

Galatians 6:15-18 “It is the Grace of God from Beginning to
End”

GAL 6:14-18 “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.”

This morning we close the letter of Paul to the Galatian church; those churches by the way, which would have included Lystra, Iconium and Derbe, all of which are in the Galatian region, which today is in the heart of Turkey.

This was a time in church history where Jewish influence often times went beyond mere cultural differences which can be entirely acceptable, to the forcing of Judaism on Gentile believers; the coercing of Gentiles to adhere to the Law of Moses as an additional means of salvation added to the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Paul couldn't tolerate this then nor can we tolerate it today. But unlike modern Islam, for example, which is intolerant of anything outside of its own religion, our intolerance must not act out in any violent or repulsive ways.

Our intolerance of false gospels or teachings must be demonstrated as we intellectually and spiritually teach the differences between falsehood and truth as contained in the word of God, the bible.

There's a lot of talk today, however, of even destroying this approach as modern ecumenicalism has struggled to break down the walls of any differences between religious groups.

In the world today among some religious factions who name the name of Christ, there are those who insist that we should embrace all groups despite our differences for the sake of love and unity. And so, we are encouraged to embrace those who teach that to be saved we must rely on our good works to get us to heaven.

We must also align ourselves with those who teach that Jesus Christ is not God but merely a good man or prophet. We must align ourselves with those who teach that the word of God is nothing more than wise sayings authored and penned by mere men with no outside influence from God.

We are encouraged to embrace and identify ourselves with religious groups who teach that instead of one true God there are many gods, and many paths to heaven.

But what does God's word say? Well, Jesus Himself puts it very succinctly. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (JOH 14:6)

To suggest that there is room for other paths to heaven; to suggest that Jesus Christ could get us to heaven short of Him being God in the flesh, or to suggest that we could add something to His death and bodily resurrection for our sin is to essentially say that what He did was to die a martyr or worse, a mad man with grand ideas of being the Savior of the world.

If our sinless Savior's atoning work on the cross was not enough to secure the forgiveness of our sins before a holy God then what makes us think our puny good works or religious exercises could make us righteous before the Creator of this world?

This is the issue Paul has been dealing with in this letter to the Galatians. The Judaizers who were attempting to add the Law of Moses to Christ's work were essentially saying that Christ is not enough.

Of course, the apostle Peter knew that Christ was no mere man, but the Son of the living God who left His throne of glory and took on flesh to die in man's place to bring about a relationship with His people which could never end. This is what he told the Jewish religious leaders of his day.

ACT 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

To add any other name or any other means to get to heaven, other than Jesus Christ, is folly. This is life and death. This is not some religious game true Christians are playing so that we can simply say, "our religion is better than yours."

This is not our religion, it is the plan God Himself has revealed so that we don't have to be separated from Him forever. Our Lord

doesn't want that, but Satan does, and he will do anything and say anything to deceive people into believing that all roads lead to heaven.

And I believe that one of the reasons people want to adopt this approach to the god of their own choosing is that they feel they are the one's in control of their own destinies, according to their own rules. In other words, like Frank Sinatra, they'll do it their way.

Well, that sounds great. But let's bring it down to a smaller scale and make that same proclamation when we've been pulled over for speeding. We can argue all we want that we'll do it our way, but the bottom line is that once the officer gives us the ticket we're stuck with having to come under the authority of the one who is in charge.

Let me assure you; God is in charge. And when He says that it is only through His Son Jesus Christ by which men can be saved He means it. And for anybody, including these Judaizers in Galatia, to suggest that they have a better way than God is nothing short of spiritual suicide.

God has been gracious to give us one simple way to Himself. What Paul is conveying here in this letter is that to strip Jesus Christ of His glory by adding anything to the gospel, is to elevate man above God and bring upon the world a death sentence. This is why he started this letter the way he did.

GAL 1:8-9 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If a Jesus Christ, then get circumcised, then make sure you observe all the holy days of the Jews, and then continue to sacrifice the appropriate animals at the temple, and hope this is enough when you stand before God."

No. The simple answer to the jailer's question, what must I do to be saved, was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." (ACT 16:31)

This is what Paul boasted in. He boasted in the fact that the Creator of this universe has made it extremely simple for mankind to come back into a relationship with their God. But it was a relationship based on truth and reality; Jesus Christ being that truth who is the way and the life for all who trust in Him alone for their salvation.

GAL 6:14 “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

And so, as we come to our text this morning Paul pours out his heart to these people as he exposes the essence of Judaism, as defined by these Judaizers, whose icon for their religion is circumcision. And Paul pulls no punches in showing the importance of circumcision as it relates to salvation of both Jew and Gentile alike.

GAL 6:15 “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.”

For the Jew, prior to Christ coming into the world, circumcision was a sign and seal of belonging to God as one of His chosen people. This was the sign given to Abraham by God Himself.

GEN 17:9-12 “Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner - those who are not your offspring.”

Circumcision was not an option for the Jews. They were commanded by God to adhere to circumcision as this special sign of the covenant God entered into with them.

But when circumcision’s usefulness came to an end as a means of pleasing God in faith, they were obliged to give way to the sign and accept the substance found in Christ as is the case for all of the Law of Moses.

HEB 10:1 “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.”

And of course Paul said essentially the same thing when writing to the Colossians.

COL 2:17 “These [different out-workings of the law] are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

And Paul’s contention in this letter to the Galatians is, “why would you go back to shadows when the reality has come, especially when you realize that the shadows cannot save anyone?”

Circumcision means nothing. Again, this is in the context as it relates to salvation. Circumcision obviously did mean something to the Jew since the command by God that all the male children in Israel be circumcised was to be carried out.

But even in the Old Covenant, circumcision couldn’t save. But here in our text Paul is attacking the Judaizers who insist that it can save as it is added to Christ’s work on the cross. And by the way, the whole concept of circumcision was meant to show, not the outward cutting away of the skin, but the cutting away of the fleshly heart which was bent on rebelling against God.

ROM 2:28-29 “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code....”

And so circumcision was always meant to point to how God can cut away that sinful and rebellious nature as He replaces it with life and a new nature and a new heart which desires to love and please the Lord. This is what the Lord told Israel.

EZE 36:26-27 “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

And this is what has been fulfilled in Christ as He has given us His life and His Spirit, as He has cut away the dominion of the sinful nature, as He has replaced that nature which leads to death with a new nature which is life in Christ.

COL 2:11 “In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,...

Do you realize that Christ Himself has done this circumcision in our lives? He has personally given us life and hope and has

restored us to fellowship with the Father as we now enjoy a peaceful relationship with our God and Creator.

Paul is saying to the Judaizers in Galatia, “why would you undermine this gospel, and destroy the hope of the world by adding something as ineffective as a mere cutting away of the flesh, and substitute that for a spiritual reality found in Christ alone, who is none other than the very Son of God?”

Circumcision is nothing, but Paul adds at the end of verse 15 of our text that uncircumcision is also nothing. So as not to possibly give the Gentiles a false pride in not being circumcised he points out that whether you’ve been circumcised or not, none of it plays any significance in your salvation. That’s precisely what Paul said earlier in this letter.

GAL 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

And when we have tasted the love of God found in Christ we can know what God’s peace and mercy are really all about, which is precisely what Paul points to in the next verse.

GAL 6:16 “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.”

When Paul speaks of those who follow this rule he is simply talking about the principle of faith as we express it in our trust for Jesus Christ alone. And he includes even the Israel of God. This is an interesting expression.

Keep in mind the context. Paul has been contrasting the Law of Moses, which is the equivalent of God’s covenant with Israel, with the grace and mercy found in Christ who is the fulfillment of the law.

The law always pointed to Christ as it was used as a tutor to lead us to Christ. Israel was always seen as God’s chosen people, but as is pointed out in both old and new testaments the Israel God had in mind and the Israel we sometimes think of are not one and the same thing.

And so, when Paul uses the phrase, “the Israel of God”, he is speaking of that group who are true believers, of whom those

believers in Galatia would be included. In other words, within the context of the letter the Israel of God is the church.

By the way, the name Israel means ruled or governed by God. And so, whether Jew or Gentile, all who have placed their faith in Christ belong to a new and merciful master and are governed by God with a new heart and a new nature which comes from His peace and mercy.

This was the point Jesus Christ made when the Jews took it upon themselves to redefine Israel. Notice what He says to them and how He acknowledges that they are the physical descendants of Abraham.

John 8:37-45 ³⁷ "I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. ³⁸ "I speak the things which I have seen with *My* Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from *your* father." ³⁹ They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. ⁴⁰ "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. ⁴¹ "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.

As Jesus identifies them as Abraham's descendants He makes it clear that they are in fact Jews and by default, at least as these Jews were concerned, that makes them part of the nation of Israel.

But our Lord then goes on to define who this Israel is as He points out to them that if they were really Abraham's descendants and by extension, really the Israel Abraham birthed, then they would listen to Jesus.

But more than that Jesus then states clearly that the nation of Israel has a Father that is beyond Abraham and it is the same Father who

was going to send His Son into the world as the seed of the woman promised to Adam and Eve.

The two fathers mentioned in John 8:42-45 are the devil and the Father of Jesus.

John 8:42-45 ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.

How can these Jews be called Israel and yet have as their father, the devil? They can't, and that's the point Jesus is making. Jesus has just defined for them who the true Israel is and it has nothing to do with physical heritage as these Jews were claiming.

Jesus told them that Abraham is the father of the Israel in a physical sense and yet He also makes it clear that Abraham did the deeds of the Father in heaven which these people were not doing, thus proving that they were not the children of Abraham.

What deeds did Abraham do? He followed wherever God lead, but he followed for one very simple reason. He believed in the promises of God and in the Messiah who would come from the Father. This, those Jews in Christ's presence, were not doing otherwise they would be accepting and listening to Jesus as they believed on Him as the Messiah.

But what are we told about Abraham and him doing the deeds of the Father?

Romans 4:3 ³ For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

In His statement that these Jews of Israel were of their father satan he makes it clear that they do not belong to the Israel of Abraham whose faith in God was credited to him as righteousness, the only kind of righteousness that makes him right before God.

Paul also makes this distinction very clear when writing to the Roman church.

Romans 9:6-8 ⁶ But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

All who are of the faith of Abraham are of the true Israel of God and it makes no difference if they are Jew or Gentile, as of course Abraham was to be a father of many nations, which was not to be limited to the Jews.

ROM 4:11 "And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them."

The importance this plays from an eschatological perspective has to do with how God will fulfill His promises to Israel in the future. Our study here cannot address this but suffice it to say that whenever God makes promises to Israel it is always the Israel of God, the true Israel who has the same faith as Abraham who make up only one people of God from all nations.

But as we come back to our text we see how mercy and peace is extended to this Israel of God, those who trust Christ alone for their salvation.

Peace and mercy from God are two sides to the same coin. As John MacArthur points out, "peace is the positive side of salvation, the establishing of a new and right relationship to God. Mercy is the negative side, the forgiving of all a believer's sins, and the setting aside of his judgment."

This is the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The fact that the bad news is so bad is what makes the good news so good. The bad news is that we are in need of mercy from God, because outside of Him intervening and giving us what we don't deserve, we would continue to be at war with God and receive His just punishment for our sin.

Praise God for His mercy and compassion. Praise God that His love for us has overcome our hatred for Him. And in His love for us He has given us peace.

Now, when we hear the word peace a number of things often come to mind. We might associate peace with an absence of war. The hostilities in the mid-east come to mind. We continually hear in the news about the peace process in the middle east. And we are told to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

But to have an absence of war is not what true peace is. Also, peace is not a mere sense of well-being. When we look at babies while they sleep we can say that they look so peaceful.

But when God talks of peace as it relates to our salvation He means something much deeper. He speaks in relational terms. It's true that in one sense to be at peace with God is to no longer be at war with Him, or to be His enemy. But the absence of war is not the only thing we want. We want to be a true friend of God with all of the benefits of one of His children.

That's the kind of peace that allows us to come into His presence with assurance and boldness knowing that He will never turn us away. Why? Because in Christ we have been adopted by a loving Father who will never reject us.

This is the kind of peace that guarantees us that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. This is the kind of peace that assures us that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

This is the peace and mercy Paul describes when writing to the Romans.

ROM 4:7-8 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Paul goes on to say to the Romans that, "since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (ROM 5:1-2)

We stand in this grace. In other words, we rest on the rock of our salvation and nothing can shake that reality. That peace comes only from Jesus Christ alone. It doesn't come from the world, as

hard as some may try to find peace in this world. It comes from knowing Christ by faith. And that's precisely what our Savior told us.

JOH 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

If we have peace in Christ, to where we know without a shadow of doubt that we will be with our God and Savior forever, how should that effect our daily walk with Him in this world? Well, we should walk in such a way as to show our thanks and gratitude. And we should walk with confidence that He can and will use us in this world to His glory.

There is no peace in trying to earn your way to heaven which is what adding the law to Christ's work does. Working your way to heaven could never bring peace. It only brings doubt and confusion, because it always raises the question, how many good works are enough to get me into heaven, and have I done enough?

When God's standard is perfection the answer is always, I could never do enough. And that's the point of God's mercy. He knows we can't do enough, which is why He sent His Son into the world to do what we couldn't; keep the law perfectly and then die for the penalty of sin we deserved as He then overcame the grave by rising bodily three days later.

I get excited about this salvation, but we have to finish this letter this morning.

GAL 6:17 "Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."

This is kind of Paul's way of saying, this issue has been put to rest, there is no more debate. Don't cause me anymore trouble over this issue. In fact, as the Judaizers have boasted in their outward act of circumcision Paul now ends the discussion by saying that I too have outward marks, but not of the circumcision type.

Paul basically says, 'while your act of circumcision has put you in good stead with the Jewish community and has kept you from being persecuted, my faith in Christ has produced persecution which I am not afraid of.'

2CO 11:24-28 "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was

stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

Paul’s faith in Christ was a faith which showed his gratitude no matter what course God put him on in life because he knew that life in Christ was all that really mattered. And that’s exactly what he told the Philippians.

PHI 3:8-9 “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

That’s what Paul is concerned with for himself and every other person who has come to be known by God and has tasted this peace and mercy which is eternal life found in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that’s how he ends this letter.

GAL 6:18 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.”

This is how Paul started this letter to the Galatians as he said in GAL 1:3-5 “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

It is grace from God from beginning to end. And it is by His grace, not by works that we are saved, be it circumcision, water baptism, good deeds in and of themselves, which tries to place us as a friend of God and a child of God.

Paul wants to end on a positive note and grace is as positive as it gets, because grace from God is undeserved, but is given none the less because He loves us so much and wants us to come back to Him as we forsake our sin and our own ways which only lead to destruction.

There is no reason for anyone to perish except for the reason of rebellion and thinking that we don't need God. But the Scriptures tell us that it is the fool who says in his heart that there is no God.

If there is a God, and there is, then He is a God who has revealed Himself and spells out quite clearly what it takes to overcome our sin which deserves a just punishment from God, which is death.

He has graciously taken our guilt and given us His righteousness, and in the process has given us life and hope and an inheritance which will last forever.

ROM 3:22-24 "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

And so, we close by saying, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers [and sisters]. Amen."