whited sepulchres which are beautiful outwardly but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness."

So you have to check yourself also, congregation, the things we hammer on. Maybe you're right, maybe you agree, maybe it is biblical, but you love that law, you love those rules, you hammer on them, "If you don't abide with that..." But now look at yourself, are there other things you have to accuse yourself of? Do you let yourself off the hook? Be critical because we are often so biased and that's what they were as well but they themselves who were emphasizing circumcision, there are many laws, many things, they did not keep it themselves. They did not care about the widows. They did not care about people suffering. There are other things.

"But desire to have you circumcised," oh yeah, they like it. If they are successful, if they can convince you, you should be circumcised as well, that would feel so good and they could report it back to Jerusalem, "We have been blessed. So many are now circumcised. They heard it." It's all about fleshy religion, about being big and large and important and showing off. I miss humility. I miss brokenness. I miss unworthiness. I miss confessing my own sins. I miss to take the lowest place. I miss it to esteem others higher than I am. I know there's so much pride and that's in our hearts, right?

But let's continue with 14 through 17. Glory in the cross. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's a key text. It's going to take some time to look at that. Glorifying in the cross, that's strange, right? You're used to that. It doesn't sound strange to you but when you think about it, to glory in the cross? I can understand to glory in the birth of Christ. Yes, beautiful. I can understand a little bit of glorying in his suffering, or glorying in his resurrection, yes, or glorying in his ascension, oh absolutely, but glorying in the cross, in that hellish agony on the cross, those pains of hell on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ exclaiming, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? I'm thirsty." You're suffering and absorbing the complete wrath of God and to feel good about that and to glory in that, and to say,

"Beautifully. Beautiful cross. Beautiful crucifixion." That's so strange. And yet the bitter death, the bitter death of Jesus is as sweet as there is. Sweet cross of the Lord Jesus Christ absorbing that complete wrath of God. That's beautiful and the Apostle Paul says, "I glory in the cross. I like it. I love it. I treasure it. I believe in it. It's important to me and all the other stuff is so much less important."

So what I understand is that the Apostle Paul was really humbled and broken because we like to glory in our flesh, we like to glory in the law and to glory in our behavior, and glory in being a conservative church, and glorifying in keeping the laws precisely, glorifying ourselves and glorifying and making the grave white on the outside, an outer religion that feels so good to show off and to prevent persecution. But to glory in the cross you really need the Spirit for that. To be humbled, you need to know your sins for that, that you should hang on the cross, right? Do you agree with me? You should hang there. You should absorb it yourself. You did yourself in Adam with our inherited guilt and sin and pollution and our actual sins, we deserve it ourselves to be forsaken by God, that he could not care a little bit about you. You deserve it and to acknowledge that, and to see him on the cross, the substitute, the sweetness of his bitter death.

Do you know why the Apostle Paul said "glory"? Why does he not say "believe"? I don't know but what I know is that the word "believing" in our time and age is not so forceful anymore. It just gives the feeling of believing is agreeing, believing is being in facts, or believing is just trusting a little bit that you're okay. But to glory in something, that's something in your heart. To glory in something, you glory in your, what? That you glory something, you glorify it. You make it look beautiful because it is beautiful.

So let us not think that believing is just believing a fact and historical knowledge, a historical faith. It's deep. It's glorifying. What I mean is John 16:14, that's about the Holy Spirit. Look at that, John 16:13 and 14, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak," he shall not speak, "of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me," he shall glorify me, "for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." That's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit likes to be hidden. The Holy Spirit is behind the curtains, secret, does not comfort himself but he glorifies Christ. He shows him unto us and that happened to the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit showed Christ. He took it out of him and showed it unto us. You know, that is typically true faith. Sometimes people's faith is shallow and not saving. Remember the devils believe too, right? Absolutely, devils believe as well. And Agrippa, "Believest thou the scriptures? I know you believe them," Paul said. Not saving. But if you treasure, if you glory in the cross, that's something else. Glory.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," in the cross and in nothing else. Not in good works, is that what he means? No, he means nothing else. Absolutely nothing else you can glory in save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. So you cannot glory in afflictions, and glory in the future, and glory and be happy with the things we see, all the blessing that we can receive, so many blessings on earth, God's people also many blessings granted unto us. So you may only glory in the cross

and nothing else. There's so much more the Lord gives to his church. I see what you mean, but you know, the Apostle Paul means to glory in the cross and in nothing else because everything else, all those blessings, are purchased with the same blood. All the blessings are related to the cross. They are merited and given because the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price. So the church of God is encouraged to glory in everything they have received as having received through the cross. Health, you may be happy with your health, happy with the blessing upon the ministry and with receiving a wife, a husband, a child. Maybe you'll be happy with that, you may glory in that related to the cross because everything points to him. Everything points to Christ. You can't separate any blessing of Christ.

So he glorified the cross, so when you go deeper into that, he gloried in God's attributes. He gloried in God's justice and forgiveness and election. He glorified everything, that Christ was provided for in eternity. He glorified in the means of redemption. He glorified in Christ as the magnet for all people. He glorified in surrendering. He glorified in praying and proclaiming and rejoicing and treasuring. Oh, that cross of Christ, let me just mention a few texts from the Bible with the word "cross" in there and see what we learn from that because it's all the cross. The resurrection, yes, the ascension, yes, birth, yes, burial, yes, but the cross, the most bitter part is the sweetest.

"For many walk of whom I've told you often and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Are you still an enemy of the cross as you glory in the cross of your don't? You glory in the cross, it's the most important thing, but to you it means nothing and then you are an enemy of the cross. That's serious because the sweetest because of the most bitter thing is not interesting for you. You just look the other way. You see the cross, you look the other way, you look at the world, your family, at your possessions and your cars and your stuff.

"And having made peace through the blood of his cross by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him I say whether they be things on earth or things in heaven." So make peace through the blood of the cross. What a peace. The Apostle Paul had that peace in his heart. He was glorying in the cross and such an overwhelming peace. He didn't have that peace as a Pharisee. He didn't have that peace when he was an enemy of the cross. He had no peace when he was performing well and showing off. That's serious, huh? Also in our beloved congregation, people proud of their religion and enemies of Christ.

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us which was contrary to us and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross." So he took that handwriting, he took those sins away by nailing that handwriting of ordinances that was against us on the cross so there was nothing against us anymore.

Let me ask you: what do you like the best? What do you glory in? What are your best moments in this life? The best moments were those moments that you saw him on the cross suffering or in Gethsemane, being crucified, nailed on the cross? Such a bitterness, such a hellish agony, but yes, I love to hear that. That's my life. Glory in the cross.

"So God forbid, I'm afraid of that, that I should glory in anything else. O Lord, prevent that to happen because I am foolish. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Next thought, "by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." If something is dead to you, then you don't care. If something is crucified to you, then it is a corpse, a crucified corpse. The Apostle Paul says compare it to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing is beautiful anymore. Nothing counts anymore. The whole world with all the beautiful things is dung to me because the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is everything.

"By whom." That's the work of the Lord Jesus. "By whom the world is crucified unto me." You know the world is beautiful, right? Just go to work in the morning, have your coffee, work hard, take some money home, go to your family again, having a vacation, having just a good life together, I hope you have a good marriage and I hope you have the blessings many of us have. We are very fortunate glorying in the things of this life but when the Lord comes with his Spirit, those things are fading. Everything fades and there is nothing more important than being saved. Nothing more important than the Savior Jesus Christ. When he draws your attention, you look at him and then he looks at you, those moments spoil you for the world and may we have more of those times because God's children have also to be honest. There are times they fall back into old patterns and need to be converted again. But you know, that cross of the Lord Jesus Christ guarantees that he paid the price, that he is faithful. His people aren't. They fall back into old worldly patterns but he is the Savior Jesus Christ and he is faithful to his own work. Nobody can pluck them out of his hands because he paid the full price.

So check yourself. What is beautiful to you? Has it all faded? You know, when the Lord opens his word and opens your heart there is a big hole and you have sins and nothing can make you truly happy, and maybe people notice that and say, "What's happening to you? You look so down." You say, "Yeah." What's happening? "I don't know. I miss something. I miss God. I miss salvation. I miss that real peace." But look at the sun, look at the moon, look at the stars, look at the trees, look at the valleys, look at the plants, look at all the beauty on earth. "I see it but it does not satisfy me. It does not fill me up because it does not deal with sin. There's no forgiveness in that. There's no communion, no unity, no fellowship with God in there."

Crucified. "By whom the world is crucified unto me, and I am crucified to the world." The world not only thinks of things, also the world of people. I don't see life in the world and the world is not interested in me either. It's kind of a separation. I don't understand them and they don't understand me. We're from different planets. Is that how you feel at work? Is that how you feel at home? Is that how you feel in your marriage? She doesn't understand me. He does not get it. That's painful.

"By whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Or read for yourself 1 Corinthians 7, that's very instructive. Verse 31, "they that use this world, as not abusing it." Using it. We live in the world, we may use the world. "And they that use this world, as not abusing it:

for the fashion of this world passeth away. Yea, doubtless," the Apostle Paul writes in Philippians, "and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord through whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." Do you see? I count all things, all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. He was rich. "Love not the world and neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Christ is faithful and, yes, God's children can fall back into old patterns and we can begin to doubt again but the Lord is faithful to his own word. And then further, verse 15, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Our last thought. First we sing.

Congregation, those Judaizers were not only fanatics, religious fanatics focused on the law and the circumcision and you name it, but they're also nationalists, not only religious fanatics, also nationalists. You had to be Jewish, right? You had to belong to the Israel of God. If you're not circumcised, you don't belong to God's Israel. That was their theology and the Apostle Paul reverses that and says, "No. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." And if you become a new creature, then you belong to Israel.

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God," he says. God's Israel. Israel is still God's people. We love the people of Israel, God's covenant people. The enemies, many still enemies of Christ, we still love them. We reach out to them. We pray for them but strongly believe that all the believers, all them that are new creatures, that all them that glory in the cross belong to the Israel of God. They are the Israel. That's the point the Apostle Paul is making. So he's saying, you know, circumcision, uncircumcision, I don't comment on that. He's not per se against circumcision either because Timothy was circumcised. He just did not want to force it.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision," helps, "availeth any thing." It doesn't help you a bit being baptized or being in line with the church and abiding with the laws and rules. It doesn't help you a bit although there is a law and there is also obedience required as a fruit of the marriage of Christ. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision." That neither because some people are proud of their circumcision and others said, "But I am proud of my uncircumcision." Neither helps, "but a new creature." A new creature.

We don't make ourselves a new creation. We don't make ourselves a new creation. God does it in us. At root, Christianity is something God does in us and not something we do for God. Not something we do for God. What God does in us, that's what counts. Making you a new creature, that is comparable, that work of the Spirit is compared to a creation out of nothing, and I would say to create something out of nothing is not as difficult as to create something anew out of something stubborn and hostile. When God comes to people's hearts, he is first and he opens that door and gives you a willingness to open the door and comes inside and begins to work and makes a new creation, and your will

changes and your desire changes and your preferences change and you're completely changed. You're born again and born again does not mean just seriously minded. Born again does not mean that you just go to church and that you're baptized. No, that means that you have dramatically changed.

Ezekiel 36, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." I read in John 1, "which are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God." People don't do that to themselves. It's God's work, God's one-sided work with the Holy Spirit making room for himself and humbling us and bringing us low and making us cry out, "Be merciful to me a sinner!" "Not by works of righteousness," Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done," no, "but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Glory to the cross because the Lord Jesus paid the price for that. It's not so that he paid the price and now it's up to you. He paid the price and he makes it work and he gives that faith, and he works that repentance himself and nobody can take any credit at all. In heaven, nobody takes any credit and says, "I wanted it. I desired it." They all give glory to God and say, "He wanted me. He was first and he's last. He's the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. All glory to him and all glory to the cross!" But if you won't be there, it's your own fault. He was preached unto you, that cross of the Lord Jesus Christ preached unto you, but you did not glory in it and that's on you. That's your foolishness if you didn't.

"And as many as walk according to this rule," that's not a legalistic rule, that is the rule of that faith we've heard about, be in Christ Jesus glorying in the cross. "And as many as walk according to this rule," not like the Judaizers, "peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." You are God's Israel. Are you God's Israel? Is Abraham your father by faith? He is the father of all the faithful.

"From henceforth let no man trouble me." The Apostle Paul is closing and he says, "I have suffered enough. I have suffered enough." "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." You have marks. You have the mark of circumcision. The Apostle Paul said, "I have other marks in my body. I have scars everywhere. I've been stoned. I have been imprisoned. I've been beaten. Look, you see it. Let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." So he's kind of saying, "I don't benefit of this. I don't make money with this. I suffer from this but although I suffer, I yet are completely behind this. I have to preach this whatever the consequences are. I have to be honest. This is my joy, to glory in the cross, and if I have people turn against me, so be it. I bear the marks in my body of the Lord Jesus."

"Brethren," he closes. That's how he started, "Brethren." In spite of the influence of the Judaizers and the change and the confusion in the congregation, although he strongly disagreed with this sort of tendency, he yet said, "Brothers. I yet feel love." Being so firm, he had been so firm, he had put his foot down. He said, "No, absolutely not." At the same time that kindness, that lovingkindness. "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ be with your spirit." It was normal to close a meeting, to close a letter with the word "grace." Grace to you, then something like, good bye. But here, I just cannot believe it, that word "grace" is here so flippant. No, brethren, the grace, it's only grace, that's the summary of the gospel. "Brethren, the grace of our," our, "Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Giving that connection, your spirit, like the Spirit witnesses with your spirit. You're a child of God, that connection. "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

I'm going to close. Now you go home and think about this, what do I glory in? What's the best there is? And I hope the most bitter thing is the most sweet to you. Amen.