

“Growth, Purpose and Grace”

Galatians 6:11-18

As the Apostle Paul concludes his message to the Galatian churches, he tries one more time to convince them that they are being misled away from the simplicity of the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. Paul planted many of these churches on his first missionary journey with Barnabas in Acts 13-14. Sometime after they left, on their way towards Jerusalem to report what God was doing (which he will do in Acts 15), a group of Jews, claiming that they believed Jesus was the Messiah, but that any Gentiles who placed their faith in Jesus, still had to be circumcised and obey the Laws of Moses in order to be accepted by God.

Throughout the letter Paul has tried numerous ways to point the error of this teaching. What has he tried? He tried shocking them right off the bat in 1:6 when he said,

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ 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! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Because these Judaizers undermined Paul he had to defend himself and the gospel from Ch. 1:11-2:21. So he gave them some of his personal testimony, summarized in 1:11-12

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Then he appealed to them on the basis of their own testimonies and how they received Christ in 3:1-5,

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ⁴ Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? ⁵ Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Then from 3:6-26 he appealed to the Old Testament itself showing how Abraham was credited with righteousness by God through faith not by the Law. Then he used a cultural argument in 3:26-4:11 about how Roman adoption from slavery works and that they too have been adopted by God freely through grace and faith and are now full heirs of Christ. Then he uses an analogy between Sarah/Isaac and Hagar/Ishmael to challenge them to think about whether they are still slaves or children of promise.

Then in Ch. 5 he counters the Judaizers' charge that 'freedom from the Law' means freedom to sin. But Paul points out that while we are free from the penalty of sin we are also freed from the power of sin, and submission to Jesus by faith means the Spirit will produce fruit in you of loving actions and service. And last week in 6:1-10 Paul challenged the Galatians to put this faith in practice

by caring for one another not causing divisions. And he reminds them that we will all stand before God one day so be careful because we reap what we sow. So, keep doing good even if it seems wearisome.

So, what's left to say in the final 8 verses? In this last brief appeal Paul speaks to their hearts.

He's basically going to close with a challenge to examine themselves and ask some introspective questions that the Scripture gives clear answers to.

Paul concludes the letter by writing the last 8 verses by himself:

¹¹ *See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!*

Paul dictated most of his letters. In Paul's final greetings in Romans 16:22, Tertius writes '*Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.*' At the end of 1 Cor. 16:21 Paul adds his own benediction when he wrote, '*I Paul write this greeting in my own hand.*' Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch. And Moses and Joshua and Samuel obviously didn't write their own obituaries. But, what it does here in Galatians is remind the believers there that this was not easy for Paul (large letters might indicate his possible poor eyesight – some suggesting this was his 'thorn in the flesh') – or most likely, just emphasizing how important this was [like all caps or Bold font today]. Nevertheless, Paul took time to write this out himself to remind the Galatians how much he cared about them; unlike the Judaizers who cared more for themselves than the Galatians and, ultimately Jesus. Paul writes in vv.12-13,

¹² *Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.*

Here's the first introspective question he wants the Galatians (and all believers) to wrestle with:

Whose Approval am I Living For? **(6:11-13)**

Paul takes the pen in hand here in v.11 because he wants to emphasize his concluding arguments. Normally, the end of a letter has a certain pattern; greet so-and-so, end with a benediction. But not here. There's more to get across. I'm even writing this myself. And this reminds us about Paul himself. Paul's trying to help these people follow Jesus, not follow himself. Paul wants to see the Galatians growing and producing the fruit of the Spirit. That's why he served (And continues to serve them) through warning and teaching. A good reminder to all of us that we don't serve each other for their approval; rather

We serve others to encourage spiritual growth (v.11)

Those who were listening to the Judaizers were straying away from the purity of the gospel. Paul could see how damaging this would be to them and to their testimony in the area. He desired to see their spiritual growth and so pleaded with them not to go down this road. That's why almost all his letters that contain a prayer from him focused on spiritual growth. Is that how we pray for ourselves, our children and grandchildren, and our church? Take Paul's prayers and pray them verbatim for one another. And then pray for how we can serve one another so spiritual growth happens. If we're caught up looking for the approval of others we won't think to pray for them or encourage them to grow spiritually closer to God and people. Carrying one another's burdens means being burdened for

their spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness. We often lament for those who have abandoned their walk with Jesus or drifted away but are we burdened to do anything about it? It's our responsibility to help each other grow spiritually.

Why were these Judaizers trying to persuade new Gentile believers to be circumcised and place themselves under the Law? Paul doesn't hide their motivation here:

¹² Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised.

How? These Judaizers wanted more people to follow their teaching because it makes them look good to gain a following. Because a lot of people judge by what the majority do. "If all these people are doing this, how can it be wrong or bad?" That's not how God works. Few are saved. Few choose life. Many choose destruction. Take the narrow road Jesus says. The Judaizers were looking for people's approval then they will become more acceptable to the Romans, who for the most part were not persecuting Jews. So Paul challenges us here?

Ask yourself why you want people's approval (vv.12-13a)

I wish I could say I rarely come across this with believers and I also wish I could say it's not a problem for me, but it's something we all struggle with. We do want people to accept us and like us, so there are times we do want people's approval. We do it in conversations. We do it by not speaking up when we could. We read Paul 2000 years later but if we lived when he was alive we would hear a lot of negativity about Paul from other Christians. He was a hardliner for the truth. Jesus was not popular with the majority. Truth always separates people.

Why do we worry about what people think of us? Why do we hesitate to speak God's perspective when we have an opportunity? The same reason these Judaizers wanted people's approval:

The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Jewish Christians had an advantage over Gentile Christians; when asked about their faith they could simply identify as a Jew and not necessarily as a follower of Jesus and avoid persecution. The Romans weren't bothering the Jews unless they made a stink about worshipping Caesar as Emperor/a god. No one wants to be persecuted for the gospel but we must accept it as part of choosing Jesus over the world and ourselves. When we place our faith in Jesus we change allegiance from ourselves as Master to Jesus as Master. And as such we should live for His and God's approval now.

Don't be ashamed of God's approval (v.13b)

The Judaizers didn't even realize they were not walking with God. Paul says they weren't even obeying the very Law they were forcing these Gentiles to follow! Paul already pointed this out in 5:14,

¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

If these Judaizers truly were following the Law then why were they criticizing Paul and causing a division in the body of Christ? Paul quoted Lev. 19:18 (referring to 19:1-18) of how the Law said to show you're loving others. Sin always blinds us from seeing how we look to God. If we truly want God's approval over people then we will seek to obey His Word. Obeying His Word does come with

the risk of being misunderstood, of being labelled as things were not and of verbal, social, financial and even physical persecution. Paul said elsewhere,

2 Tim. 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Paul wants to leave the Galatians with these penetrating and soul-searching thoughts. Whose approval are you living for? If you're worried more about these Judaizers' opinion or the world's opinion more than God's then you're not obeying Him either.

The biggest stumbling block for Jews was the cross. The Law says (and Paul already spoke to this back in 3:10

¹⁰ All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ¹¹ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

To be hung on a cross was doubly shameful for a Jew. So to identify with Jesus is to identify with the cross. Paul says you can't separate the two. But the Judaizers wanted to avoid persecution because they were embarrassed that their leader was a crucified Lord and that the Law said cursed is anyone hung on a tree. Paul reminds us in vv.14-17 that this is what the gospel is all about, the death and resurrection of Jesus. We live for the purpose of making this known. So Paul challenges them again to think about this:

What's My Purpose in Life? **6:14-17**

Paul says he wants to boast about Jesus, not about how many people are following him.

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. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. ¹⁷ Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

Paul reminds us all of our purpose in life. Namely,

Glorify Jesus for what He did (v.14a)

The cross is not an embarrassment; it's our salvation. Jesus became the curse for us. He died in our place. All of us should die for our own sins but Jesus did it for us and we who place our faith in Him confess our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness from God.

Don't avoid the cross or be ashamed of the cross, tell people about the cross. It's the only way to salvation. Boast in a crucified Saviour who loves you enough to die horribly in our place. He wasn't ashamed of us, nor should we be ashamed of him. The cross is our salvation from ourselves otherwise we would still be following what the world does, which takes us away from God. Paul says that it is through the cross that the world has been crucified to me. In other words, it no longer has the

same attraction it once held. So to seek man's approval and avoid the cross is how the world thinks. Therefore,

Resist the temptations of the world (vv.14b)

Death means separation. The cross separates people. Those who cling to it for salvation or those who shun it. Once we see Jesus for who He is and how much He loves us, living for Him becomes far more attractive and far more satisfying than anything the world has to offer. When we know God's approval and pleasures forever more in His presence await us, the temporary glitter of worldly trinkets and accolades lose their appeal. Because they never satisfy us and can't satisfy us.

If we're going to fulfil our purpose by glorifying Jesus we need to resist the temptations of the world and

Let our light shine (vv.15-16)

¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

Circumcision used to be the sign of the covenant. No longer. Now the sign is the evidence of the Spirit in your life who has made you into a new creation. The rule to follow is that you've been made into a new creation and that outward religious symbols don't define you. A changed life is what speaks to people. When Paul says 'those who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God' he's referring to saved Gentiles and saved Jews. Your Jewishness doesn't save you so not all Jews are saved. In Romans Paul says be a Jew like Abraham the Father of Jews, whose faith saved him, not the Law. Paul is not so subtly telling Jewish people, you're not all saved. Let your changed life be the light that points people to Jesus. Show it by your loving service (which you didn't use to do before you were saved) and by the fruit of the Spirit, producing the characteristics of God in you.

And instead of avoiding or fearing persecution,

Anticipate persecution (v.17)

Paul bore the marks of being beaten and whipped for Jesus, for proclaiming this gospel by grace. Some of these beatings came from Jewish people (as well as Romans). His charge 'Don't cause trouble' is directed to the Galatians who he's trying to persuade to live by grace not the law. The word for trouble has more of the idea of work. Change your hearts and don't make more work for me. You're not going to change me because I wear the branding mark (as a slave) of Jesus Christ, who is my Lord, in whom I am not ashamed. It's almost like he's shaming them with his marks of 'shame'.

He leaves them not just with a benediction but a final appeal to live by grace:

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

Brothers (Sisters). Believers. Followers of Jesus,

If You're Saved by Grace are We Living by Grace?
(6:18)

Benedictions are prayers. Paul prays for Jesus' family members to be the most gracious people. That grace should pour out from your spirit as the Holy Spirit makes you more like Jesus. These Judaizers lacked grace. Everything was black and white. The Law or nothing. Circumcision, Sabbath keeping, kosher foods. Jesus saved you from all that, why go back?

Would people describe you and I as gracious people? Teachable. Flexible. Kind. Listeners. Sacrificial. Loving. It cost Jesus His life to make grace available to us. Paul wrote these last 8 verses in his own hand as one final appeal for grace to reign over Law. For God's approval over people's to be more important. For spiritual growth to be more important than the letter of the Law. That risking losing friends and being misunderstood was worth the joy of sharing the gospel. That the cross is something you hold out as a light not hide behind you.

We are challenged this morning to ask ourselves these questions:

Are we living for God's approval?

Are we seeking to glorify Jesus is all that we say and do?

Is grace permeating yours and my spirit?

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- If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@email.com