

The cross of Jesus Christ is the only source of confidence, it is on the cross that Jesus became a curse for us and bore the consequence of our sins. As a result, we are united with Christ by faith, and we come to inherit the promises made to Abraham, which Christ has taken hold of on our behalf.

Nothing else is required. Circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing. Faith expressed in love means everything, and upon those who share such a faith, Paul prays a final blessing, that God's peace and mercy would be upon them.

Thank you for taking the time to follow these short reflections on Paul's letter to the Galatians. I do hope you have found them useful and that you too can celebrate the freedom of faith in Christ.

Amen.



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Reflections on Galatians

Galatians 6:1-18

“Bear One Another’s Burdens”

Having completed his case against adopting legal practises, and having warned about using Christian freedom as an opportunity to sin, Paul now goes on to teach about the manner in which Christians should behave.

Paul ends the letter with a final warning against circumcision, and a brief benediction.

Last week we saw how Paul warned the Galatian Christians that if they adopted circumcision Christ would be of no value to them, and they would be bound to obey the whole law, and be cursed thereby.

We saw how Paul stressed the call to Christian freedom, and warned against using this freedom as an occasion to sin.

In chapter six Paul offers the Galatian Christians some final advice on living together.

Clearly the issue of circumcision has put the Galatian church under immense pressure, and exposed weaknesses and divisions in their community.

Lest there arise an attitude of judgementalism and condemnation, Paul reminds the Galatians of their responsibility to love and support one another as brethren in Christ.

We are talking, not so much about those who have led the church astray by false teaching, but about those who had sadly been caught up in their error.

Paul's desire is to promote an attitude of gentle love and compassion, aimed at restoring and rebuilding the weak.

Christians talk a lot about sin, but this is not meant to condemn people or promote a sense of guilt, but to lovingly bring them to a point of repentance, faith and restoration.

Paul tells the Galatians to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," and it is interesting that Paul is unafraid of using the idea of law to express obligation.

Paul is adamant that the Galatians need add nothing to faith, for the sake of their salvation, but that does not mean that as children of God they are free from obligation.

Christian freedom is freedom from the law that leads to sin and death, but carries a much deeper obligation to the law of Christ, that leads to love and life in the Holy Spirit.

Paul warns the Galatians to "keep watch" on themselves, and not to think too much of themselves, adding that each person should "test his own work," Paul is concerned lest, in their freedom from the law, the Galatian Christians fall into sin, and reminds them that each will "have to bear his own load," and answer to God for his deeds.

Interestingly, Paul adds a plea that the Galatians should support those who minister to them, and that they should "share all good things" with this who teach them the word of God. This of course is an Old Testament principle, that the worker should share in the harvest.

At the risk of appearing to be preaching good works, Paul reiterates that "whatever one sows, that will he also reap." Paul says the God cannot be mocked, by which he means that having enjoyed the gift of forgiveness in Christ, one cannot then free insult God by continuing in a life of selfishness and sin. To do so would demonstrate an absence of saving faith, and such "sowing" to the flesh will only result in corruption, and death.

Instead, Paul urges the Galatians to sow "to the Spirit," not to become "weary of doing good," and to continue doing "good to everyone," and especially to serve those who share their faith in Christ; the consequence of which is to "reap eternal life."

Paul's closing remarks give an important balance to the letter, having stressed that the Galatians are free from the ritual law, he now wants to stress the absolute necessity of doing their very best of obey the law of Christ, that is the law of love.

On that note, Paul brings the letter to an end with a last and personal plea: "see what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." It is as if Paul were seeking to remind them of his illness, and the love and the care they showed to him, appealing once again to the special relationship they had previously enjoyed.

Paul states, one last time, that those who were pressing the Galatians to accept circumcision, were concerned only for the flesh, that is, for outward submission, and not for the needs of the heart or the health of the spirit.

Paul goes further to suggest that the only reason that the circumcision party were so aggressively arguing their position was their desire to avoid the persecution that came from holding on to the true Gospel in the face of violent opposition.

Paul points out that even the circumcision party do not keep the law, nor are they sincerely trying to promote obedience to the law, just submission over the issue of circumcision, which promoted such a backlash from the religious authorities of the day. They wanted only, as Paul says to "boast" in the flesh, seeking to justify themselves in the face of persecution by arguing that Christians too are circumcised.

Paul has no desire to put such confidence in flesh, neither as a sign of faith, nor as a means to avoid persecution and rejection. Paul boasts not in the flesh, nor things of the flesh, but in the "cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."