

**‘Don’t be intimidated out of God’s grace!’ (19)**

A woman, who had just dyed her hair, went to the hospital because her whole body hurt. She told the doctor that where ever she touched herself it would hurt. The doctor told her to demonstrate and so, she touched her nose and she screamed. She touched her stomach and she screamed. She touched her foot and she screamed. The doctor said to her, **‘look the answer is simple, your finger is broken!’**

We’ve come to the end of our sermon series on the letter to the Galatians. A series in which I think you’ll agree hasn’t been the easiest to preach through because of the negative nature of Paul’s words, especially to those legalising Judaizers.

Paul begins this section by saying in **Galatians 6:11** **“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”** Now just like that woman in the story whose finger was broken, I believe Paul’s reason for writing with large letters, is also simple. Yes, it’s possible he was emphasising the seriousness of his letter, yes, it’s possible he’s emphasising a warning about what he’s about to write. I personally believe he was writing with large letters because he was going blind.

I believe this because Paul has already mentioned it in his letter. **Galatians 4:12-15** **“I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.”** Now I don’t want to be dogmatic about this, but it seems to me this is what Paul is speaking about.

Paul continues and writes in **Galatians 6:12** **“Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.”** Paul says the problem with legalists is that they always want to be recognised, they’re always fighting to become popular among the saints. In other words, it’s all about status and when they get that status, they go all out to recruit other Christians to their own doctrine. But the problem with seeking status is that it promotes pride and we know what the Bible says about pride, **don’t we?**

I once heard a missionary tell how he was trying to do translation work in a particular tribe and found it hard to translate the word **‘pride’** or at least the concept. He finally came to the idea to use their word or words for the ears being too far apart. In other words, he conveyed the idea of an **‘inflated head’**.

Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:12** **“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”** He also said in **Romans 11:20** **“Do not be arrogant, but tremble.”** These legalistic teachers wanted some status of importance in the church in an effort to get Christians to be circumcised. The word **‘compel’** means to constrain, it means to persuade someone strongly or as we would say today, intimidate.

These guys were using every tactic of intimidation they could think of, to get others to submit to their rules and regulations. You know the kind of tactics I’m talking about, **don’t you?** The same kind of tactics they used on Peter and the church in Antioch. **Galatians 2:11-13** **“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.”**

You see, they were compelling the Gentile Christians to be circumcised in order that they might make an appearance of toeing the line with the law. But the real reason behind this was to try and escape being persecuted for the sake of the cross of Christ. But what they were in fact doing was making themselves enemies of the cross. **Philippians 3:18** **“For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.”**

You see loved ones, this is how cults start, they intimidate people to conform to their ways. Once the new converts totally conform, the new convert goes out to intimidate others to conform. In other words, their goal is to save the saved and they want their own group to grow, made up of people who now follow the original legalistic teaching. But loved ones, when we start trying to keep the law, we run into all sorts of problems and one of the problems is hypocrisy.

Galatians 6:13 “Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh.” Paul not only explains the motivation of the legalistic Judaizers, he also shows their hypocrisy. Paul says they were zealous for keeping one part of the law, which was circumcision. But the only reason they were zealous was because they wanted to impress those around them.

Jesus Himself said in Matthew 23:3 “So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.” Paul says these guys were hypocrites because they wanted to keep one part of the law but ignore the other parts of the law. And James says in James 2:10+11 “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.” In other words, Paul says these guys demand conformity to their standards, but fail to measure up to perfect law-keeping, their hypocrites.

Paul continues and says in Galatians 6:14 “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.” Though the preaching of the cross brought persecution, Paul wouldn’t stop preaching about it. In fact, he says in Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”

Though the atonement of the cross by the grace of God was foolishness to some, he would still proclaim that God’s grace was revealed by His Son hanging on the cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Philippians 3:3-7 “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”

**Do you see the difference?** The legalist will always praise themselves in their own ability to keep law and they can always tell you about all the good deeds they’ve done. But Paul says, that he personally would glory only in the grace that proceeds from the cross. All that Paul had gained in the world, he had sacrificed for the grace that came from the cross. His old man of sin had been crucified when he came to Jesus.

It’s the nature of those who depend on the grace of God for their salvation to show in their lives and speech, the glory of the cross. And in contrast, those who trust in themselves, will always glory in the glowing reports of their works. Ask yourselves loved ones, **does your Christianity bring glory to God or to men?** In your religion, **who gets the glory, God or yourself?**

Galatians 6:15 “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.” When Paul speaks about circumcision here, he’s using it in a way which stands for a legal system of religion and all that would involve. In other words, if your trying to be right with God solely through your good works, you’re wasting your time. Paul says if your trying to do that, then your meritorious efforts accomplish nothing. There’s no religious significance to the act of circumcision and so it makes no difference whether a person is circumcised or not.

But what really counts and what is really important, is that we become a new creation. **But how do we do that?** Well, it’s quite simple. Paul’s already spoke it about back in Galatians 3:26-28 “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

We become a new creation when we’re baptised into Christ. We become a new creation by the atoning blood of Jesus. Acts 22:16 “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” Now a few people today oppose the need for baptism, but if Paul recognised it was important for him to be baptised, **shouldn’t we too recognise the importance of us being baptised today too?**

There was a minister who kept boring his congregation with sermon after sermon about baptism. Finally, the church leaders told him to preach on another subject the following Sunday. They chose the subject of pills because they felt, there could be no connection between pills and baptism. So, the next Sunday the minister began his sermon and said, ‘there are big pills and little pills, there are bitter pills and sweet pills, cheap pills and expensive pills. But another pill is the ‘gos-pill’ and that brings me to my real subject, baptism.’

Someone once said, ‘some people never come to church except for their baptism, their marriage and their funeral, or when they’re hatched, matched and dispatched’.

Paul continues and says in Galatians 6:16 “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.” Now what is this rule which Paul is speaking about here? Well, he tells us over in 1 Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

You see, God’s grace isn’t in vain in the life of the Christian who has given themselves to thank God through obedience. Like I’ve mentioned a few times through this series, Christians don’t work in order to receive salvation. Christians work in order to thank God for all that was accomplished on the cross on their behalf.

2 Corinthians 4:15 “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” That’s the rule Paul is speaking about, he’s speaking about a life which just overflows with thankfulness to God for what He has done for us and it’s demonstrated in our good works. Now when Paul speaks about the Israel of God, he’s referring to the true Jews who became children of Abraham by faith, not by works of law. And as we saw a few weeks ago, all Christians are sons of Abraham by faith.

Paul continues and says in Galatians 6:17 “From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” These Judaizers were boasting about their works in relation to law. But Paul, had only the scars left by those who persecuted him for preaching the Gospel of grace and faith. 2 Corinthians 4:10 “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

These Judaizers were boasting to their supporters concerning the mark of circumcision. But Paul, only had the scars of persecution for preaching the cross in order to deliver men from the bonds of paganism. And loved ones, there are Christians all over the world, who suffer great hardships because they are Christians. There are Christians all over the world who are being persecuted because they’re preaching Christ and Him crucified.

How many times have we heard of or even seen a preacher’s work come undone because legalists came amongst them and destroyed everything God has achieved through them? You see, until you’ve witnessed this at first hand, you won’t understand why Paul was so angry with these legalists. These legalists were stealing the work of God that had been brought forth by the grace of God and Paul’s hard work. No wonder Paul ends his letter by saying Galatians 6:18 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.” It’s grace that goes with every Christian, for in it, we all must trust.

A biologist tells a story about he watched an ant carrying a piece of straw which seemed too heavy. The ant came to a crack in the ground which was too wide for it to cross. It stood still for a time, as though perplexed by the situation, then put the straw across the crack and walked over on the straw.

Now Paul had his burdens to carry and so do we. And if only we were as wise as that ant, we would speak a lot more about the burdens we must carry. This idea of ‘become a Christian and life will be a bed of roses’ is foreign to the Scriptures. The Bible never once says, become a Christian and life will get easier, in fact it promises the opposite. 2 Timothy 3:12 “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Christians are to expect persecution, they are to expect trials and suffering.

Paul teaches us about his ‘thorn in the flesh’, which I believe is a reference to his blindness. And he spoke about boasting in our ‘weaknesses’ and what did God say to him? 2 Corinthians 12:9 “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” It’s in grace that we find the boldness to speak about judgment.

For we will all stand before God, not on the merit of our own performance of law or meritorious good works, but on the foundation of the grace of God. Everything we do, say and live for is because of the grace of God. Grace is what you are, you’re a living, talking example and advertisement of what grace is. 1 Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

And so loved ones, as we close let me leave you with this thought. Quit trying to work your way to heaven through good works, you’re wasting your time. Don’t be intimidated out of grace but accept and believe with all your heart that Christ has done enough.

Because when you do, out of appreciation for everything which Christ has done, your life will overflow with thankfulness to God which in turn will be shown in your good works. I said at the very start of this sermon series that this wouldn't be a popular sermon series, especially if you were legalistic in your thinking.

I hope and pray that through Paul's writing, I've shown you the dangers of having a Jesus plus gospel. If you're not a Christian this morning and want to become a new creation, then take Paul's advice and be baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and God will give you the Holy Spirit as a gift to help you live right for Him.

Let me leave you by repeating Paul's own final words, **“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen”**.