



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 6: 11-18

Summer 2021

"The Essence Of Our Faith"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth. Well, it is all about Christ; that's the Book of Galatians. And so now we're coming to the end of it; we're looking this morning at Galatians chapter 6, verses 11 through 18,

¹¹ See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. ¹² Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴ But may it never be that I would 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 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

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

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

Galatians 6: 11-18

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless this time of studying it together.

(Message) We come now to the end of Paul's letter to the Galatians; his 'Fighting Epistle', as it has been called. And just as it began, in an unusual way, without a word of thanksgiving, but with what one writer called an immediate polemical punch, it ends in much the same way. Normally, Paul concluded his letter with a warm, personal touch. He would send greetings from other saints, he would state his desire to see those to whom he had written the letter, and he would close the letter with a doxology, a word of praise to God: And we find all that missing at the end of this letter.

Instead of giving a final word of encouragement, he summarizes the main thoughts of the book. He warns the enemy, he condemns their heresy, and states the crux of the Christian faith. Christianity is either human or divine. It is either about what we do for God—or what He has done for us. Paul makes it very clear in these last verses that it is all about what God has done for us. He says the only thing he will boast in is, "the cross of our LORD Jesus Christ." (vs14).

The lack of pleasantries here at the end was not anger or rudeness in Paul, but an expression of the profound sense of urgency that he felt. He was deeply concerned about the Galatians' spiritual welfare, and indicates that in the beginning of this conclusion in verse 11 by drawing attention to his own handwriting; "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." Why would he say that? Why would he draw attention to that? Why would he direct them to his handwriting and the size of the letters of each of the words that he wrote, the uncials of this letter? The reason is, because it's so unusual.

It was Paul's practice to dictate his letters. And then at the conclusion, he'd take the pen from his scribe or his secretary, and he would write his own signature. And sometimes he would write a verse of encouragement. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 17, he ends the letter by stating that the greeting that he gave, he gave in "his own

hand" with his, as he says, "distinguishing mark". And that is this distinguishing mark in all of his letters. But there it is written in the present tense. "I Paul, write this greeting with my own hand." (2 Thes 3:17).

Here in the Book of Galatians, it's in the aorist tense, (or the past tense), and is literally, "See with what large letters I have written to you." And that suggests that Paul wrote the whole letter in his own hand. And the large letters that he calls attention to were his well-known style of writing. Maybe it was due to poor eyesight that he had to write these large letters. That's the characteristic feature of his signature, which authenticated that the letter was from Paul.

But Paul calls attention to it in order to express to the Galatians his great concern for them, and impress upon them the importance of thoroughly considering all that he had written to them. It was a way of saying that he was so troubled by the danger that they were in that he did not take the time to find a secretary to dictate to—as he normally would have done. But instead he went right to the letter himself and took great pains in writing it, in his own, labored style, because it was so urgent that he get this message to them. The letter was a labor of love and he had toiled over it and strained his tired eyes to write it. And he hoped by communicating that, that they would be persuaded to read it carefully; and go back and read over this, these things; and consider them deeply.

What Paul has written in this epistle is of the greatest importance. And to insure that they didn't miss the message, he concluded the letter by summarizing its main points.

The first point that he makes in verses 12 and 13 is that the people troubling them, the Judaizers, not only had false teaching, they had false motives—they were not who they claimed to be. They claimed to be interested in the Galatians, but they were really only interested in themselves and making what Paul calls a "good showing" for the purpose of avoiding persecution.

If they could convince the Galatians to be circumcised, they would bring them under the whole Law, and in doing that they would bring them within the orbit of Judaism by making them dependent on the Law of Moses. It's not enough to begin to take one aspect of the Law, to take circumcision as Paul pointed out. You take one Law — you take the whole Law. You take it all, and put yourselves under that. And that, if they had done that, if they had achieved that goal of theirs, they would have eased the tension between the church and the synagogue in Jerusalem, since the synagogue valued the Law as the means of salvation, as did some within that Jerusalem church. And as a result of their work, the attacks of the zealots in Jerusalem would cease against the Christians.

It's not Jesus 'the rabbi', it's not Jesus 'the teacher' or 'the wonder worker' that offends people. It's Jesus the crucified Savior that offends both Jew and Gentile. The cross is poison to pride because it is the symbol of man's guilt and man's spiritual inability. It is the proof of his abject condition in his absolute need of a Savior. If the Law could save, there would be no need for the cross.

That's what Paul has said, back in chapter 2, verse 21. 'If the Law could save, then why did Christ die?' Would God send His Son to die such a miserable death, a shameful, painful death if men could be saved in any other way? And the point, of course, is, 'No!' The very fact that the cross occurred is the proof that the Law does not save; that the Law cannot save; that there's salvation in no other person and no other way except Christ crucified. And that's why it is so offensive.

That is what caused Paul, when he was a zealous Pharisee, "to persecute the church beyond measure", as he wrote in chapter 1, verse 13, and try "to destroy it." And why, upon his conversion when he began to preach the cross as the only means of salvation, he was persecuted for it. That's why, in chapter 5, verse 11 he called the cross "a stumbling block", a scandal. So to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ, these Judaizers modified the message of the Gospel, and made it much less offensive by insisting that believers must be circumcised.

But converting the Galatians to circumcision and Law keeping, not only eased them, these Judaizers, of danger, it also enhanced their prestige. They could also brag to others about all their converts to Judaism. That lay behind so much of what they did. Paul states that in verse 13b, "...they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh." They were trophy hunters. They wanted to be able to return to Jerusalem with a lot of 'spiritual scalps' on their belt and boast about their missionary achievements.

And that's not only an ancient problem. It reminds us of churches today that take pride in the number of decisions for Christ and baptisms that they have that they can count up by the end of the year. These men, these Judaizers weren't genuine, that's what Paul is saying. They didn't live up to their own standard. And Paul called them on that very point. He said that they do not even keep the Law themselves. They tell you to 'keep the Law'; but they don't do it—like those Pharisees that Jesus dealt with.

These men were hypocrites. I think that's probably true of every heretic, every false teacher. They don't live up to their own standards. And these didn't seriously believe that salvation was by works of the Law because they didn't keep it. And, of course, they couldn't keep it. The Law was not given to be kept in its wholeness and its perfection because no one can keep it. —That's the point of the Law. That's what it demonstrates.

So Paul condemned their dishonesty. The real motives in their ministry were selfishness; they were fear and pride. They wanted to avoid persecution—and they wanted to look good doing it to have something to boast about.

In contrast to all this empty boasting, Paul describes an entirely different kind of boasting in verse 14—the only boast that is legitimate; and he is fearless in it, "But may it never be that I would boast except in the cross of our LORD Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

That was a bold statement for Paul to make in his day. It was a jarring statement for the world to hear because Paul exalted the very thing that provoked horror and

disgust in others. Among the Romans, the cross was the lowest form of death. It was reserved for slaves, for robbers, assassins, for traitors. It was designed to be a humiliating form of execution. Roman citizens were exempt from it. A cultured Roman would never mention the Latin word *crux*, or cross, in polite society. Cicero said that a citizen of Rome should not even have the word *cross* in his or her thoughts.

For Paul to say that, 'he gloried in the cross' was like someone today saying, "I glory in the gallows," or, "I glory in the hangman's noose." So what was an offense to the Jew was foolishness to the Gentile.

But Paul gloried in it. He knew the world's attitude, but he boldly boasted in the cross because it is the instrument of salvation. It saved Paul. At the cross, Christ paid the ransom price that freed him, that freed us, every believer, from sin's power and penalty, and from Satan's captivity. It set us free. It's the means of delivering us from eternal judgment.

The cross 'wipes the slate clean' because there Christ suffered in our place. He suffered the penalty and the guilt, and gained forgiveness for all of us. Our penalty, our guilt, our debts were all paid there at the cross by Christ. Now how can a Christian not glory in that? Paul did. He wasn't ashamed to say it. He wasn't ashamed of the cross. To paraphrase one writer, C. H. Dodd, "Paul put his pride in the one thing that emptied him of pride."

The reality is, we cannot boast in ourselves and boast in the cross at the same time. The two are mutually exclusive. We can only put our confidence in, we can only boast in—the cross. But when we do that, the cross not only crushes pride, it changes our relationship with the world. By the cross, Paul says, "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

The *world* here, in the Greek text, is the word *cosmos*. Literally he says, "The *cosmos* has been crucified to me." Now we're all familiar with that word, *cosmos*. It's the universe. But it's more than that. At least this word in Greek has more than one meaning than 'the universe'. Here it is not the material world, but the society of unbelievers. It's the world's system, with its standards and values that is a system hostile to God.

Cosmos is an interesting word. Our word *cosmetics* comes from it. It means "order" or "adornment". And the verbal form means "to put in order", "to adorn", "to decorate", "to make beautiful". And you can see how that applies to the material world, and the universe—a place of order and a place of natural beauty. We look out on the stars at night, or we look at nature and we're amazed at the beauty of it—and God's goodness and wisdom in creating it all.

But in that sense, it also applies to the world's system, which is very attractive. It represents itself as that. It represents itself as beautiful and desirable. It offers wealth, power, pleasure. It boasts of greatness and glory, and promises all of that to the person who comes after it—who pursues it. And there was a time when Paul was attracted to all of that, within his own context: Advancing in Judaism; getting the praise of the revered rabbis; achieving a high position among his countrymen.

But now all of that was dead to Paul. He could see through the world: Its claim to glory was just a thin veneer of cosmetics. And behind it all, a great lie. —Vanity and death. It no longer had any appeal to Paul. After he met Christ on the Damascus road, all of his self-glory turned to rubbish; it turned to refuse. —It turned to *dung*. That's the word that Paul uses in Philippians 3:8. And what's the appeal in that?

He was no longer enamored of its scholars and opinions, no longer impressed with its riches and treasures, no longer longing for its prestige and comforts. He understood what John would write later, in 1 John 2, verse 17. "The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts..." That's an interesting statement. —That's quite a condemning statement. It should be a defining statement for us as we consider the world. He's saying the world, (this is John), the world, right now, this whole realm around us, this whole system that we think is so attractive, the world, right now as we speak is fading. —It's on the way out. It's a bad investment. It had no more appeal to Paul than a dead corpse on a cross did. —It had been crucified to him.

But, when the world died to Paul, Paul died to the world. It no longer had any use for him. In fact, it considered him a fool, and it treated him like refuse. In 1 Corinthians 4

he wrote of that. He wrote, "We have become," (we apostles, he's saying), "we have become as the scum of the world and the dregs of all things." (vs13). That's the opinion of the world of an apostle. And that was the world's opinion of him. He was dead to them.

Still, Paul did not abandon the world. By dying to the world's system he became all the more active to the world's people—and crossed continents and seas to bring them the light of the Gospel.

There have been others like that, other men and women, who have been born into privilege, who turned their backs on all that the world had to offer in order to follow the way of the cross.

Men like William Tyndale, whose great ambition in life was to translate the Bible into English. And he worked at it diligently, all the time while he was fleeing from his persecutors. —Imagine that. —The king of England wanted Tyndale dead because he was trying to translate the Bible into English. And he worked at that, fleeing from one city to another until he was finally caught, imprisoned, and executed. His dying cry was, "LORD, open the king of England's eyes." He was dead to the world—but he loved the people of the world.

Or C. T. Studd, who was born into wealth—and he had it all, (even had a great name, C. T. 'Studd'). A gifted athlete, he was a great cricket player. In fact, he was kind of 'the Tom Brady' of his day. Educated at Eaton and Cambridge. Heir of a great fortune. But he left it all to spend his life as a missionary in great hardship. —Spent his entire life in that.

Well, the world thinks that's foolish. It cannot understand a man like Paul and these others—and many, many others.

But the cross was everything to Paul. It saves because it makes atonement for sin, removes guilt, results in union with Christ and reconciliation with God. Ceremonies

can't do that. So, as Paul says in verse 15, "Neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." "You must be born again," as Jesus told Nicodemus.

What is important is not whether a person has been circumcised or baptized—or not—but whether he or she has been born again and is a new creation. And that happens only by the sovereign grace of God—not by works. The essence of Christianity is not what we do for God, but what God has done for us. It is not about ceremonies and outward deeds. It is all about God's free gift that we receive through faith alone, by grace alone.

Now, it's not that deeds are unimportant. —They are not unimportant. In fact, Paul indicated that they're very important. He indicated that just in the previous lesson, that we had last week.(Gal 6: 1-10). "Let us not lose heart in doing good." (vs9). He says, "While we have the opportunity, let us do good for all people, especially those who are of the household of faith." (vs10). And back in chapter 5, verse 6 he wrote similarly to this, "...neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." Love works. Love is not simply 'feeling', it's action. And saving faith works love, which is self-sacrificial.

But we don't live by our works. We're not saved by our works. We live because of grace, which enables us to do good works. Which enables us, in fact, Paul would say, *compels* us to love and good deeds.

A new creation means a new life—it means a new relationship with God which results in a new attitude toward the world. It results in a new form of conduct; results in new power to engage in that conduct in a life of obedience in love and doing what Paul urged us in the previous part of this chapter, "bearing one another's burdens." (vs2).

Again, all of that, though, is due to the grace of God, and it is based on the cross of Christ. It alone is the instrument of salvation. And all of the fruit that comes from that is a consequence of what Christ did on the cross, what He purchased for us, and what the Spirit of God has applied to us. —That's sovereign grace.

In verse 16, Paul pronounces a blessing upon “those who will walk by this rule”, (meaning this principle of the new creation), who walk by grace and faith, not by works. These are people directed by the Holy Spirit. They are blessed.

So Paul says, "...peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." (vs16b). What does Paul mean by that expression, *the Israel of God*? It's an interesting expression and a lot of ink has been spilled over it and its meaning—and it has theological significance.

Many define it as ‘the church’: ‘That's what Paul is speaking of; Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike are ‘the new Israel’, are ‘spiritual Israel.’ That, for example, is the common view of amillennialists—those who do not believe in a future millennial kingdom on the earth or a future for ethnic Israel for God's finished with that nation. They believe that the material promises, like the promise of land that was given to Abraham and his descendants—that all of that has been changed into spiritual promises that are fulfilled in the church in the present day. And so, when Paul says “peace and mercy be upon them, *and* upon the Israel of God”, they interpret that word, *and*, as introducing an explanation of those who walk by this rule of grace.

The New International Version translates this in that way. "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, *even* to the Israel of God," —meaning those who walk by this rule are the Israel of God. Those who walk by this rule—that is the Israel of God.

Other versions, like one that I'm reading from, the New American Standard Bible, interpret the *and* as a simple connective that adds something else to the sentence. So it describes two groups, not one. That interpretation, I think, is the best interpretation. It has the best support.

First, because the Greek word *and* rarely means ‘*even*’ or ‘*namely*’, in the sense of explanation. It is commonly used as a simple connective, joining two ideas or two things or two groups.

Secondly, the word *Israel* is never used of the church. It's found in the New Testament more than 65 times, and always of the nation Israel, of ethnic Israel, of the

Jewish people. This would be the only case in which it is used of the church—so the common usage of the word is against interpreting it that way.

Dr. Johnson set forth a basic rule of interpretation, and that is, “We should avoid the rarer grammatical usage when the common one makes good sense.” So when Paul says, “Israel of God”, what does he mean? He means ‘true Israelites’, ‘believing Jews’, ‘the remnant of Israel’ who are part of the church but not the whole of the church. And what Paul was doing here is giving a parting shot at the Judaizers who claimed to be the true representatives of Israel; and Jerusalem; and the authorities there.

But Paul was saying that ‘the true Israel’ is the Jews who understood grace and walked by the rule of the new creation. —Men like the apostles, who preached the same Gospel that Paul preached. They are ‘the Israel of God’ —not the Judaizers. ‘Listen to them...listen to those apostles who preach the message that I preach’, Paul was saying. ‘Don't listen to the false teachers.’ That's Paul's point.

Now he concludes the letter, first with a request and then a benediction. In verse 17 he calls upon all who were involved in causing him trouble to stop. They had denied his authority as an apostle. They had questioned his motives in ministry. They had rejected his Gospel, or were in the process of doing that, or were considering that. So Paul says, "...let no one cause trouble for me." And the reason he gives is, "...I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus."

Now what he's referring to there are the scars, the literal marks, the scars on his body that he received from the beatings, the whippings, the stonings as a result of preaching the Gospel. He was stoned preaching the Gospel to them—left for dead. But he suffered far more than that in his ministry and would in the years that followed suffer even more. Well those marks distinguished him from the Judaizers, who suffered nothing for the Gospel. They had the mark of circumcision on their bodies. He had the marks of Christ which proved his authenticity.

There's a story about Alexander the Great that, after his conquest of Persia and India, he decided to send his army of Greeks home and continue his conquest with

foreigners. —And the Greeks became angry. They felt he was ungrateful for their service and began to mutiny. To calm the army, Alexander asked, 'Which soldier among them had suffered more than he had?' Then he showed them his body, covered with marks from spears and swords and arrows that he received as he led them over mountains and crossed deserts to victory. His wounds proved his courage and his wounds showed his devotion to them and to his army.

Paul's scars proved his devotion to Christ; and the church; and to the Gentiles. He had suffered much for the truth for their good. So he says, "...let no one cause trouble for me." His life was proof of his love for them.

He concludes the letter on its great theme and with a word of confidence in these Galatians; "The grace of our LORD Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen." (vs18).

Paul began the letter with a greeting of grace in chapter 1, verse 3. He went on to express his astonishment that, 'They were so quickly deserting the God who had called them by His grace—the God who had lavished such blessing upon them—amazed that they were deserting him.' (vs6).

And from there, the whole letter is a development of this great theme of grace: God's unmerited, undeserved favor for sinners—for the undeserving. And so it's fitting that his letter should end on one more reminder of what is the essence of salvation, the essence of faith—and that is the sovereign grace of God. Christianity is not about what we have done for God, but what He has done for us. He's done it all—from beginning to end. He chose us from eternity past in His unconditional election. He sent His eternal Son to die for His elect ones and purchase us for salvation.

The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to draw us to the Savior by regenerating us; by giving us faith; by bringing us a life of sanctification—producing that within us and setting us apart for holy lives—and enabling us to live that because we have genuine life, the life of Christ within us. Salvation is all of God, and Paul confirms that in one word—Grace.

He ends by calling the Galatians his “brethren”. Now that's quite a statement to make. I think something we should reflect upon. He calls them brethren. He was convinced that they were his brothers, and that they, by God's grace, would see the truth and turn from error.

We do often wander. We're all prone to do that. But God, in His grace, rescues us. It's part of God's nature and grace to do that—to be merciful and to bring his erring children back to Himself. And that's what Paul was convinced that God would do with them, through this letter that he had written—through the Word of God.

Well, may God keep us from being deceived, keep us from wandering, keep us from being enamored of the world and straying from the LORD. We face that challenge every day—and it's a strong, alluring challenge. May God keep us from that; and keep us grounded in His truth; and keep us steadfast in Christ. Only He can do that—and He promises to do that.

If there's anyone here who is without Christ, our hope is that God will open your eyes to your desperate need of Him. He is God's Son and man's Savior. You are lost without Him. And when I say you're lost without Him, I mean you're doomed for all eternity. He seeks the lost. He saves the sinner. He died so that all who believe in Him will certainly be saved. So believe in Christ. That's all—Simply believe in Him. Trust in Him. Receive Him into your heart. He receives you and forgives everyone who puts his or her trust in Him.

Father, what a great gift Your Son is. What a great blessing the cross is. And when we survey it, when we think about it, as we will do in the minutes to come, what a blessing it is to consider all that He has done, and what a sacrifice He made for us. The whole world could be an offering to You and it would not make any difference. —It would be as nothing. Only the precious blood of the Savior could save. And we thank You for that. We thank You for Your grace. We thank You that You have saved us in spite of

ourselves. Now may we live lives that honor You. We pray these things in the LORD's name.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)