

# A New Creation

Galatians 6:11-18

Key Verse: 6:15

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

Today we come to the end of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. As we have learned, it is packed with deep spiritual truths and it unfolds in a logical and systematic manner. It was no small task to write this letter. After doing so, most people would be ready to finish with a simple, affectionate “goodbye.” However, Paul’s last words are a powerful final appeal, which indicate his spirit; he was ready to begin writing all over again. Paul reiterates the main argument of his letter and encourages the Galatians to hold on to the truth of the gospel. Paul introduces the term, “the new creation.” Let’s learn what he means by this, and how we can live as “the new creation.” Verse 11 is Paul’s signature on the letter. Verses 12-16 are a postscript, which contain an important summary. Verses 17-18 are his final greetings.

## **Signature (11)**

Paul finishes by saying, **“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”** (11) Most likely, the use of large letters was simply for the sake of emphasis, like our use of italics, bold or underlining. Until now, it seems that Paul had been dictating his letter to a scribe or secretary. But here he takes the pen in his own hands to put his unique signature on the letter. It was his stamp of authenticity as an apostle.

## **Postscript (12-16)**

Usually postscripts add supplementary information to a letter, using the designation “P.S.” But here Paul uses a postscript to strongly emphasize the main point of his teaching. He does this by means of contrast between circumcision in the flesh and the new creation. This contrast may be seen in two ways: human effort vs. God’s work; and external vs. internal.

**First, human effort vs. God’s work.** In verses 12-13, the word “circumcised” or “circumcision” is repeated four times, and “flesh” twice. In verse 15, we find the words “a new creation.” Circumcision in the flesh symbolizes human effort to keep the law. A new creation refers to God’s work.

## A New Creation

The Judaizers had emphasized that circumcision and the works of the law were necessary for salvation, claiming that Jesus' death on the cross was insufficient. In essence, they taught that people can be saved by the works of the law. But Paul said in 3:10-11, **“For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’”** Paul also said in 5:4, **“You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”** Paul declared that no one can be saved by observing the law, that is, their own effort.

However, we can be saved by God's work through Jesus Christ. Paul said in 2:16, **“[We] know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”** 3:26 says, **“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith....”** We did nothing to merit our salvation. God did everything for us through Jesus Christ. We were destined to die for our sins and face eternal condemnation. We had no way out. But God had mercy on us. God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law. Jesus was condemned in our places and paid the full price to satisfy the demands of the law. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law (3:13). Through the blood of Jesus, God adopted us as his children. Now we can come to God freely, calling **“Abba, Father”** (4:6). As Father God's children, we are heirs of his kingdom (4:7). Our Father God gave us his Holy Spirit. We can walk by the Spirit and bear the fruits of the Spirit. We can sow to please the Spirit and reap an abundant harvest. What great blessings we have! All these blessings have come to us by God's grace through faith in Christ. We do not need to **“do something”** in order to be saved. We only need to believe what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Thank you, Jesus!

Here we see the contrast between Christianity and other religions. Christianity emphasizes what God has done for us. Other religions emphasize what we do for God. Many human beings believe in God and want to draw near to God. People try to pile up good deeds: giving to the poor, showing compassion to the suffering, praying regularly, and participating in religious meetings, and so on. Yet doing good deeds does not eradicate their evil deeds. Still, they hope that their good deeds will outweigh their evil deeds. They hope that they will be saved by their good deeds. But they are not sure about it. In fact, they fall short of the glory

# A New Creation

of God. Then they suffer from self-condemnation, anxiety and fear. In truth, their self-righteousness provokes God's wrath and leads them to eternal judgment.

On the other hand, Christians rely on what Christ has done for us. We trust the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. By one sacrifice Christ has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Heb 10:14). God accepts our faith in Christ, justifies us, and gives us his Spirit. The Spirit assures us that we are God's children (Ro 8:16). We have peace with God. We can serve God without fear and live meaningful and fruitful lives. Let's remember that we are saved by what God has done for us in Christ, not by our own efforts.

**Second, external vs. internal.** We can find another major contrast in verses 12-16. It is between an external form which emphasizes the means of the flesh, and the internal which emphasizes the Spirit and the new creation. In verses 12-13 we find characteristics of the external.

**In the first place, they were impressed by outward appearances.** Look at verse 12a. **“Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised.”** The Judaizers wanted to impress people, not God. Most likely this refers to their superiors in Jerusalem. If the Judaizers could persuade the Galatians to be circumcised in the flesh, they could claim a victory for Judaism and become heroes in Jerusalem. They would be rewarded for this. In this way, they wanted to use the Galatians for their own benefit. They treated them harshly, compelling circumcision, whether it helped the Galatians or not. The Judaizers did not really care about the Galatians or about the spiritual meaning of circumcision. They were only interested in getting the mark on the Galatians' flesh for their own benefit. It is true that circumcision came from God, as a sign of the covenant with Abraham. However, circumcision was never intended to be merely external. It was a symbol of a more important inner reality: circumcision of the heart by the Spirit (Ro 2:28-29). Here we learn that we must see through signs and symbols to the spiritual reality they represent. To do this, we must overcome the tendency to be impressed by what we see with our eyes.

**In the second place, they avoided persecution.** Look at verse 12b. **“The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.”** The cross of Christ was an offense to some, for it declares that all people are sinners who cannot save themselves - with no exception. The Jews were offended when their self-righteousness was ignored. They were further offended when they sensed that their entire system of Judaism was threatened. They felt that hundreds of years of Jewish religious history and culture were being totally discredited. They were

## A New Creation

very upset to think that Gentiles could become God's children simply by faith in Christ, without going through the strict discipline of the law. So they insisted that without circumcision one could not be saved (Ac 15:1). The Judaizers had succumbed to the pressure of the circumcision party. So they tried to add circumcision to the cross of Christ. This is a different gospel, which is no gospel at all (1:7). Paul plainly exposed their motive. It was to avoid being persecuted. The message of the cross still offends people. It offends those who trust in religious rituals, those who trust in science, education or knowledge, and those who trust in military might or money. The message of the cross declares that these things cannot save; only faith in Jesus can save. This is why some people do not preach the message of the cross clearly. But we must preach the message of the cross, for only the cross saves people.

**In the third place, they were hypocrites.** Verse 13a says, “**Not even those who are circumcised keep the law...**” The Judaizers knew that they could not keep the law. They were full of inner conflict. Though they made a great effort, they were still full of dirty desires: immorality, selfishness, greed, envy, hatred, and so on. They were also very rebellious. So they realized that their teaching would not help the Galatians. Still, they boasted about the law and wanted to use the law to rule over the Galatians. They were hypocrites, not truth-seekers. They pleased men, not God.

**In the fourth place, they boasted about their flesh.** The King James Version translates the word “boast” as “glory.” They were seeking their own glory. They boasted that they were Abraham's descendants to gain superiority over the Gentiles. They boasted about which tribe they came from, who their ancestors were, their educational background, and so on. These days, many people boast about their flesh, including their nationality, skin color, social position, education, wealth, and so on. But this kind of boasting in the flesh is useless. 1 Peter 1:24-25a says, “**All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.**”

Now let's think about the characteristics of the internal, the spiritual life of a Christian. We find them in verses 14-16.

**In the first place, they boast only in the cross of Christ.** Look at verse 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.**” In the past Paul had many things to boast about: circumcision on the eighth day, tribal identity, Pharisee's

## A New Creation

education, great zeal and so on (Php 3:5-6). However, when he met the Risen Christ on the way to Damascus, he realized that he was nothing but a terrible sinner, yet Christ died for him. In the bright light of Christ's love he could see his flesh for the despicable thing that it was. He could not boast about his flesh any longer. He only wanted to boast about Christ. His relationship with the world changed: it no longer had any attraction for Paul. He could leave everything behind without any regret to pursue Christ. Paul 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.”** The fact that Christ loved Paul and gave his life for him became the central truth in Paul's life. He wanted to talk only about Christ. To Paul, the cross of Christ was not a stumbling block, but a source of pride. He knew that the cross of Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and that in the cross of Christ there is forgiveness of sins, true peace and the way to eternal life. The cross of Christ is the cross of life, the cross of victory, and the cross of glory. Paul boasted about this cross, for he loved it. I also boasted about my flesh in the past. However, when I met Christ who gave himself to save me, I saw my flesh for the dirty garbage that it is. Now I want to boast only in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ.

**In the second place, they are a new creation.** Let's read verse 15. **“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.”** How did they become a new creation? It was the miracle of God through faith in the gospel. While the Galatians were living in darkness, the Holy Spirit worked in Antioch to set aside Paul and Barnabas. The Holy Spirit sent them to the province of Galatia (Ac 13). There they preached the gospel in obedience to the Spirit. The Galatians believed the message and the Holy Spirit worked in them. The Holy Spirit gave them new birth and they were changed (3:2, 5). They became sons of God through faith in Christ regardless of nationality, social status, gender, or any other human distinction. This happened totally by the grace of God through faith in Christ. This grace is given to all who receive Christ. John 1:12-13 says, **“Yet to all who received him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”**

Those who are new creations walk by the Spirit. In 5:16, Paul said, **“So I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”** To walk by the Spirit is to listen to the Spirit and to follow the Spirit's leading each day. It is a personal relationship and it is spiritual. It is not measurable by external standards. However, as time goes by, 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

## A New Creation

like Jesus, who was full of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

**In the third place, we live in a new community.** Look at verse 16. **“Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule - to the Israel of God.”** What does “this rule” mean? In Greek “rule” is “canon.” This is the universal rule Paul laid down for all the churches: justification is by faith in Christ Jesus alone, not by observing the law (2:16). This is the truth of the gospel. This is not something that men made up, it is a revelation from Jesus Christ; it is of divine origin (1:11-12). So it cannot be changed, added to, or subtracted from, even by angels or by those who are called to preach the gospel. If anyone tries to change the gospel, may they be eternally condemned (1:8-9). On the other hand, peace and mercy will come to those who follow the rule and they will establish a new community.

To understand the grace of a new community, let’s consider briefly the old community. It is the community of those who live by the flesh. It is characterized in 5:15 and 5:26. Its members are conceited, judgmental, and condemning. They provoke and envy each other. They bite and devour each other. They hurt others and are hurt by others. There is no rest or peace in their hearts. They always try to find others’ weak points and become very divisive. In the end they destroy each other. In this respect, Darwin’s teaching about a jungle society is true.

On the other hand, the new community is characterized by peace and mercy. As each member has peace with God, so they have peace with one another and bless each other mutually. As each member knows the mercy of God, they practice mercy toward one another. They carry one another's burdens and help restore one another when they fall. The new community is also characterized by freedom. Its members are free from the condemnation of the law. They come to God freely by faith and serve God willingly, gladly and creatively. They serve one another in love (5:13b). This love comes from faith. Paul clarified the standard of the new community in 5:6b, saying, **“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”** Faith is not just theory. True faith is expressed through love. Those who really believe in Jesus love their brothers and sisters in Christ. So they serve them out of love. This serving is not humiliation but great virtue. They understand others’ needs and to try to meet their needs in the grace that Jesus gives. They practice the lifestyle of Jesus. Even though Jesus is the Son of God he did not come to be served, but to serve (Mk 10:45). In 6:9, 10 we can find other characteristics of the new community. It is full of people who do good, especially to the family of believers. What a beautiful community!

# A New Creation

## Final Greetings

Verse 17 says, **“From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.”** The Greek word for marks is “stigmata.” It was used in secular Greece for the branding of a slave. Paul was a slave of Jesus who had received his branding through persecutions. It was like a Christian tattoo. Paul concluded with the final blessing: **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.”**