**A NEW CREATION**

Galatians 6:11-18

Key Verse 15

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

**Introduction**

 

 Today’s passage is the epilogue of Paul’s letter to the Galatian believers. By comparing circumcision with a new creation, he summarizes his letter. He talks about the motive of those who insisted on circumcision. With his personal remark he shared his motive to boast of the cross of Jesus Christ only. Paul wanted all Gentiles to come to Jesus and receive the same salvation grace. Paul’s testimony serves as a role model for all of us as we serve the work of God. May the Lord help us to become like Paul so that we may boast in Jesus’ cross only, deepening our relationship with Jesus. Amen.

1. Read verses 11-14. What did Paul say about his own writing? (11) What were the motives of those who insisted on circumcision? (12, 13) What was Paul’s one and only boast? (14a) How does Jesus’ cross impact our relationship to the world? (14b)

1-1, Read verses 11-14.

See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! **12** Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh 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 keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. **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.

1-2, What did Paul say about his own writing? (11)

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

* Paul usually dictated his letters to his assistants, perhaps because of his eye problems.
* He might have asked God to heal his eye problem. Despite his own weakness, he set a good example in holding firmly the gospel message to the end.
* But in the book of Galatians, he wrote the entire letter with his own hand in large letters.
* He wanted the believers to know that the letter came from his heart. It was his personal appeal to them.
* He was deeply concerned about the issues that the believers in Galatia were challenged with.

1-3, What were the motives of those who insisted on circumcision? (12, 13)

 ***Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised.The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.***

* The problems of the Galatian Christians began when some Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem and told them that they needed more than their faith in Jesus in order to be saved.
* These false teachers said the Galatians needed to be circumcised, meaning they had to obey the law, in order to be justified.
* In this letter, Paul emphatically told the Galatians that this was an obviously false teaching: “
* Here Paul pointed out what was motivating the Judaizers to twist the gospel truth.
* First, they wanted to make a good impression outwardly. Because of their position on circumcision, they could say, “I keep the law; you don’t. So I am better than you.”
* They would refuse to enter the house of anyone who was not circumcised. They also refused to eat with uncircumcised people. They fasted twice a week.
* Second, through promoting circumcision, the Judaizers avoided persecution because of the cross of Jesus.
* When Paul preached the message of the cross to the Jews and the Gentiles, he was severely persecuted.
* In many of the cities he visited in Asia Minor, he was beaten, put into prison, and nearly stoned to death by the hardcore Jewish zealots who were opposed to his preaching.
* But by adding circumcision, the Judaizers could avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. It was a compromise.

***13 Not 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.***

* Paul says that they did not obey the law even as they compelled the Galatians to do so.
* This means that some of them did not have any true conviction about circumcision. They adopted the practice because it made their life easier.
* The truth was that they could not obey the law fully. No one could obey the law 100%.
* Even St. Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, failed to do so. Yet they urged the Galatian believers to obey the law. It was hypocrisy.
* Of course, Paul is not saying here that they should observe the law. What he was saying is that keeping the law was neither necessary nor possible.
* The Judaizers wanted to boast about their flesh. Their motive was not to win people to Christ.
* We want more students to join our ministry, not because we want to boast about what we do, but because we want to help them to know Christ personally.

1-4, What was Paul’s one and only boast? (14a)

***14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,***

* Paul had much to boast about himself (Php 3:1-10). He was from the tribe of Benjamin, “a Hebrew of Hebrews.”
* He was a Pharisee in Jerusalem, under the prominent Pharisee named Gamaliel to be a future leader of the country.
* Paul had worked hard to achieve the goal of becoming a top Pharisee himself. He was in charge of executing Stephen, the first martyr (Ac 8:1).
* He had many Christians in Jerusalem arrested and put them in prison. He then obtained an approved letter from the Sanhedrin to go to Damascus to arrest more Christians there.



* He did everything to seek his own glory. But Christ changed this ambitious man. The Risen Lord met him on his way to Damascus.

* Jesus saved him from his sins and called him to be a light to the Gentiles.
* Paul experienced the amazing grace of God. Now he wanted to please Jesus and to boast only about Jesus.
* He said, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Judaizers boasted about their circumcision.

1-5, How does Jesus’ cross impact our relationship to the world? (14b)

***through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.***

* To be crucified is to die. The world died to him and he died to the world.
* He said in 5:24, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
* He also said in 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.
* Paul had experienced the power of the cross. Christ saved a terrible sinner like him. It was an unthinkable thing.
* How could an enemy of God, a persecutor of the church, be saved? But that was the grace of God he personally experienced. It was the power of the cross.
* So Paul chose to boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:16 reads,

 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”

* Paul wanted all Gentiles to come to Jesus and receive the same salvation grace. Paul’s testimony serves as a model for all of us as we serve the work of God.
* We also have something to boast about ourselves such as academic achievements in our children, good looks, athletic abilities, good jobs, so on.
* But we should consider them rubbish, or at least not as important as our relationship with Christ.
* Like Paul, let us not boast about anything except in the cross of Jesus.
* Two songs by Chris Tomlin may be fit in here.

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07VrhAe-oz4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07VrhAe-oz4)

 **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zev5tHjCB\_s**

 2Co 11:30 reads,

 “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness”

1. Read verse 15. What is the most important thing for us as believers? How did we become a new creation? How can we live as a new creation?

2-1, Read verse 15.

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

2-2, What is the most important thing for us as believers?

***15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.***

* The Judaizers put so much emphasis on circumcision. They wanted to feel good about keeping the law. They set aside the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus who paid the price of our sins on the cross.
* Paul reminds us in this letter that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything as far as our salvation is concerned. What counts is a new creation.

2-3, How did we become a new creation?

* It is only through faith in Jesus and His works on the cross that we become a new creation.

 2 Corinthians 5:17 says,

 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 reads,

 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. **2** By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

**3** For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

* We are “not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (2:16).
* When we believe in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, God baptizes us with the Holy Spirit (3:2).
* We are adopted into God’s family as his sons and daughters (3:26).
* Because we are his children, God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father" (4:6).
* We are given a new life in Christ. We live a new life in Christ as a new creation.

2-4, How can we live as a new creation?

* As we learned, it means to live by the Spirit (5:13,16), bearing the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23).
* We no longer live to gratify our sinful nature as we used to (5:13). Rather we use our freedom in Christ to build each other up.
* Our faith in Christ expresses itself through love (5:6). We strive to serve one another in love and take others’ burden of sins (5:13).
* To live as a new creation is to live a life that shows a person’s inward change. It is a transformation to the core, not a window dressing.
* It is easy for us to pay attention to our outward appearance before people. The legalist want to show to others that they are better by keeping the law.
* Paul says that this does not count. God sees our hearts. Only our relationship with him matters. If we do good things, they come from our relationship with the Lord.
* Therefore, to live as a new creation, we should examine what is in our hearts.
1. Read verses 16-18. What blessings come to those who follow this rule? (16a) Who is the “Israel of God”? (3:28-29; 4:26, 28) How did Paul share his agony? (17) What final blessing did he bestow upon them? (18)

3-1, Read verses 16-18.

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

3-2, What blessings come to those who follow this rule? (16a)

***16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule***

* What is the universal rule Paul laid down for all churches? The universal rule is that circumcision does not mean anything.
* External appearance, works and human achievements without a transformation of our inner being does not mean anything before God.
* What counts is a change in our life—a new creation by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit bears fruit in us. Jesus said, “Each tree is recognized by its own fruit” (Lk 6:44).
* We will become more and more like Jesus, who was full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
* Paul gives a blessing of peace and mercy to all who follow the universal rule.

3-3, Who is the “Israel of God”? (3:28-29; 4:26, 28)

***—to the Israel of God.***

* The Israel of God today is those who are in Christ Jesus. If we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham’s descendants according to God’s promise (3:28- 29).
* This new community is characterized by “peace and mercy”. We have freedom in Christ but we don’t abuse it.
* Instead, we live by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, carrying our own load, even more than willing to carry each other’s burdens in our community

3-4, How did Paul share his agony? (17)

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

* Paul was deeply troubled by the Galatian believers’ backsliding because of the false teachings. His heart was broken. He was a shepherd for them.
* He felt pain. His pain was caused by their wavering faith. He told them to stop causing him any more trouble by remembering how much he suffered for Christ.
* He said he bore on his body the marks of Jesus. The “marks” (ta stigmata in Greek) may refer to fire “brandings” on slaves to indicate ownership or “tattoos” on the body to show one’s identification.
* Paul must have had scar marks on his body inflicted by the Jews who stoned him for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.
* Paul was thrown into prison frequently, was flogged severely and exposed to death again and again.
* Five times he received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times he was beaten with rods (2Co 11:23-25).

 Acts 14:19-20 says,

 “Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.”

* Paul put his life on the line to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Gentiles. Paul wanted them to remember this.

3-5, What final blessing did he bestow upon them? (18)

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

* Paul ended his letter with a final blessing for the Galatian believers.
* Paul prayed that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with the Galatian believers and the Spirit may lead them daily to Jesus who is the truth and the true life.
* If this is so, they will walk in a gracious relationship with God, instead of the legal, performance-based relationship that endangered them.
* Thus, it is an appropriate end for this letter, and prayer for all our lives.

**Conclusion**

 We learned today that habitual religious activities do not matter before God. The only thing that counts is a new creation, that is, the transformation of our inner beings as we commit our lives to Christ who died for our sins. When our hearts are changed by God, we can live a happy life that bears the fruit of the Spirit. It is not a joyless, superficial religious life, but it is a joyful, fruitful, and eternal life with Christ. May God help us to live a life of knowing Jesus personally and serving him to the end. Amen.

**One Word: A New Creation!**