Liberated in Christ
Galatians 6: 11-18

As we come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Galatians, we end up where we started. As he wraps up the letter, he offers a final rebuke of the Judaizers and their false teaching, while challenging the believers to rest fully by faith in Christ alone. Their salvation, and thus all who would come to faith in Christ after them, rested solely in the finished work of Christ, without any works of the flesh needed to secure salvation.

For centuries, there has been some debate about what Paul meant in verse 11. Gal. 6:11 – Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. Many will use this verse to provide additional argument for Paul's thorn in the flesh being a problem with his eyes. While that may in fact be true, I don't think we can be dogmatic in such an interpretation. I prefer to view this statement in the context in which it was written. To me, it appears that Paul is referring to the extensive letter he has written in defense of the faith and the gospel. This was a foundational doctrine and it required a thorough explanation and defense.

As we discuss Paul's parting words, I want to consider the thought: Liberated in Christ.

I. The Quandary of Flesh (11-13) – Here we discover Paul's final rebuke of the false teaching of the Judaizers and a final warning against its deception. Notice:

A. The Mandate (12a) – As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised. Those who sought to keep the rituals and traditions of the Judaizers did so in order to be perceived as righteous and committed to the Lord. Unfortunately, often their commitment to the flesh exceeded their commitment to serving the Lord. They placed far more emphasis on adhering to tradition than actually serving the Lord and pleasing Him. Men, such as these, constrained all believers to be circumcised in order to be acceptable unto the Lord.

➢ Do we not see such nonsense being promoted today as well? Circumcision is not a matter of debate in our culture, but many have a multitude of unwritten rules that believers are expected to follow, in addition to salvation by faith in Christ, if they are to be viewed as acceptable to God. Typically, these are mere preferences or traditions that have been elevated to a position that should be reserved solely for faith in Christ.

B. The Motive (12b) – only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. Paul was aware of the genuine motivation behind the Judaizers teachings and he openly exposed them. They

were unwilling to identify solely with faith in the finished work of Christ alone for fear of persecution or being shunned by those, whom, they were determined to impress. In Roman culture, the cross was a symbol of shame and reproach. During the time of the apostles, the cross became the symbol associated with Christianity. The Judaizers viewed the cross in much the same way. It stood in direct contradiction to the works of the flesh. Believers rested solely in the finished work of Christ upon the cross, and denied the need of further works of the flesh.

C. The Masquerade (13) – For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. Paul was also aware of the deception of the Judaizers. While they demanded believers be circumcised, in accordance with the Law, they failed to keep the law entirely themselves. This was never about an attempt to keep the whole law of God, but an attempt to control others and impose their beliefs upon them. The Judaizers were not interested in the spiritual condition of others, but merely in assuring others kept their traditions.

➢ Many today operate in a similar manner. They are not really concerned about the spiritual condition of others, but ensuring their traditions are kept and being able to boast of convincing others to follow their particular belief system. I have not been called to preach the keeping of laws and works of the flesh, but salvation through faith in Christ and conformity to Him following one's conversion by grace through faith.

II. The Glory of the Cross (14-18) – While the Judaizers and others boasted in the works of the flesh, Paul gloried solely in the cross. His life was lived in contrast to theirs. Notice:

A. The Humility (14a) – But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul knew he had nothing to boast of within himself. He was a religious Pharisee, fully committed to the law, prior to salvation, but he realized the law was unable to save. He became aware that he could never earn or deserve the grace of God through works of the flesh. He boasted in Christ. (Like Paul, we have nothing to boast of in ourselves. We are sinners saved by grace, apart from merit or worth based on the works we had produced.)

➢ It was the cross that provided the means for salvation. The cross was the only reason for boasting in Paul. He may have suffered persecution and rejection for embracing the cross, but Paul was not ashamed. He knew that it was the cross that men needed to see. It was the preaching of the cross that men needed to hear. Rom.1:16 – For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 1 Cor.2:2 – For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

B. The Conformity (14b) – by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. The old way had died out, and the old man was now dead too. The man Paul used to be no longer existed. He died there on the Damascus Road. Paul was a man just as we are. I'm sure there were days when the flesh rose up within him. There were days when he desired the old paths. In those times, Paul had to crucify the flesh. There were times when he had to suppress the lusts of the flesh. While he faced continual struggles, he had been liberated from the flesh in Christ. Gal.5:24 – And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Rom.6:6 – Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

➢ Paul was crucified unto the world. He was no longer accepted of many who knew him before. Many of the friends he once knew had forsaken him. Living for the Lord will not bring you the favor of men. There will be those who will reject your walk with Christ. You may be labeled a fanatic or "too religious" by some. Regardless, we must abide faithful and rest in Christ alone.

C. The Clarity (15) – For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Paul again argued against the false teaching of the Judaizers. He had lived a life of service for the Lord. He had planted many churches, preached many messages, and witnessed many souls come to Christ, but these accomplishments could not bring acceptance to the Lord. We are expected to live for God, but we are justified through the blood of Christ. The penalty of sin is gone through Him. We could never do enough to merit salvation.

➢ I rejoice that my relationship with Jesus isn't dependent upon the works that I perform. I am justified in Christ because of the sacrifice He made. I have been made a new creature in Christ. It is more than a change of habits; it's a change of heart. It is more than a change of behavior; it is a change of being. Eph.2:10 – For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

D. The Security (16) – And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. This had been a difficult letter for Paul to write. The churches in Galatia had wandered from the truth. Paul was concerned with their spiritual well-being. There was much that troubled them and hindered their walk with the Lord. As he closes, he gives a final reminder – those who know the Lord and live for Him can enjoy the peace He gives. The churches in Galatia may have faced adversity, but the God of grace was still on the throne.

➢ It is often easy to focus on the problems and fail to remember that we serve a sovereign God who is still in control. The Lord is still on His throne with His almighty power. I have no way of knowing what we will face as these difficult days progress, but I have the peace of God within my

heart. I have no doubt that He will keep those who belong to Him. When the cares of life bear heavy on your soul, just remember to Whom you belong.

E. The Identity (17) – From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Paul offered a final challenge to those who sought to add to his difficulties. This may have been believers who had been influenced by the Judaizers or Jews who sought his harm. Either way, Paul admonished them to cease causing trouble. He desired their salvation and conformity to Christ, rather than continued opposition.

- His faithfulness to the Lord was without question. He physically bore the marks of the Lord Jesus, being beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and betrayed for his commitment to the gospel. He was declaring that his commitment to Christ had been proven, and he would remain committed unto the Lord until the end.

- This raised a question in my mind that presents a challenge to all believers. Do we bear the marks of the Lord Jesus? We may not have been physically scarred for our faith, but do our lives clearly reveal our commitment to the Lord? Are we living so that others know, without doubt, that we are saved by grace and committed to Christ?

Conclusion: Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Paul concluded this great letter with a desire for the believers to experience the grace of the Lord within their spirit. This was a final declaration of faith over works, grace over law, and the eternal over the temporal. The believers in Galatia needed to rest solely in Christ and His finished work. Their lives should reflect the transformation that takes place by the grace of God at conversion. Rather than behaving as the Judaizers and demanding works of the flesh, Paul wanted them to experience the grace of our Lord and show forth His grace to others.