

**Galatians:
Commentary
Galatians 6:11-16**

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

There is much debate about whether this statement is a reflection of Paul writing the entire letter in his own hand, or if he has "taken over" the pen from a recording secretary (as was the custom) at this point and concluded the message in his own handwriting. There is also no shortage of discussion about whether he wrote in large print as a means to exhort his teaching to an even greater degree, or if to accommodate his poor eye sight, or as an inevitable result from an earlier persecution. While interesting, these discussions are a distraction from the greater significance that Paul was indeed writing this message to the Galatians personally. It was an intimate exhortation reflective of his affection for them as a pastor to his children in the faith. He was communicating that these instructions were his own, given by God to them for their benefit. This was not a formal, staid edict passed in a hierarchical system of power and control. It was a shepherd's love being expressed to bless and guide in conformity with the truth and spirit of the grace Gospel of Jesus.

12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Paul makes a final criticism of the opponents of the gospel of grace, explaining that they were not motivated by love of God, appreciation for His divine imparting of righteousness which they assumed to enjoy as a result of their self-perceived exemplary obedience, and certainly not for their selfless love for the Galatians. Instead, Paul was pointing out that their imposition of circumcision was both their cause for self-aggrandizement, but also the means by which they would avoid persecution. For at the present time, it was the Judaizers' contention that circumcision was the greater extent of obedience that was required for salvation and God's approval. In the inevitable persecution that would come (and did come), it would be the rationale that would distinctly differentiate the Judaizers from the community of genuine Christ followers.

13 For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

Paul understood greater than most, due to his first-hand experience in his missionary adventures, that the arrival of the true Gospel was invariably met with opposition and persecution by those in power who believed in righteousness attained by obedience to the law. Those who required circumcision, therefore, had a foot in both camps that allowed them to appease the legalistic authorities if they found themselves being scrutinized. The Judaizers were not bowing at the throne of God, but at the foot of man.

Paul has already clarified how far from the gospel these deceivers were by revealing their pride demonstrated in their zeal to proselytize the followers of Jesus to return to the law. Here, though, Paul profoundly describes the extent to which they are willing to go to accomplish this, even using the circumcised flesh of others as their proverbial badge of honor.

14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,

As a comparison, Paul determines not to boast selfishly about any aspect of his life or his work. He will not brag about where he has visited. He will not parade the statistics of his extensive (and probably impossible to count) number of converts. He will not list the addresses of the churches that were started as a result of his efforts. He certainly has no tally of circumcised hearts to compare to the Judaizers' own circumcision campaigns.

Rather, Paul only boasts in the cross of Jesus. This is baffling to consider. Boasting, by its nature, requires an accomplishment that is universally recognized as impressive and commendable. From Paul's perspective, the only accomplishment worth bragging about is the one accomplishment that the world would only label a failure of epic proportions: the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus arrived as the Savior of the world, the Redeemer of humankind. Yet it was the objects of His selflessness who rejected Him and nailed him to a cross to die. He allowed the ugliness of man to pin Him to the cross. He allowed His creation to kill Him. Yet it is in this that the greatest victory is accomplished and the greatest love to be demonstrated.

by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

With this prepositional phrase, Paul explains why you find no selfish boasting originating from his mouth. The net result of Christ's death on the cross is Paul's total identification in it. Because his faith is in Jesus, he identifies in Christ's death. His old life has died. As such, the world no longer has a "pull" on him. He is free from the need to establish his own name, his own reputation, or brag upon his own accomplishments so that the world might esteem him. Likewise, he no longer has any concern what the world may think of him.

15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Specifically, this matter of circumcision is of absolutely no value in the perspective of grace. The only thing that matters to God, and by extension, to Paul, is whether or not a person has been saved from sin, raised from death to life in Jesus, and is born again.

16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them,

Paul highlights the primacy of this principle that the grace which brings freedom through spiritual renewal in Jesus is the only thing that matters by reminding the Galatians of their ability to "walk by" it. They are able to live...to exist...to relate with God in a vibrant, grace-based paradigm through the finished work of Jesus. They are free from sin and they are free from self. Not merely situationally, but continually...forever. Because of this reality, the Christian is able to live in the reality that they are at peace with God. They are perpetually under the mercy of their Creator and Redeemer, who has taken upon Himself His wrath that should be rightfully directed unto them.

and upon the Israel of God.

This phrase has stirred much controversy among biblical scholars. It is best interpreted in a light that illuminates the consistency of God's love for His entire creation, as well as faithfulness to fulfill His promises to His children. In this regard, it can be reliably construed that "the Israel of God" consists of the Jewish people who recognize Jesus as Messiah and the Gentiles who call upon Him as Savior.

17 From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

Some, even several, theologians and historians have commented that Paul may have bore the actual *stigmata* marks of Jesus' crucifixion on his own wrists, side, and feet. This is unproven and unprovable. However, what is proven is Paul's own testimony of bearing the marks of persecution that identify him as a faithful follower of Jesus. He mentions these in the context of the earlier braggadocios of the Judaizers in regard to circumcision. It is though he is articulating his earlier claim of bragging only in the cross, saying in effect, "Do not bother me further with your trifling claims of significance, for I bear the testimony of identifying in the cross." He is not "one-upping" them by pointing to himself and what he has accomplished. He is not pointing to his own righteousness that is superior to their righteousness. Instead, because he is dead to his self and alive to Christ, he is pointing out that his scars of persecution point not to himself but to Jesus, to the price He paid and the salvation He accomplished.

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

Paul concludes his letter with a standard benediction, the second half of the earlier mention of peace, here by the grace which provides it and is the central theme of this epistle. He concludes with the beneficent identification of the Galatians one final time as his "brothers," a final reminder that his message was heartfelt and compelled by a God-given love with their temporal and eternal best interests at stake. His final "amen" is a declaratory "so may it be!"

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 6:11-18 - Except in the Cross

Small Group Learner Guide

A Deeply Personal Note (Galatians 6:11)

What does it mean to you that Paul makes the point that he has written these words with his own hand?

For all Intents & Purposes (Galatians 6:12-13)

How do you think it was beneficial for the Judaizers to proselytize the Galatian Christians?

How do you suppose their efforts would have kept them from being persecuted for the cause of Christ?

Verse 13 is profound because it rightly accuses the Judaizers of themselves not being keepers of the law. How is this true?

What does it mean to you that they were trying to boast in the flesh of the Galatians? How do you feel about those who would selfishly use others for their own spiritual bragging rights?

Boasting in Christ Alone (Galatians 6:14-17)

What do you think it means when Paul says that he will boast only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ? What is provocative to you about this statement.

What does it mean to you to be crucified to the world, and it to you?

What do you think are some some comparable things today to circumcision that people put unnecessary importance in?

How do you try to live out the principle that the only thing that matters is a new creation?

What does verse 17 mean to you, and how do you bear the marks of the crucifixion?

The following pages
are for small group leaders.

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 6:11-18 - Small Group Leader Guide

Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together

- **Think** about some of the difficult tasks you have undertaken in your life. Think about the things you have given up on and the feelings you have felt afterward. Conversely, consider the things you persevered in until completion, and the feelings you experienced afterward. Consider what was different between the two. What was the role of God's leading in these endeavors? How were others affected by your perseverance?
- **Review** Galatians 6:11-18 to review the content of the biblical focus. **Invite** God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. **Ask** to give you a spirit of perseverance to walk by faith in your daily living, particularly when you are tempted to give up and "go your own way." **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Read** the provided [commentary](#) Galatians 6:11-18.
- **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

To The Point - What to impart to your small group

Key Verse: But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14, ESV)

Objectives: Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

Discuss what it means to do the right things for the right reasons

Explore the implications of identifying with Jesus in the crucifixion.

Consider how to emulate Paul by both "walking in the rule" of grace, by boasting only in Christ and by bearing the marks of the crucifixion.

Leader Guide Key:

Blue - hyperlinks to other resources

Red - Reading prompts

Green - Leader headers and *sample responses to questions*

Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

Ice breaker - Great Accomplishments

Ask

What are some things you hope you would be remembered for? Personally, professionally, civically?

Say

People want to be remembered for different things. Some people want to be remembered for

accomplishing great things. Some people want to be remembered for their generosity. Still others have different interests altogether. In our time together, we're going to see really mattered to Paul, and what it means to us to have our priorities in order. It may be challenging...but we will also see that by having biblical priorities we will experience tremendous blessings and opportunities.

Open in prayer for your time together.

A Deeply Personal Note (Galatians 6:11)

Ask

What does it mean to you that Paul makes the point that he has written these words with his own hand?

Allow for responses. Aspects to highlight:

- *Paul may have written the entire letter personally, rather than through a recording secretary.*
- *This particular excerpt may be what Paul is writing in his own hand.*
- *Paul may be writing in large letters to make an emphasis, because he has poor eyesight, or as a physical result of his earlier persecution.*
- *Regardless, Paul cares enough for the Galatians to be making this personal appeal. This expresses his deeply personal relationship with them and his pastoral care for their spiritual development.*

For all Intentions & Purposes (Galatians 6:12-13)

Ask

How do you think it was beneficial for the Judaizers to proselytize the Galatian Christians?

The more successful the Judaizers were in convincing the Galatian Christians to undergo circumcision, the better it looked for them among the Jerusalem leaders.

How do you suppose their efforts would have kept them from being persecuted for the cause of Christ?

Even though the Judaizers called themselves followers of Jesus, they preached a false gospel that righteousness was attained by adherence to the laws of circumcision and the observation of the Jewish traditions. When the Jewish persecutors rose up in opposition to the Gospel, as they unfailingly did everywhere the Gospel was preached, these Judaizers could safely deny being proponents of the Christian gospel of grace, and convincingly argue they were striving to evangelize the "wayward Christians" back to the doctrines of the law.

Verse 13 is profound because it rightly accuses the Judaizers of themselves not being keepers of the law. How is this true?

Paul echoes Jesus that if a person is to be a keeper of the law (or one who hopes to find their righteousness by their obedience to the law), then the only acceptable standard is perfection. James declares to break one law is to violate the entire codex of the law. So even while the the Judaizers pressured the Galatians to embrace the law, they were not loving God, they themselves were not loving others. They themselves were violating the law and themselves were self-exposed to the judgment of God.

What does it mean to you that they were trying to boast in the flesh of the Galatians? How do you feel about those who would selfishly use others for their own spiritual bragging rights?

The Judaizers were literally tallying converts for their own bragging rights. The more they circumcised, the more righteous they could claim to be. In a sense, their actions were grossly pornographic - objectifying other humans for their own selfish gain. Paul's criticism is harsh, but spot on.

Allow group members to share their insights on the personal reflections from such behavior.

Boasting in Christ Alone (Galatians 6:14-17)

Ask

What do you think it means when Paul says that he will boast only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ? What is provocative to you about this statement.

Paul is saying that he will no longer brag about any personal accomplishment because anything ever done pales in comparison to the accomplishment of Jesus on the cross. This claim is so provocative because it is epically scandalous. First, it is the ultimate failure, from a human perspective. Jesus came to be anointed Savior and Messiah and instead was killed on a cross. Second, it is the ultimate humiliation because the Creator allowed Himself to be killed by His creation. Third it is provocative because God determined to use the first and second implication to accomplish His greatest victory, redeeming His fallen creation and through His own death, give life to all those who would believe in Him by faith!

What does it mean to you to be crucified to the world, and it to you?

Allow group members to respond. Typical responses may include:

- *It means that I am dead to the world's temptations, lures, and traps.*
- *It means that I now live by the Spirit, and I don't have to be a slave to the world.*
- *It means that the world no longer has any power to me.*
- *The things that matter from a worldly perspective don't apply to me.*

What do you think are some comparable things today to circumcision that people put unnecessary importance in?

Among many acceptable answers:

- *time, day, and style of worship*
- *the length of a sermon*
- *the lighting or other physical characteristics of the worship venue*
- *the attire of the worshipers or worship leaders*
- *the version of the Bible (from the perspective of exclusivity of it)*

How do you try to live out the principle that the only thing that matters is a new creation?

In allowing responses, try to highlight the purity of a simple Gospel where nothing is added to the finished work of Jesus. Celebrate the freedom in Jesus who validates our experiences by aligning us with His Holy Word, even if our experiences vary from another person's experiences.

What does verse 17 mean to you, and how do you bear the marks of the crucifixion?

Paul willingly and repeatedly paid a physical toll for following Jesus unashamedly. We are fortunate to live relatively free from persecution. Yet, God desires that we live unashamedly for Him. That we live publicly for Him, willing to face exclusion, mocking, isolation, and more. As it has been said, it is one matter to die for Jesus, but another altogether to live for Him. Our opportunity is to do the latter since we are largely free from any risk of the former.

Say

Our great opportunity through Galatians has been to celebrate the pure simple Gospel of grace - that Jesus redeems us fully to enjoy God forever. If you do not know Him, if you have not trusted Him to reconcile you to the Father, now is a perfect time to respond to the invitation that He offers you. The Bible promises that if you ask God to forgive you for trying to live life on your own apart from Him and ask Him to forgive you for the wrong things you have done, He will. The Bible promises that if you call on Jesus to save you from the penalty of your defiance of God, He will. If you ask Him to rescue you, He will...completely. If you believe God is leading you to begin that new relationship with Him now, pray with me:

God, I have heard you talking to me in the depth of my spirit, leading me to turn away from my past mistakes. I'm sorry for the things I've done that are offensive to you. I'm sorry for the mess I've made of my life. I ask you to forgive me and to save me. I believe that Jesus is Lord and that you raised Him from the dead. Thank you for hearing my prayer and answering as you have promised! Amen!

If you have prayed this prayer for the first time, let's talk afterward so I can help you with your next steps to grow in your new life. Remember, Paul says the only thing that matters is the new creation! The Bible is talking about you! And this is not the end, but the new beginning! And we celebrate that with you!

For those of you who have done this at some point in the past, Galatians then is a reminder to keep step with the Spirit and to not get distracted. Let's close in prayer asking God to help us keep the main thing the main thing and to empower us to keep up with His Spirit, who is always at work, completely unhindered, and always advancing!

Invite the group to pray for one another. Pray over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important. Confirm your plans for your next gathering!