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Galatians

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. Galatians 6:15

The words "For in Christ Jesus" are given to show that a change occurs when one receives Christ. Past distinctions are set aside and there is a wholeness that all alike share in. To show that this is true in the highest sense, he continues with the words, "...neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything."

Paul has used circumcision as the benchmark requirement for works of the law. If one is not circumcised, then there is no other thing that he can do under the law to be pleasing to God. Adherence to the law starts with circumcision. However, in Christ who fulfilled the law, this preeminent distinction is utterly swept away. This is such an important point that he has stated it in similar terms in both Galatians 5:6 and in 1 Corinthians 7:19.

We are now identified, not with an external mark upon our body, but with the internal sealing of the Holy Spirit. Being "in" Christ comes by faith in Him. This is the thought of Romans 10:9. When we believe, we are saved. At that moment, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 1:13, 14. This is our "baptism of the Holy Spirit." It is a one-time occurrence upon belief in Christ.

From that moment, we are "a new creation." God positionally sets us in the heavenly places at that moment (as noted in Ephesians 2:6) showing that salvation is a "done deal." The concept of eternal salvation permeates Scripture. Verses such as 2 Corinthians 5:7, when looked at

objectively, can mean nothing other than this. To assume that we are a "new creation" and yet could suddenly become unsaved is unfathomable.

We are a new creation because God in us "has made all things new." The old is passed away; the new has come. And it is all a work of Christ.

Life application: If Paul says that being circumcised or be uncircumcised has no bearing on who we are in Christ, and as circumcision is the preeminent sign of acceptance into the terms of the Law of Moses, then it means that the Law of Moses, in its entirety, is of no effect for those in Christ. If you are still adhering to precepts of the law, you are estranged from Christ. You are a debtor to the whole law. Put away your silly attempts at finding righteousness through self and put on Christ, wholly and completely.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Galatians 6:16

"And as many as walk according to this rule" is speaking of the rule he has just laid out concerning circumcision. It is a practice which avails nothing concerning our righteousness before God. As circumcision is the benchmark for speaking of the corporate body of laws known as the Law of Moses, it means that Paul is speaking of those who hold to the grace of Christ alone, apart from deeds of the law, for a right standing before God.

The word for "rule" here is *kanón*. It "was used for a summary of orthodox Christian doctrine in the early Church (its "consensual theology") – called "the rule (*kanōn*) of truth" or "rule of faith" (*regula fidei*). This represented the core theological convictions prevailing in the local churches in the "post-apostolic era" (particularly from ad 100 on)" (HELPS Word Studies). It is now what is thought of as the doctrine to be found in Scripture, which is the rule and canon for our doctrine.

It is to such as these that Paul petitions "peace and mercy be upon them." These are terms used elsewhere by Paul, to indicate a sense of wholeness, both internally and externally, concerning life, spiritual contentment, and the blessed hope of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Following this come some of the most misunderstood or twisted words in the New Testament. They say, "...and upon the Israel of God." Charles Ellicott incorrectly states in part –

"The benediction is addressed, not to two distinct sets of persons ('those who walk by this rule' and 'the Israel of God'), but to the same set of persons described in different ways. 'And'" is therefore equivalent to 'namely:' Yea, upon the Israel of God. By the 'Israel of God' is here meant the 'spiritual Israel;' not converts from Judaism alone, but all who prove their real affinity to Abraham by a faith like Abraham's."

Ellicott has mixed apples and oranges here. He is correct in some aspects, but then faulty in others. Vincent's Word Studies says –

"The καὶ 'and' may be simply collective, in which case the Israel of God may be different from as many as walk, etc., and may mean truly converted Jews. Or the καὶ may be explicative, in which case the Israel of God will define and emphasize as many as, etc., and will mean the whole body of Christians, Jewish and Gentile. In other words, they who walk according to this rule form the true Israel of God. The explicative καὶ is at best doubtful here, and is rather forced, although clear instances of it may be found in 1 Corinthians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 15:38. It seems better to regard it as simply connective. Then ὄσοι [many] will refer to the individual Christians, Jewish and Gentile, and Israel of God to the same Christians, regarded collectively, and forming the true messianic community."

Vincent's is correct up until the last sentence where he, like Ellicott, unites Jews and Gentiles under the umbrella of "Israel," thus making "Israel" a spiritual entity formed from the two.

Paul never calls Gentiles Israel. Rather, when he speaks of the Gentiles, he calls them under the collective father of the faith, Abraham. However, Israel is always considered separately from the Gentiles. Therefore, the first clause is speaking of all who follow the practice as is laid out by Paul in this letter, Jew and Gentile who reject the false teachings of the Judaizers.

The second clause, speaking of the Israel of God, specifically refers to those Jews – of the stock of Israel – who have followed this truth. They are the true Israel who have left deeds of the

law behind and have pursued righteousness through Christ alone. In other words, they are set in contrast to the Judaizers who have not.

Life application: The church did not replace Israel and this verse cannot be used to substantiate that teaching. Rather, it shows that Israel is Israel, but there is only a portion of Israel – a remnant (Romans 9:27 & Romans 11:5) – that is in a right standing with God.

From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.
Galatians 6:17

The words “From now on” are in the genitive case. Thus they are a temporal statement meaning “at any time in the future as distinguished from throughout the future” (Vincent’s Word Studies). Paul had obviously been troubled concerning his apostleship, possibly having been accused of not being a true apostle. Or he may have been accused of not fulfilling his duties as an apostle. For one of these reasons, or for some other, he now defends himself against this. It is a one-time statement to cover any future accusation against him.

In his defense, he says, “...for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” The word for “marks” is *stigmata*, the plural of *stigma*. It refers especially to a brand or mark burned into the skin. Slaves, like animals, were branded to show who they belonged to. Further, Albert Barnes notes that it applied to “devotees to an idol god sometimes caused to be impressed on themselves the name or image of the divinity which they adored.”

These *stigmata* were the proof of ownership by another. Paul’s many scars and tears of his flesh proved that he was owned by Christ. His apostleship showed what he had suffered for Christ, and indeed what he was willing to suffer for Him. They were an ever-present reminder to him, and an ever-visible witness for others, to see and know what he was willing to endure for his Master.

These marks then are set in contrast to the mark of circumcision which the Judaizers and false teachers held in such high regard. They gloried in the cutting of their flesh as a sign of adherence to the Law of Moses, but Paul was filled with the afflictions of Christ as a sign of his

complete allegiance to Him. As agreeable an honor it was for him to bear these marks, so it was equally disagreeable to him that those in opposition boasted in any other way.

Paul was wholly devoted to Christ and the cross was where his boast lay. What Christ did for him was sufficient to keep him enduring worldly afflictions and abasements.

It is sad that the term stigmata has been used in such a negative way since this epistle was written. St Francis of Assisi supposedly went through such spiritual anguish that the actual marks of Christ's Passion imprinted themselves on his own body. Since then, others have claimed this as well. This is a far different thing that what Paul is speaking of. He went out and suffered for the sake of Christ, receiving his marks in the mission field. People who claim they have received a spiritual imprinting of Christ's actual sufferings may have done nothing at all for Him in this regard. There can be no comparison between that which Paul suffered for his Master and the marks of supposedly super-spiritual people who have started to bleed in their hands and feet because of an inner mental suffering.

Life application: Paul has set a standard which many throughout the ages have been willing to follow. He was willing to physically suffer at the hands of others for his devotion to Christ. How far are we willing to go for our Lord and Master? Each of us must resolve this and be willing to stand by it should the time come.

Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

Galatians 6:18

This final greeting is extremely similar to that of the closing of the book of Philemon. There is a difference though in Paul's use of the word "brethren" which he adds here. And what is unfortunately ignored by the KJV and the NKJV is the fact that the word is at the end of the greeting, not the beginning. It comes just prior to the word "Amen."

Placing it there is not without purpose. Instead it is a final note of fellowship to the people who he so cherished and to whom his heart and affections were directed. Despite the temptations of the Judaizers, Paul still considered them brethren and wanted that point highlighted, even at the very last moment of his direct and purposeful epistle.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” is one of the greatest concepts found in the Bible. Man is fallen and man needs grace for his salvation and for his continued walk with the Lord. Paul asks for this marvelous blessing to be bestowed upon the Galatians. In this petition, it is understood that they are undeserving of it. One cannot merit grace. Therefore, the petition is one of hope that this unmerited favor "of the Lord Jesus Christ" will continue to be lavished upon them - sinners already saved by that same grace.

This grace, being unmerited, is especially highlighted here for them to consider their position before God. They have been tempted by those who reject Christ; they have been led astray to deeds of the flesh; they have been called to be circumcised by those who boast in the flesh, etc. Paul is reminding them that they stand by grace and that this grace should be with their “spirit.” The spirit is the highest part of man. It is the aspect of us which is reconnected to God because of grace, not works.

Man spiritually died when Adam disobeyed God; Jesus Christ regenerates our spirit through His work. Faith in that deed, and faith alone, is what brings this about. Paul asks them to consider this and let this grace continue to be that which guides their spirit. And with that said to his “brethren” in Galatia, he closes with “Amen.” So be it!

Life application: If you have come to the book of Galatians, read it, contemplated it, and still think that you should be pursuing works of the law in order to make God happy (or happier) with you, you have a serious issue with understanding grace. You may not be saved at all. One cannot earn grace, but can only receive it by faith and then press on in that grace until His coming again for us. Put away your deeds of the law, stop trying to earn what is free, and stop sneering at God’s offer of peace. Be reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus Christ.