

The Marks Of Freedom

Galatians 6:11-18

“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!
12 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. 13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom^[a] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. 16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one 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.”

It was Paul's custom, after dictating a letter, to take the pen and write his own farewell. His standard signature was, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," as seen in 1 Thessalonians 5:28 and 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18. But so concerned is Paul that the Galatians get the message of this letter that he takes the pen and writes an entire concluding paragraph with his own hand, "Look at the large letters I write with my own hand!"

Why did Paul write this paragraph, and why did he use such large letters? The Holy Spirit inspired him to add these closing words to give more *contrast* between the *legalists* and the *Spirited Christians*, to show that the *Spirited believer* lives for the *glory of God*, not the *praise of man*. And he wrote in large letters for emphasis: "Don't miss this!"

Those people that teach that Paul's thorn in the flesh was some kind of eye trouble, use this passage of scripture as proof to their theory. But I am confident that Paul is simply making it clear that he has something important to write in conclusion, that he is not simply going to end the letter in some conventional manner.

Paul has shown them that the believer living under law and the believer living under grace are diametrically opposed to each other. It is not a matter of "different doctrine" but a matter of two different ways of life. Galatians 5:1-12 makes it clear they had to choose between *bondage* or *liberty*, Galatians 5:13-26 makes it clear they have to choose between the *flesh* or the *Spirit*, and Galatians 6:1-10 makes it clear they have to choose between *living for self* or *living for others*.

Now in verses 11-18 he presents a fourth contrast: living for the praise of men or the glory of God. He is dealing with *motive*, and there is no greater need in our churches today than for an examination of the motives for our ministries. We know *what* we are doing, but do we know *why* we are doing it? A *good work* is often spoiled by a *bad motive*.

Paul approaches this delicate subject in an interesting way. The *legalists* wanted to subject the Galatian believers to *circumcision*, so Paul takes this up and relates it to the *work of Christ on the cross*, and also to his *own ministry*. In this passage Paul presents three "marked men" – the legalist (6:12-13), the Lord Jesus Christ (6:14-16), and the Apostle Paul himself (6:17-18).

He looks first at the legalist in verses 12-13, "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh." Paul does not have anything good to say about the legalist. He describes him and his kind in four ways.

First, they are braggarts (6:12a, 13b). Their main purpose was to not to win people to Christ, or even to help the believers grow in grace. Their chief purpose was to win more converts, so they could *brag about them*. **They wanted to "make a fine impression outwardly" even though they did no good inwardly.** Their work was not done for the good of the church or for the glory of God; it was done for their own glory!

While it is certainly not wrong to want to win people to Christ, or to see the work of the Lord increase, it is definitely wrong to want these blessings for the glory of man. We want to see more people sharing in our ministries, not so that we can count people, but because people count. Every number represents a person!

Second, they are compromisers (6:12b). Why did they preach and practice circumcision and all that went with it? To escape persecution! Galatians 5:11 tells us that because Paul preached the grace of God and salvation apart from the works of the law, he was persecuted. The Judaizers tried to make Christians think that they, too, were Christians, and they tried to make the followers of the Mosaic law think that they, too, obeyed the law. Consequently, they escaped being persecuted by the legalistic group for their identification with the cross of Christ and its devastating effect on the law.

In other words, they taught to fulfill tradition in order to please the people. Paul is saying that these legalists were not preaching and/or teaching because of conviction, but rather to avoid criticism.

Third, they are persuaders (6:12a). The word "constrain" carries with it the idea of strong persuasion and even force. It is translated "compel" in Galatians 2:14. While it does not mean, "to force against one's will," it is still a very strong word in the Greek language. It indicates that the legalists were great persuaders; they had a "sales talk" that convinced the Galatian believers that legalism was the way for them.

How did Paul deal with this persuasion? He preached the Word, as seen in 1 Corinthians 2:4, "And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Although it often causes a measure of unrest (because it pushes people out of their comfort zone), the Word of God is a great equalizer when it comes to legalism.

Fourth, they were hypocrites (6:13). Paul says, "They want you to submit to the law, but they themselves do not obey the law." The legalists belonged to the same group of Pharisees about whom Jesus said

in Matthew 23:3, "They say and do not." In other words, they were preaching something that they themselves could not obey!

Paul looks next at Jesus Christ in verses 1416, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." Paul kept his eyes on the cross of Christ and glorying in it. Why was Paul so determined?

First, he knew the Person of the cross. There was a day on the Damascus Road when Paul met him, "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus..." My friend, I can tell you about Jesus because I know Him!

Second, he knew the power of the cross. In John 1:12 we have been told, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name." In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me..." The fact of the matter is that we are utterly helpless in winning the lost to Christ without the "Power" of the Holy Spirit. And apart from the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit there is, a spiritual deadness in our congregations.

The book of Ezekiel records the story of "dry bones," and Ezekiel noticed that they were "very dry." Just then the Spirit asked Ezekiel the question, "Can these bones live?" That was a tough question for the preacher, and Ezekiel replied, "O Lord, God, thou knowest." With God's prompting, Ezekiel began preaching to the valley of dry bones. When Ezekiel did as God commanded, things began to happen to those dry bones. Sinews stretched out over those bones; flesh came up upon them; and they were covered with skins. They had every appearance of life, but there was no breath in them. God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind, and when he did, breath came into

those bones and they lived. They stood up and became an exceeding great army.

There are many churches that are little more than "dry bones." Their bones are dried up, and their hope is lost. The preaching of the Gospel to them seems a useless endeavor. The cause seems to be lost, and every effort appears vain and ineffectual. Some may even appear to be alive, but they are corpses. They are *moving* but are not *moved*. They look but do not see. They *listen* but do not *hear*. There is an answer the filling of the Spirit! When the breath (or Spirit) came, there was meaningful activity in the valley. There always is!

Yes, Paul knew the "power" of the cross.

Third, he knew the purpose of the cross. It was to bring into the world a new "people of God," and this "new creation" is the Church, the body of Christ. This great truth is seen in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

John 3:16 reminds us that Jesus Christ came into the world to give light to the Gentiles and salvation to the ends of the earth. The death of Jesus on the cross is the heart of Christianity, for without His death on Calvary the sacrifices and prophecies of the Old Testament Scripture would be void and empty.

Apart from Christ, we have no righteousness whatsoever because Isaiah 64:6 reminds us that "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags..." But 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "Of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." **And that is the purpose of the cross!**

And last of all, Paul looks at himself in verses 1718, "Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Philippians 3:4-6 tells us there was a time when Paul was proud of his mark of circumcision, but after he became a believer, he became a **"marked man"** in a different way. He now gloried in the scars he had received and in the suffering he had endured in the service of Jesus Christ.

Listen to me carefully, beware of that religious leader who lives in his ivory tower and knows nothing of battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil. These are those who have no compassion for those who have **"been overtaken in a fault"** and no love for the brethren.

So, Paul comes to the end of his letter; and he closes just the way he began: **"grace be unto you."** From that day on the Damascus Road, Paul never got over God's wonderful grace! And neither should we.