**A NEW CREATION**

**Galatians 6:11-18**

**KV 6:15 “Nether circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation”**

Good morning! Thank God for helping us study the book of Galatians this year. Last 12 weeks, we have studied the whole book of Galatians and today we will study its epilogue, the last part. Have you enjoyed Galatian study so far? This is a relatively short epistle consisting of only 6 chapters, but Galatians is one of the most important books in the New Testament written by Apostle Paul. I think it was written around AD 50, which indicates Galatians is one of the earliest books written in the New Testaments. It was only 20 years since Jesus had been crucified. As you know our UBF church was founded more than 50 years, so we know how close this book was written from Jesus’ cross. The key words in the book of Galatians is ‘grace and freedom’. Then, freedom from what? It is about who a true Christian is and how this new Christian should live.

Majority of Christians at that time were probably the Jews, who had accepted a new gospel of Jesus Christ. They were of course very familiar with the Jewish traditions and its laws. Although they were converted to Christianity by the gospel of Jesus, it was taken for granted that these people observed the Jewish laws and followed Jewish traditions as we Koreans keep some of Korean traditions or celebrated Korean festival though we live in America; however God wanted to save not only the Jews but also all people on earth through gospel, so God called Paul, who was a former chief enemy of Christ. He was the Pharisee of the Pharisees and the most ardent persecutor of God’s church.

However, after his conversion, Paul preached the gospel fearlessly and pioneered the Gentile churches and converted many Gentiles to Christians through his tireless missionary work. The Galatian churches were one of them Apostle Paul had pioneered and converted. He preached the gospel of Jesus to Galatians; these church members were mostly Gentiles. They did not have any background of the Jewish traditions or did not know the observance of the Jewish laws; what was taught by Paul was salvation by faith in Jesus Christ and his cross. However, when Apostle Paul left for other mission fields, some people from Jerusalem came to Galatia and taught them that they should follow the Jewish traditions and observe the laws of Moses, especially circumcision law to be a true Christian. They even denied Paul’s Apostolic authority. Now Galatian Christians were very confused and many of them began to accept this new Jerusalem brand, so called, “true, authentic Christianity” instead of Paul’s gospel.

Basically, Galatians deals with freedom Christians got through gospel of Jesus. The key words are “grace and freedom”. It deals with Who the true Christians are and how we should live as a Christian in this world. Because of book of Galatians, we Christians don’t have to observe Hanuka or Passover or follow circumcision laws. Instead, we celebrate the Christmas or Easter. Because of Galatians, we don’t have to follow Jewish traditions to become Christians and we don’t have to follow the Jewish food regulations, can enjoy the bacon or pork chop without sense of guilt. The book of Galatians makes Christianity to be a true gospel to all people on earth completely free from being a sect of Judaism. Praise God, Hallelujah!!

Last month, I visited Korea and had worship services in various chapters of Korea UBF. I noticed each chapter had its own character. The UBF church has grown in Korea by Korean shepherds, though American missionary Sarah Barry taught us, so unconscientiously we can’t deny we have been influenced by Korean culture and tradition. I felt some chapter is much more traditional UBF mold than others. God uses all different types of God’s work. It is not a value judgment. I can’t say which one is better, but I thank God that in a sense our LA UBF church is much more close to Galatian church, which means we enjoy freedom through gospel of Jesus Christ and at the same time, we have some confusion and controversy among us. I pray that God may clear some confusion up and go back to the Gospel of Jesus. Amen.

The title of today’s message is a new creation, which came from Galatians 6:11-18. The key verse is 6:15. Let’s read together. **“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation”**

Today’s message consists of two parts; I. A New creation (6:11-15), II. Marks of Jesus (6:16-18). May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see the mystery of Christ. Amen.

1. A New Creation (6:11-15)

Let’s read verse 11: “11See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”

This passage indicates that Apostle Paul wrote this epistle by his own hand. Some people says that Apostle Paul had a serious eye sight problem, so he had to write it with large letters to see. Traditionally, the epistle was dictated and the scribe or secretary wrote them down and only one or two sentences in the end were written by Paul in his own hand as we see in other epistles. However, here we can see that Paul himself wrote this long epistle by himself. It is like a bold highlight to emphasize his point. He probably wrote this epistle overnight and he could not wait for his secretary. It shows how urgent the issues he deals with here. Apostle Paul was very anxious and had a burning desire and passion to correct the false teachings and tried hard to turn them back from these.

Let’s read verses 12-15.

“12Those who want to impress people by means of the fleshare trying to compel you to be circumcised.The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecutedfor the cross of Christ. 13Not even those who are circumcised keep the law,yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. 14May 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. 15Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything;what counts is the new creation.”

In verses 12-13, Paul explained true motives of the circumcision group.

What were their true motives?

The Jewish Christians did not believe in their hearts that the circumcision is truly important for salvation; rather, they knew that it is not essential for salvation, however, they were fearful and they did not want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ by the Jews, so they wanted to compromise with the Jews by showing that they were circumcised and followed the laws. So they could claim to be faultless before the Jewish laws. Not only that but also they tried to compel the new Gentile converts to be circumcised, so they could boast about these fruits to the Jews. I know someone who is the eldest son in his family and he was supposed to participate in the ancestor worship ceremony in the family with Confucius tradition. All his relatives gathered together and had to prepare the various food in the day of his grandfather or grand mother’s death and had a kind of memorial services every few months at the date of their death; this was very important ceremony in Korean tradition and we were supposed to bow down and express our homage to our ancestors. As an eldest son, he would succeed his father as a chief master of the ceremony in the future and all his relatives were watching him, whether he would bow down or not in the ceremony. His mother begged him to bow down because his father would be angry and very upset if he would not bow down. Please don’t cause more trouble and shame to your father before all other relatives, Just bow down one time. But he knew it is not just one time; this would be a Satan’s trap. The Satan would point out his compromise again and again. If the Galatians would be circumcised, it is not just circumcision but they had to observe all the laws of Moses.

They would say to the Jews that they were keeping the laws of Moses and they would brag about it, but it is nothing boasting of as a Christian. The Jewish Christians wanted to claim that they would appear to be flawless before the Jews even after they had accepted the gospel of Jesus and they even compelled the Gentiles to do so.

Look at verses 14-15. 14May 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. “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation”

It seems very familiar. This is a repeated argument Apostle Paul had made. In 5:6, it says “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Then, who is a new creation?

First, a new creation has a different value system from the world.

The new creation is those who are crucified to the world and the world to them.

As a human being, we tend to boast of many things to satisfy with our pride and dignity. The worldly people like to brag about their family background; one time, I insisted on my son to name my first grand-daughter Esther, emphasizing Min’s family had four queens in Yee dynasty so she should have a queen’s name. A Korean immigrants have not much to boast of because they started from the bottom of the society. However, they still find many things to boast of; how smart their sons and daughters are, their degrees, school, cars, house or even the size of the church members they attend.

Apostle Paul had many things to boast of in the flesh, but he did not boast except Jesus cross; what does it mean that the world has been crucified to him and he to the world?

Let’s read Philippians 3:4-8.

“4though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. 7But whatever were gains to me I now consider lossfor the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowingChrist Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ”

The new creation are those who boast of only Jesus Cross by considering anything else garbage.

Why is Jesus cross so precious? In worldly point of view, the cross is a device which was invented to kill the most heinous criminals in a most cruel, shameful way. It was a symbol of shame, pain, terror and death. However, for us Christians, it is a symbol of God’s unfailing love and the power of God who saves us. It is the only way for the sinners to go to God’s salvation and eternal life. Look at 1 Corinthian 1:23-25.

“23but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

Jesus’ cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

I know someone who is outwardly an OK Christian but he is not completely new creation, but a half baked Christian inside. He has been a missionary more than 30 years. However, he still has a strong desire of worldly recognition and honor. He still worry about material security and even his son’s future. He maintains the worldly connection, such as the alumni and the worldly friends and enjoy them. He feels a title of missionary is not enough, so he looks for other titles in the world, and he is easily tempted by the opportunity to become somebody in the world as the Jewish Christian wanted to have a circumcision and signs of flesh in addition to the cross of Jesus. Circumcision or uncircumcision does not matter; what counts is a new creation.

Second, a new creation is those who have faith expressing itself through love. Yes, we will be saved when we believe God’s salvation through Jesus’ cross, which is God’s grace. We will be saved by our faith in God’s grace. However, faith is an abstract concept; we cannot see and check the faith. We can pretend or fake faith. Genuine faith should express itself through genuine love. In that sense, in my opinion, faith is same as love. That’s why James says in James 2:22, “22You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” So the new creation is those who have faith expressing itself through love. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

Let’s read 1 Corinthians 13:1-2. “If I speak in the tonguesof men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2**If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

As a sinful man, we won’t an instant mature Christian and be full of love instantly even though we become a new creation. We have to grow as the baby grows. We need a practice of love step by step and need a discipline some times. We have some controversy as in any other church. All of us have to be very humble. Even if we know everything and have all knowledge, that knowledge does not do any good if that knowledge makes us divide. According to 1 Corinthians 8:1b, “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”. It means knowledge sometimes makes us proud and elate, or look others down while it is only love to edify. I pray that we may overcome this controversy by loving one another. Amen.

1. The marks of Jesus (6:16-18)

Let’s read verses 6:16-18.

“16Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.17From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marksof Jesus. 18The grace of our Lord Jesus Christbe with your spirit,brothers and sisters. Amen.”

Who did Apostle Paul bless with peace and mercy? Apostle Paul blessed to all who follow this rule. Then, who is the Israel of God? He is the new creation and only those follow this rule, which is the principle, not those who follow the old principle. It does not matter whether he is the Korean or the Americans, the Jews or the Gentiles. Only those who are led by the Spirit and express his faith through love are the Israel of God. Let’s read verse 17. “17From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.”

Apostle Paul said he bore the marks of Jesus in his body. Marks in general shows some distinction from others. In graduation ceremony, some students may have special distinction depending on the degree of their distinctions such Summa Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, or Cum Laude and they may have a special golden marks in their gowns. Summa Cum Laude is the highest distinction among students and only all A students can have this distinction and honor. I heard James’ daughter, Elle graduated her college with Summa Cum Laude. However, there are another marks. In the ancient time, the slaves or animals had marks in their bodies by branding, so they are clearly marked, so anybody knows whose possessions they are. I don’t know which marks of Jesus Apostle Paul had in his body. He may have had special stigmas in his body, which are mysterious signs. However, he had clear evidences of participating in Jesus suffering and his resurrection, which is his ultimate life goal. He had many clear marks of Jesus in his body, so everybody knows he is the slave or the servant of Jesus. His spiritual authority and apostleship may have been derived from these. Let’s read 2 Corinthians 11:23-30.

“23Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder,been in prison more frequently,been flogged more severely,and been exposed to death again and again. 24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashesminus one. 25Three times I was beaten with rods,once I was pelted with stones,three times I was shipwrecked,I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews,in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city,in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27I have labored and toiledand have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food;I have been cold and naked. 28Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29Who is weak, and I do not feel weak?Who is led into sin,and I do not inwardly burn? 30If I must boast, I will boastof the things that show my weakness.”

What is his marks of Jesus in his body? They are marks of his participation in Jesus’ suffering, which testify his Apostleship. He is clearly marked as the servant or the slave of Jesus by participating in his suffering. In Christ, we recognize, honor and respect to those who suffer most for Jesus and participate in his suffering. I respect missionary Isaac Kim because he had completely sacrificed his prestigious job of Korean prosecutor for the sake of Jesus and recognize Pastor, John Kwon because he has served God last 30 years by giving up his career for God’s mission and he devoted his life for Jesus. It is high distinction. I think they have marks of Jesus in their own lives. I pray that God may bless those who suffer for Jesus and take up his cross most. Amen.

In a conclusion, neither doctrine nor knowledge does matter. What counts is a new creation inside. The new creation is those who love the cross and suffer for Jesus most. The new creation is those who have faith expressing itself through love.

**One word:** A new creation.