

LESSON THIRTEEN (6:11-18)

Above All - The Cross of Christ

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. 14 But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.

17 Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

Paul has reached the end of his epistle. He has proved his apostleship, offered his arguments, and explained his application. He now makes his closing remarks with a final warning and a shout of victory for the cross of Jesus Christ. With this he rests his case, and commends the Galatians to the grace of our Lord.

V. 11 See With What Large Letters I Am Writing To You With My Own Hand - It was Paul's practice to dictate to a secretary or amanuensis, who would then write each word down (See Romans 16:22). Now, at the close, Paul takes the pen into his own hand to write the final words. (He told the Thessalonians this was the mark of each of his letters - II Thess. 3:18). Compared to the neat letters of the trained scribe, Paul wrote rather large, bold letters.

The translation of the KJV takes a different direction, "See how large a letter I have written." This is probably incorrect for two reasons:

1. The word "letters" in plural in the Greek.
2. Paul did not use the word "letter" for the messages he wrote, always preferring the word "epistle."

V. 12 Those Who Want To Make A Good Showing In The Flesh - The word for "make a good showing" is found only here in the New Testament. It means literally "to have a lovely appearance" or "to look pretty to the eye." Paul launches a strong attack on his opponents, twice accusing their motives in this verse. For one, they promote circumcision to make a favorable appearance, and for another, they are doing it to escape persecution.

Compel You To Be Circumcised - Their bad motives were producing bad actions - specifically the insistence upon circumcision. Furthermore, they were not merely suggesting or recommending the rite, they were compelling it! Notice how fiercely the legalists always enforce their own personal ideas!

Only In Order That They May Not Be Persecuted - When certain Christians adopted the doctrine of circumcision, they blended in with traditional Judaism and escaped persecution. They were no longer regarded as a new and dangerous sect, but a harmless variation of Judaism, with whom the pagans were more comfortable.

We who have faced little physical persecution or torture should not underestimate the pressure the Galatian Christians felt.

For The Cross Of Christ - Without the cross of Christ, Christianity would not be a cause of stumbling (I Cor. 1:23) and would be universally accepted as a pleasant collection of nice platitudes. With the cross, Christianity unyieldingly asserts several unpleasant truths:

1. Sin is real and demands punishment.
2. God sent His own Son to save people, and they must make some response.
3. No amount of doing good can atone for one's own sin.

4. No other religion is true.

V. 13 For Even Those Who Receive Circumcision Do Not Themselves Keep The Law - The supreme folly of the legalists was evident. While they insisted on keeping circumcision, the badge of the law, they ignored much of the rest of the law. If a person is free to reject those parts of the law he does not like, obviously the whole law is of little importance.

That They May Glory In Your Flesh - The false teachers were motivated by the desire for glory (See 4:17). They saw in the cutting of the flesh a mark of victory. They cared little for God's law - they were collecting scalps! They who glory in the cut flesh of their converts are guilty of the work of the flesh - selfish ambition.

V. 14 But Far Be It From Me To Glory - Unlike the false teachers, Paul had no desire to glory in what he could take from his converts. (The expression "God forbid" found in some versions is not authorized. The Greek words simply say, "By no means! May it never be!")

Except In The Cross Of Our Lord Jesus Christ - What a strange thing in which to glory! The cross was an object of shame. It was an ugly means of executing the lowest criminals and slaves. (Try to imagine a hangman's noose in place of the cross. How would that look on your necklace? What would that do to the architecture of your church? Yet, this is how Christianity broke into the world of the 1st century).

The cross is the symbol of man's depravity and God's sufficiency. It is the perfect illustration of the failure of human works and the remedy of God's righteousness, which is available through faith in Christ. The cross is the tower of triumph for grace and the seal of defeat for works.

By Which The World Has Been Crucified To Me - The cross makes the point at which the Christian is cut off from the world. Because of the cross the enticements of the world lose their appeal. Because of the cross, the child of God no longer is subject to the rudimentary elements of this world.

It is interesting that the scriptures also point to baptism as the separation of the believer from the old life (Romans 6:1-4). Actually, baptism and the cross are closely connected, since it is by baptism that we join Jesus in His death. It is the cross which makes baptism significant.

V. 15 For Neither Circumcision Counts For Anything - Surely by now it is clear that the keeping of a law, such as circumcision, does not win God's favor.

Nor Uncircumcision - Neither is uncircumcision the secret to earning God's favor. God's favor is not to be earned at all. And God simply does not care whether a person is circumcised or not! (See also 5:6).

But A New Creation - God does not want to remodel the old man of flesh; He wants to make a new one! "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come (II Cor. 5:17). The only thing that counts on the scoreboard of heaven is whether a man is in Christ Jesus, and is clothed in His righteousness.

V. 16 Peace And Mercy Be Upon All Who Walk By This Rule - The rule or standard by which the Christian must walk is the truth contained in the preceding verse, which summarizes the doctrine of the entire epistle. Upon the people who walk by (literally, "get in line with") this great truth Paul pronounces two blessings: peace and mercy.

Since we are justified by faith, not works, we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). We do not live in the constant fear of coming up one good work short on the Day of Judgment. We have peace with God and peace of mind. We have all that is needed for our well-being (See 5:22).

Being justified by faith, not works, is itself the expression of God's mercy. The loving Father saw that we could not save ourselves and took pity on us. He provided a way of salvation that depended not on our goodness, but His own.

Upon The Israel Of God - Those who are in Christ are God's chosen people. Although once people were born into this select group by physical ancestry, now people are born again into the chosen people by union with Christ. In other words, the Jews are no longer the Israel of God,

the chosen people. “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants” (Rom. 9:6-7).

God has not abandoned the Jews, however. They are still eligible to receive salvation, but on the same terms as the Gentiles. If a Jew (or a Gentile) wants to be numbered among God’s chosen people, he must accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and be united with Him in His death. (Cf. Rom. 11:23) Those who are in Christ are the true Israel of God.

V. 17 Henceforth - In conclusion, and from now on.

Let No Man Trouble Me - Literally, “let no one give me hardships.” What Paul has written should prove conclusively, once and for all, that his Gospel is true. There is no ground for his opponents to stand on. Their mouths have been stopped and their arguments have been silenced. Paul would like to hear nothing more from them.

For I Bear On My Body The Marks Of Jesus - The proof of Paul’s character can be seen in what he has suffered.

“Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.

Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” (II Cor. 11:24-27)

All this simply shows how extremely wrong it has been for Paul to be attacked by some of the Galatians.

V. 18 The Grace Of Our Lord Jesus Christ Be With Your Spirit - Paul’s concluding words, as always, are centered on the idea of grace. Grace is unmerited favor, which means that God is smiling down at us, even though we deserve his wrath. Grace is the granting of legal pardon through the atoning death of Jesus, even though we had no righteousness of our own. Grace is the end of the old law, and the death of the custodian (3:23-26). Grace is the coming of the spirit into our lives, so that we are saved from the unfruitful works of the flesh and saved for the good fruit of the Spirit.

“By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Brethren - For the ninth and final time Paul addresses his readers as “brethren.” Even though he has scolded and rebuked them, warning them of the consequences of apostasy, he still counts them his brothers. While some of the Galatians may have been lost to the Judaizers, Paul seems hopeful of the successful recovery of the majority.

Amen - “So be it.”

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Paul mention the “large letters” written with his own hand?
2. In what ways did Paul accuse the motives of the false teachers in Galatia?
3. How did the acceptance of the law of circumcision help certain people to avoid persecution?

4. What does it mean to “glory in the cross of Christ”?
5. How are Christians and the world crucified to each other?
6. If neither circumcision nor uncircumcision mattered, why didn’t Paul just let them go ahead and be circumcised?
7. Who is the true Israel of God?
8. What do “peace and mercy” have to do with the subject of this epistle?
9. How would you explain the concept of grace to a child?
10. What have you gained from the study of Galatians?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is an “amanuensis”?
2. Why would Paul want to personally write the final words of his letter to the Galatians?
3. List two reasons why the following is probably not the most accurate translation of Gal. 6:11—“See how large a letter I have written.”
4. How many times does the word for “make a good showing” found in the New Testament? What is the literal meaning of this word?
5. What does 1 Corinthians teach about the cross of Christ?
6. “With the cross, Christianity unyieldingly asserts several unpleasant truths: 1) ____ is real and demands _____. 2) God sent His own Son to _____ people, and they must make some _____. 3) No amount of _____ can atone for one’s own _____. 4) No other _____ is _____.”
7. What motivated the false teachers to gain converts? What should motivate a Christian to share the Good News of Jesus Christ?

8. "The false teachers were _____ by the _____ for _____. They saw in the _____ of the _____ a _____ of _____."
9. In reference to Gal 6:14, "the expression ' _____ ' found in some versions is not _____. The Greek words simply say, ' _____! _____!'"
10. "The _____ is the symbol of man's _____ and God's _____. It is the perfect illustration of the failure of _____ and the remedy of God's _____, which is available through faith in Christ. The _____ is the tower of triumph for _____, and the seal of _____ for _____."
11. "It is interesting that the scriptures also point to _____ as the _____ of the believer from the old life (Romans 6:1-4). Actually, _____ and the _____ are closely connected, since it is by _____ that we join Jesus in His _____. It is the _____ which makes _____ significant."
12. Is it possible to earn God's favor through circumcision or uncircumcision? Explain.
13. What is the message of 2 Cor. 5:17?
14. "The only thing that counts on the scoreboard of heaven is whether a man is in _____, and is _____ in His _____."
15. What is the literal meaning of "walk" in Gal. 6:16?
16. "Those who are in _____ are God's _____ people. Although once people were _____ into this select group by _____, now people are _____ into the chosen people by _____ with _____."
17. Summarize the teaching of Romans 9:6-7.
18. "In other words, the _____ are no longer the _____ of God, the chosen people. 'Not all who are descended from _____ belong to _____, and not all are _____ of _____ because they are his descendants.'"
19. "Those who are in _____ are the true _____ of God."
20. What is the literal meaning of "let no man trouble me" in Gal. 6:17?
21. Refer to 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, and list the hardships experience by Paul.
22. "Paul's _____ words, as always, are _____ on the idea of _____."
22. "Grace is _____, which means that God is smiling down at us, even though we _____ His _____."
23. "Grace is the granting of _____ through the _____ of Jesus, even though we had no _____ of our own."

24. "Grace is the end of the _____, and the _____ of the _____ (Gal 3:23-26)."

25. "Grace is the coming of the _____ into our _____, so that we are saved from the _____ of the _____ and saved for the good _____ of the _____."

26. Summarize the teaching of Ephesians 2:8-10.

27. Why was it important for Paul to address his readers as "brethren" in Gal. 6:18?

28. What is the meaning of "Amen"?

29. How has this course helped you gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of God's grace?

30. Name several people you know who need to come under the grace of God. What steps will you take to share the Good News and God's grace with these people?

May God use your life to lead these people into a saving relationship with Jesus!