

## **Gospel, Faith and Freedom (Studies in Galatians)**

### **Gospel Fulfilment - Our Only Boast**

#### **Galatians 6:1-18**

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Last week we heard Paul say, "Walk by the Spirit", and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." To walk by the Spirit, is to go "hearing with faith" the gospel promises of God in Christ, especially as the flesh wages war against the Spirit within us. As we do this, there will be a harvest of the Spirit - the fruit of the Spirit.

This week, we catch a glimpse of what 'walking by the Spirit' looks like in the community of faith. Then, returning to the flesh and Spirit contrast, Paul reminds us that "whatever one sows, that will he also reap." And in closing, he summarises the central concerns raised in the letter and emphasises the things which matter most- namely, the cross of Christ and a new creation.

#### **vv1-6**

Verse 25 of the previous chapter can be considered the conclusion to the previous section. However, together with verse 26, it also functions as a transition into the following section where Paul provides examples of how members of the Christian community relate and function when the Spirit of God is active among them.

- The church is relational before it is institutional, and so Paul is primarily concerned with the relationships among the family of God.
- Positively, Paul exhorts the Galatian believers to care for each other by restoring any fellow saint caught in sin and to bear with one another's burdens (6:1-2).
- Negatively, he warns against pride and competition among the church (5:26; 6:3-5).
- Together, such actions "fulfill the law of Christ- namely, love (Cf. 5:6, 13).
- Any 'testing' in these matters is not to be comparative, but personal, and in accordance with the standard of God, not any other measure. This protects from any false sense of pride or failure. (Cf. John 21:20-23; 1 Cor 14:12; Eph 4:15-16).
- With regards to each believer having their own load to bear, this is not in contradiction to Paul's argument for being justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the flesh. Yet, as the following section highlights, it does maintain the truth that how we walk now, will affect our future. However, our only cause to boast on the day of judgment will be Christ himself, and not our own 'load-bearing efforts' (6:14).
- Such 'bearing of one's own load' does not excuse those being taught from supporting those who provide genuine gospel instruction (Cf. Luke 10:7; 1 Cor 9:14).

#### **vv7-10**

Linked to the previous section, Paul here motivates the Galatian believers to 'do good', warning them that how they walk now has consequences for their future- "whatever one sows, that will he also reap,"- either corruption or eternal life.

- This is also linked with 5:16-24 where Paul declared that those who do the works of the flesh "will not inherit the kingdom of God," but those who walk by the Spirit will bear the fruit of the Spirit, against which there is no law.
- Without nullifying his main argument in this letter, Paul deliberately guards against complacency and presumptuous Christian living by reminding his readers that whichever way they choose to walk, there will be a harvest of one sort or another.
- Aware of the potential for disenchantment and despair, Paul calls for persistence in doing good. There seems to be warrant for particular concern and care to be shown towards fellow believers, as indicated by the phrase, "especially to those who are of the household of God."

## **vv11-18**

As with the beginning of this letter, Paul dispenses with much of the usual custom and formula in his closing remarks. Instead, he provides a summary of his key concerns and of what he considers 'really matters'– not circumcision or uncircumcision; not moralistic, law-abiding religion, but "a new creation."

- There is evidence of a concentric structure to this final passage. Moving from the outside in: verses 11 and 18 provide the outer framework; verses 12-13 and verse 17 concern the false teachers - with a rebuke and a plea for no further trouble from them; and verses 14-16 contain Paul's central point in this section - the cross and new creation.
- The 'large letters' Paul writes with may be for emphasis, but may be due to his possible ocular degeneration (eyesight problems!) as indicated back in 4:13-15.
- Paul's final words concerning the false teachers exposes their hypocrisy and their selfish motives (v12-13). Paul also appeals to any of them who might read his letter, and to the Galatians, that they would cause him no further trouble in this matter of the true apostolic gospel.
  - Whilst the false teachers boast in their 'law-keeping' mark of circumcision, in what is probably a reference to the scars on his body as a result of his persecution on behalf of Christ, Paul pleads for no further trouble on the basis of 'the marks of Jesus' he bears on his body (Cf. 2 Cor 4:10).
- Contrary to false teachers' boasting in the flesh, through circumcision, Paul's only boast (rejoicing) is in "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." This may not sound strange to our ears, but in Paul's day such a statement would have seemed quite bizarre. The matter of crucifixion was not something you spoke about in polite company.
  - But it is not the matter of crucifixion itself Paul was boasting of, but the crucifixion of "our Lord Jesus Christ" in whom believers are justified and saved.
- To be *crucified to the world, and the world to him*, Paul is repeating the point he made in 2:20. As he now stands in union with Christ he stands in a completely new relationship to the world, where he no longer lives for himself, but for him who died for his sake and was raised. Nor does he regard anyone according to the flesh, but only according to Christ (Cf. 2 Cor 5:15-16).
- This is what he means by stating that "neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." It is no longer according to any worldly, religious or fleshly evaluation that we are justified– it is only according to the cross of Christ. "The old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17).
- Paul often concludes his letters with a blessing of peace to his readers. However, other than here in Galatians, never does Paul include 'mercy', nor does he ever make such a blessing 'conditional' as he does here– "for all who walk by this rule."
  - Just as he commenced the letter with the announcement of a curse upon anyone who should preach a gospel contrary to the one he preached to them, so too he concludes the letter with a blessing upon anyone who boasts in the cross of Christ and has therefore been crucified with Christ and now lives by faith in him and has received the gifts of the Spirit and eternal life. It would be both counter-productive and contradictory for Paul to give a word of blessing and peace to anyone who walked by any other 'rule'.

***"Peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."***

***"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen."***