

FROM PAUL'S OWN HAND
Galatians 6:11-18

Intro: This morning we come to the end of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

- And as he draws it to a close---he surprisingly calls attention to the size of the letters with which he is writing---in his own hand.
- He actually says---“See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.” (Galatians 6:11)
- What's the big deal?
- Why is Paul calling attention to something as insignificant to us as the size of font someone uses?
- Obviously he's making a point.
- But what is it?
- First and foremost---he's authenticating that the letter did in fact come from him.
- No doubt he was dictating the letter---rather than actually writing it.
- He was using an amanuensis---a secretary---who wrote as he spoke.
- Taking the pen in hand at the close of the letter was therefore his way of signing the letter.
- He says as much in II Thessalonians 3:17.

- “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”
- He wanted there to be no doubt that the letter came from him.
- And he used large letters for the same reason we might use boldface type.
- He wanted to get their attention.
- He wanted them to take special note of the way he was drawing his letter to a close.
- And instead of writing a brief greeting---as he usually did---he went on to write an entire concluding paragraph.
- Apparently he wanted to leave them with some important thoughts.
- And indeed he does.
- In his final words he includes a warning---a promise---an appeal---and a blessing.
- We begin with his warning.

I. A WARNING
Galatians 6:12-13

- “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

- For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh.”
- Paul couldn’t end the letter without taking one more shot at the Judaizers.
- Those Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who came to Galatia---insisting that the Gentile Christians had to submit to the Law.
- And become Jewish---as well Christian.
- In doing so they were robbing Christians of the freedom they had been given in Christ.
- The freedom to come before God on the merit of a Savior---instead of attempting to do so on the basis of their obedience to the Law.
- They were trying to convince them to give up the grace they had given---and to return to a religion based on good works.
- Paul has addressed this at length in this brief letter.
- But he can’t close without a final warning about those who he said “desire to make a good showing in the flesh.”
- What exactly he meant by that---we can’t be sure.
- It may be a veiled reference to circumcision itself.
- Or more likely to the fact that the Judaizers themselves wanted to look good.
- That they wanted to impress the Galatians with their big city ways---and their theological sophistication.
- That by adding complexity to the simplicity of the gospel Paul preached---they sought to elevate themselves in the eyes of the Galatians.
- And they were very persuasive.
- They argued their case impressively---no doubt quoting from the Old Testament.
- They could prove from Scripture that circumcision was the sign God Himself had chosen to distinguish His people from unbelievers.
- And their argument was compelling.
- Many of the Galatians were apparently ready to go under the knife---because of their arguments.
- And the fact that the Judaizers had convinced them they were genuinely concerned about their relationship to God.
- The truth of the matter---however---was that the Judaizers were simply trying to avoid persecution.
- If they could keep Christianity within the fold of Judaism---they could maintain their acceptability in Roman society.
- The Jewish faith had found an acceptable place within the diversity of religions.
- And the Romans even allowed them to be ruled by a quasi-Jewish king.

- But if the Christians kept calling attention to the cross---claiming that access to God was only possible through the cross of Christ---they would be viewed as narrow-minded extremists.
- They would be alienated from society---cancelled---and most likely actively persecuted.
- And the cross is offensive.
- It symbolizes the fact that man is sinful---and deserves to die.
- And it demonstrates the fact that man cannot save himself---but needs a Savior who is willing to die for him.
- If---however---Christians could be made to believe they still needed to come under the Law to be acceptable to God---the significance of the cross would be minimized.
- It wouldn't be the glaringly divisive dividing line between Christians and everyone else.
- Sure---Christians could still believe Christ died for them---but they would really be in the same boat with everyone else.
- They would be trying to save themselves by their good works.
- But as Paul has already made abundantly clear---no one can do that.
- No one can save himself through obedience to the Law---because no one can perfectly obey it.
- The Judiazers couldn't do it.
- The Jews couldn't do it.
- And circumcised Gentiles wouldn't be able to do it either.

- And the Judaizers knew that.
- They knew no one could obey the Law.
- No one ever had---other than the Son of God.
- So why were they trying so hard to convince the Galatians that they needed to be circumcised?
- Paul says it was so they could boast in the Galatians' flesh.
- They were trophy hunters.
- They wanted to boast as David had---over 200 Philistine foreskins.
- They wanted to be able to tell the boys back home how effective they had been converting Gentile Christians into Jewish Christians.
- They really didn't care about the Galatians.
- What they cared about was getting a number of conversions they could boast about.
- The Judaizers may be gone.
- But in a day of market oriented---pragmatically evaluated church programs---Paul's warning is still relevant.
- And so is his promise.

II. A PROMISE Galatians 6:14-16

- "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

- For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.
- And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”
- The Judaizers were ashamed of the cross---and tried to downplay its significance.
- But it was Paul’s sole reason for boasting.
- It was the cross that made Paul who he was.
- It was the cross that freed him from his sin.
- It was the cross that made possible a risen Lord who could take up residence in his life---and work through him.
- So Paul boasted in the cross.
- He centered his life on the cross.
- In fact---through the cross Paul had died to the things of this world.
- He had crucified the flesh---and its desires.
- The world had in effect been crucified to him---and he to the world through the cross.
- And his allegiance to it put everything else in a distant second place.
- His chief goal in life was to please his Lord---and he wouldn’t let anything sidetrack him.
- Least of all religious substitutes for a personal relationship with Christ.
- And that’s why circumcision meant nothing to him.

- It was an external.
- And religious externals---in and of themselves---were of little value to Paul.
- What mattered to Paul was being a new creation in Christ.
- Being born again into the kingdom of God.
- Being changed from the inside out.
- And Paul wanted everyone to understand that the promises of God are given to those who are likewise committed to the cross.
- Those who walk through life ruled by the cross.
- And that if we limit our boasting to the cross---and become new creations through the grace of God---we will find peace and mercy.
- We’ll be at peace with God---because of His mercy.
- We will be the Israel of God---His chosen people.
- With or without physical circumcision.
- We will have entered into a very special relationship with our Creator---through the cross of Christ.
- Having made that clear---Paul makes a brief personal appeal.

III. AN APPEAL Galatians 6:17

- “From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.”

- This isn't the frustrated cry of one who didn't want to be bothered any more.
- When he says---"From now on let no one cause trouble for me"---he's expressing the hope that this letter will silence those who were challenging the gospel---and his authority.
- He had demonstrated theologically the validity of the gospel he proclaimed---and had destroyed the Judaizer's position by showing where it ultimately led.
- He had clearly exposed error---and revealed truth.
- So this issue should have been settled.
- If---however---they wanted even more proof of his faithfulness to Jesus---all they had to do was look on his body.
- Because on it he bore the brand-marks of Jesus.
- Now what these brand-marks were has been debated for centuries.
- The word is στίγματα (stigmata).
- And mystics claim the stigmata of Jesus are miraculously appearing marks of the crucifixion.
- The first recorded instance of stigmata appeared in a biography of St. Francis of Assisi in 1230.
- "His wrists and feet seemed to be pierced by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on his wrists and on the upper sides of his feet, the points appearing on the other side.
- The marks were round on the palm of each hand but elongated on the other side, and small pieces of flesh jutting out from the rest took on the appearance of the nail-ends, bent and driven back. In the same way the marks of nails were impressed on his feet and projected beyond the rest of the flesh. Moreover, his right side had a large wound as if it had been pierced with a spear, and it often bled so that his tunic and trousers were soaked with his sacred blood."
- There has been a lot of debate over the nature and origin of stigmata.
- But without getting into the debate---I really doubt that Paul was talking about miraculously appearing marks of Jesus on his body.
- His marks came by very natural means.
- In II Corinthians 11 he notes the number of times he was beaten.
- He received thirty-nine lashes five times.
- He was beaten with rods three times.
- He was even stoned---and left for dead.
- It's not hard to imagine what his brand-marks were.
- The Judaizers claimed that circumcision was the authenticating mark of a believer.
- Paul's saying persecution---not circumcision---is the authentic Christian tattoo.

- And since he had the marks of persecution all over his body ---Paul could be trusted as a faithful witness to Christ.
- There was no need to further challenge the gospel he proclaimed---nor his apostolic authority.
- Paul then concludes his letter with a blessing.

IV. A BLESSING Galatians 6:18

- “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.”
- Very brief---and to the point.
- No personal greetings.
- No name dropping.
- Just a simple---“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren.”
- But even his simplicity is pregnant with meaning.
- Paul’s prayer was for God’s grace to be evident within them ---with their spirit.
- For His grace to be evidenced by their spiritual and emotional well-being.
- He’s making one final reminder about the nature of a relationship with God.
- It’s not evidenced by religious externals---but by grace---and the resulting peace that’s in the core of our being.

- And do note that he concluded by referring to them as brethren.
- In spite of everything---he still considered them to be his brothers and sisters in Christ.
- He had had some very hard things to say to them.
- There had existed---and quite possibly still existed---some huge differences of opinion between them.
- But they were still brethren.
- So he ends on a note of our unity in Christ.
- That in spite of our differences of opinion---if we kneel at the cross---we are brothers and sisters in Christ.
- And we end our study with the question---“What is the cross to you?”
- Is it merely a religious ornament you wear around your neck ---or is it the foundation of your relationship with Christ---and His people?
- Is it a God-given marker that separates you from the rest of mankind---and binds you in eternal bonds with other believers---or something you minimize---and keep hidden---for fear of being considered divisive and intolerant?
- And most importantly---have you knelt there?
- Have you bowed in reverence to the One who died for you there?
- All the good works and religious observances in the world amount to nothing of eternal significance---if you haven’t knelt at the cross of Christ.