

THE CLOSING OF THE LETTER
Galatians 6:11-18
October 14, 2012

We have come to the end of the book of Galatians and we will finish this book up this afternoon and next time we will move on to something else. But I want to take a few minutes and summarize this book as best I can.

This book is a defense of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. It is like Hebrews in that it warns against the adoption of Judaism. Hebrews was written to encourage Jews not to return to Judaism. And Galatians is written to warn Gentiles not to adopt Judaism.

The major issue in Galatians is that Jewish teachers have come behind Paul and by their zeal and by their affectionate appeals have turned the hearts of the Gentile converts in Galatia against Paul and against the true gospel of Christ.

The specific issue was that the Jewish teachers were teaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. This seems like an insignificant deviation, doesn't it? At first glance we might think that Paul would simply ignore them or indulge them in this matter in order to keep the peace.

But Paul understood that this question goes to the heart of the gospel. This is not a minor issue. This is a major issue. And it goes to the issue of whether salvation is a matter of grace or a matter of law. Is salvation by faith or is it by works? Is salvation by something you can do, or is salvation by something that has been done by Christ? Is salvation you plus Christ or is it Christ alone?

Now if I were to break the book of Galatians down into three parts, I would say that the first two chapters establish the apostolic authority of the Apostle Paul. After all, the Jewish teachers have drawn the affections of the people away from Paul. And they are telling the Galatians that Paul is not really an apostle. And even if Paul has some authority, he certainly does not have full authority like Peter and James and John and the

other apostles.

So, in the first two chapters, Paul establishes his authority. And here is the authority of Paul:

1. He was separated from his mother's womb. (1:15) This means that God had his hand on Paul from the very beginning. There was a very special purpose on Paul's life from the beginning and God separated him unto this purpose from his mother's womb.
2. He was called by the grace of God. (1:15) This is an effectual call. Jesus Christ came to Paul one day and called him to a new purpose. Paul had a miraculous conversion. It can be attributed to nothing less than the miraculous power of God. For Paul was hell bent on killing Christians. And then, in a moment, he was changed. He went from hell bent to heaven bound when Christ appeared to him on that Damascus road.
3. He was taught the gospel by Jesus Christ himself. (1:12) Peter and James and John and the other apostles were taught by Jesus Christ and so was Paul. Paul was taught by the resurrected Christ. And Paul had a theological education like none other. He had the best professor of all time.
4. Paul demonstrated at the Jerusalem Counsel that he did not come behind Peter and the other apostles at all. (Galatians 2:1-10) In fact, Paul marched right in with his Gentile convert, Titus, and said, "OK boys, let's decide this right now. Does Titus have to be circumcised or not?" And Peter, James and John had to admit that circumcision was not required.
5. Paul demonstrated his authority when he confronted Peter face to face in Antioch and called Peter a hypocrite for refusing to eat with the Gentiles. (Galatians 2:11-21)

So, the first two chapters establish the full authority of Paul as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The next two chapters of Galatians are a theological treatment of the law. Of course the law is also known as the Mosaic Law (3:17); the covenant (3:17); the schoolmaster (3:24); the weak and beggarly elements (4:9); the yoke of bondage

(5:1).

In Galatians Paul sets up a contrast between two systems. There is the law system and there is the gospel system. The law system came by Moses. (3:17) The gospel system came by Abraham. (3:8)

And the two systems are contrasted in order to show that the law system is not the way to be saved.

The Mosaic Law system was temporary from the very beginning. It came along 430 years after the gospel promise to Abraham and lasted only until Christ came.

The Mosaic Law was a works system of religion. The whole focus of the Law was doing and working and performing. But the gospel system is a faith kind of system. Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

The Mosaic Law was a cursing kind of system.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.

Galatians 3:10

But here is the conclusion of the whole matter as far as the Law is concerned. It could not save.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident.

Galatians 3:11

Paul demolishes the efficacy of the Law in chapters two and three. You can never be saved under the Law.

Paul goes a little bit further and throws another dagger at that old system. And he says that the Mosaic Law and the people under the Mosaic Law (the Jews) correspond to Hagar and Ishmael. That old outcast Ishmael represents the people under the Law. But Jacob is the child under the promise. Anyone under the Law was an outcast because salvation does not come by the Law but by a saving promise.

This is the heart of the message of Galatians. No one is saved by law. No one can be saved under a legal system. No one can be saved by works.

But mankind will forever maintain that he can be saved by doing something. This is the arrogance and the self-righteousness of man. He thinks that he is yet good enough to please God.

There are only two kinds of religions in the world. There is Christianity which says salvation is by the sheer grace of God. And then there is every other religion in the world that says you must do something to be saved. Now all these other religions may have their own requirements, but in every one of them, you must do something.

And Paul says that salvation is by faith alone. There is nothing that you can do. There is no ritual that you can perform. There is no "sinners prayer" that you can say. There is no "Hail Mary" that you can recite. There is no aisle that you can walk down. There is no water that you can be dunked in. There is no church you can join. There is no foreskin that you can cut off to be saved. There is no feast day that you can observe. There is no food that you can eat or refrain from eating that will save you.

There is only one way to be saved and that is by believing what Christ has already done for you. Salvation is defined not by the word "do," but the word "done."

Chapters five and six of Galatians are a contrast between legalism, which is what you have under the Law, and liberty which is what you have under the gospel. And it is a wonderful difference. Under liberty we are not subject to penalty of the law. We are taken out from under the law. And we are taken out from under the law by our justification. We are placed under another law – the law of Christ or the law of grace or the law of liberty.

It is a whole new administration of things. We are forgiven on the front end. All our sins are gone. There is no more curse of the law. And, we are given the Holy Spirit of God to produce in us the fruit of holiness. What we could never do under the law, the Holy Spirit does for us in Christ.

The Closing Remarks of Paul

And now we come to the closing remarks of this book. Paul has written a rather long letter to the Galatians. It is as long as Ephesians and longer than Philipians and Colossians. It is longer than the Pastoral Epistles. And Paul says,

You see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

Galatians 6:11

I. Paul personally penned the letter.

It appears that Paul wrote a large letter and he wrote it with his own hand. This would be contrary to his usual way of writing his letters. Usually he would dictate his letters to someone else and they would actually write it by their hand. And then Paul would write the last few words in his own hand. This would serve as his personal signature.

But here, perhaps Paul is suggesting that he broke with his custom and wrote the entire letter by his own hand. This would convey the impression that the letter was very important or that Paul had a keen, personal interest in the letter.

II. The Jewish teachers had a twofold motive.

Paul takes one last swing at the Jewish teachers in hopes of convincing the Galatians to renounce them and return to the gospel.

A. First of all, the Jewish teachers were motivated by a desire to avoid persecution.

As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

Galatians 6:12

Here is what motivated the teachers. They wanted to appease the Jews so that they would not be persecuted. You see, as long as you taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation, the Jews were satisfied. They would leave you alone.

But the moment you suggest that circumcision is not necessary, then you incur the wrath of the Jews. And these teachers have caved in to the fear of the Jews.

B. Secondly, the teachers are motivated by self glory.

But desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

Galatians 6:13

The idea is that they are trying to make proselytes. What they want is to go back to Jerusalem and say, "I signed up this many Jewish proselytes. And of course all of this is nothing more than self glorying.

III. Paul had a single motive.

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Galatians 6:14

Whereas the Jewish teachers were motivated by self glory, Paul gloried only in the cross of Jesus Christ. He was only interested in Christ and Christ's gospel.

IV. Paul had a simple message.

Paul ends his letter by stating that Christ could not care less about circumcision. Circumcision or uncircumcision means absolutely nothing to Jesus Christ. It is a meaningless ritual that served a purpose only in the Old Covenant.

There is one thing that is meaningful as to salvation and that is whether or not you are a new creature.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Galatians 6:15

The only thing that matters is whether or not God has made you new. It is whether or not you have a new heart. It is whether or not you have the Holy Spirit of God in you. It is

whether or not you are counted among the faithful like Abraham.

I would like for you to notice that if you are a new creature, you walk according to a different rule.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Galatians 6:16

You no longer walk according to that old rule of law, but you walk according this rule, the rule of a new life. It is the rule of Christ. It is the rule of liberty. It is the rule of grace. And for all those under this rule, Paul wishes peace and mercy.

Note: When it says “and upon the Israel of God,” there is some disagreement as to whom this refers. Does it refer to the Jews or does it refer to all those who are new creatures? I prefer to think that Paul is referring here to all those who are under grace and liberty through Christ and not to the Jewish nation.

V. Paul had a final request.

From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Paul may have been saying here, “Please don’t trouble me with this again.” Paul had been scourged and stoned on several occasions and he was asking that he be spared any further trouble of this nature.

VI. Paul has a final prayer.

Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

In the end it all comes back to grace.

May we never look to our own works but always and forevermore look to the work of Christ for our salvation.