

Gal. 6:11-18
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A. 6:11, Paul's Personal Closing

1. Ref. is not to "what a large letter" (AV), but to "with what large letters."
2. Paul's custom is to let a secretary write his material, adding only the last bit in his own hand: 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thes. 3:17f.
3. Here he summarizes the point of the epistle in the starkest terms, and does it in his own hand, in bold letters so that no one can miss it. The Judaizers have been challenging him: both his person (ch. 1-2), and his doctrine (3-6). So he sets them and himself side by side for a final comparison.

B. 6:12-13, The Motives of the Judaizers

Presented as a chiasm. Clearest if we start from the center.

1. Their Fear: 12c, 13a. They are not practising Jews, but halfway Christians who are afraid of the persecution that their faith brings on them. So they attempt to compromise with the Jews by advocating circumcision. They are not advocating total law-keeping; Paul suggests the need to keep the entire law in 5:3 as an unexpected consequence of circumcision.
2. Their Agenda, 12b, 13b: Get as many Gentile converts circumcised as possible.
3. Their Purpose, 12a, 13c: Glory in the flesh--specifically the flesh of the Galatians! As David purchased Michal from Saul with the foreskins of 200 Philistines (1 Sam. 18:27), so the Judaizers hope to keep the Jews off their backs by showing that they are really bringing Gentiles into the Jewish fold.

C. 6:14-17, Paul's Boast

1. The Object of his boast: The Cross of Christ. This is a striking statement: the cross was so offensive in the ancient world that it would never be mentioned in polite conversation. It is its association with Christ that leads Paul to glory in it.
2. Its effect on him: severs him from any worldly motives or ambitions.
 - a) World crucified to him. The dearest thing we have becomes abhorrent when it dies. All of the world's attractions are now as appealing to us as a dead corpse.

b) He crucified to the world. Thus we no longer have any appetites toward the world. A dead man is not hungry, does not lust for riches.

c) Phil. 3 is a good commentary on this verse.

3. The purpose of this effect: "a new creature." Death in itself is nothing great, but death is a necessary door through which we pass to a new life.

4. "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision." cf. 5:6. In fact, uncircumcision is no more meritorious than circumcision. Just because he has shot down the Judaizers' position does not mean that the Galatians should glory in being uncircumcised (or, by extension, in deviating in any other way from the Mosaic law). Legal conformity is utterly beside the point. Being re-created in Christ is all that matters.

D. 6:16-18, Closing Prayer

He makes request for three groups: "them," "me," and "you".

1. 16, Them (others who agree with his position). He has no quarrel with them, no matter how Jewish they are.

Who are the "Israel of God"?

a) Ascensive, "even the Israel of God"? In the light of ch. 4 ("Jerusalem ... is the mother of us all"), Phil. 3:3 ("we are the circumcision"), Rom. 2:29, we would not be surprised if Paul described the church as Israel. But in fact this would be the only place that he would use the word of Gentiles. He does have a great deal to say (Rom. 9-11) of the physical nation Israel.

b) Godly, believing Jews. This is NOT contrary to the tenor of the book, which opposes Judaizers who force circumcision on Gentiles, not Jews who believe while walking according to the custom of the fathers (cf. Acts 21:21-26).

c) A prayer for elect but still unbelieving Jews? Burton notes that the order "grace and mercy" is backwards to what one finds elsewhere, and suggests an understanding along the lines of, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace [be] on them; and let there be mercy, even upon the Israel of God." Then the sentiment here will be very much like Rom. 10:1; 11:1; asking God to remember his covenant faithfulness with Israel, bringing them into the enjoyment of salvation by grace through faith.

2. 17, Me. He bears a sign more meaningful than circumcision: the scars of his sufferings for the LJC. Therefore the Judaizers should stop persecuting and opposing him.

3. 18, You. Focuses in on the Galatians: he has said some pretty stout things about them, but closes by greeting them as "brethren," and prays for the Lord's grace with them.

Why "with your spirit," instead of "with you"?

a) "your spirit": Gal. 6:18; 1 Cor. 6:20 (MT); Phm. 1:25; Phl. 4:23 (not MT); 1 Thes. 5:23; cf. Rom. 8:16. This is the human spirit; the immaterial part viewed with respect to its relation to God, not the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:16). While in other epistles he prays for God's grace to be with the recipients, here he focuses in a bit more closely and emphasizes that organ with which they receive that grace. 1 Thes. 5:23 is particularly helpful here: "May your spirit be without flaw [singular, predicate position], and may your soul and body be kept blameless." Thus this is particularly a prayer for their spiritual preservation and protection in the light of the heresy raging around them.

b) Other epistles:

- 1) "you all": Rom. 16:24; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phl. 4:23; 2 Thes. 3:18; Tit. 3:15; Heb. 13:25.
- 2) "you": Col. 4:18; 1 Thes. 5:28; 2 Tim. 4:22 (!)
- 3) "thee": 1 Tim. 6:21
- 4) "all them...": Eph. 6:24

E. Conclusion

At the end of his epistle, Paul takes the pen from his secretary to add, not just a line of greeting, but a summary defense of himself and his gospel against those who are challenging him.

Hymns:

"In the Cross of Christ I glory."
"When I survey the wondrous cross"
Phil. 3