GALATIANS

New Life

Day 1: A new standard

Read : Galatians 6:11-13; Acts 15:1-11; Galatians 5:1-12

Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians with some powerful final words - "see what large letters I write with my own hand". This was a mark of authenticity (seen again in 2 Thess 3:17), and it also served as a sense of personal urgency. When Paul speaks about circumcision in these verses, he is addressing the Judaizers who had imposed old Jewish laws on the believers in Galatia. This was dividing the early church, and creating a barrier for many of the Gentile believers there. The Judaizers were believers of Christ, however, they had allowed their fears of persecution & rejection pressure them into imposing old religious law into their teachings. They had allowed superficial outward religious acts, such as circumcision, replace the grace of Jesus Christ.

While we may not struggle with following old Jewish laws today, we still struggle with the pressure of trying to outwardly impress or prove ourselves to others, and even to God. We can even use "good things" to create additional standards verses accepting the unearned grace Jesus gave us on the cross. We can try to prove how helpful, dependable, outwardly spiritual, productive, or agreeable we are. We can serve, care, give, or work hard in order to seek approval or achieve success. Thankfully, the gospel invites us into a new standard of grace. Instead of WHAT we are doing or HOW MUCH we are doing it, Jesus invites us to examine WHY we are doing it. Our new standard in grace values true faith over approval, honesty over image, & love over appearances.

Think about a moment recently that you felt pressured to live up to a certain standard, or to prove yourself. Reflect on your response and honestly ask yourself -

- Did I act in love & obedience based on my standard of grace in Christ?
- Did I try to control or manage how others saw me or attempt to meet their standards to prove myself or to earn approval?

Day 2: A new confidence

Read : Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2

In verse 14, Paul reminds the Galatians not to boast in their adherence to old religious laws, but instead to boast in what Jesus did for them on the cross. This would have been a bold statement because death by crucifixion was seen as extremely shameful. In fact, people would typically shun those associated with people that had been executed on crosses. This certainly wouldn't have been something they would have considered boasting about. Through his bold statement, Paul reminds them of their need for a savior, and what Jesus sacrificed for them on the cross. He wants them to

User Guide:

How to use this study guide:

- **Pray** : Ask God to reveal Himself to you.
- **Read :** Read the daily scripture, take notes, and write down anything the Spirit reveals to you.
- **Study :** Read the daily study section and prayerfully answer the discussion questions.
- **Act** : Take a step, even if it's small, to put what you are learning into action.
- **Gather & Share** : Gather with your GUMC small group and use the discussion section to share what you have learned, ask the hard questions, and receive prayer for anything you are struggling with.

- NOTE: If you need help finding a group - Reach out to our Discipleship Director, Melonie at: meloniep@gumchurch.com

remember that they can't follow the law perfectly, and to humbly accept that their faith in what Christ did for them is the ONLY thing they should place their true confidence in.

As we think about our confidence, how much of it depends on our circumstances verses what Jesus did for us on the cross? Can you relate to any of these statements?

- I feel valuable when people appreciate, compliment, or thank me.
- I feel secure when everything is under control and I know the outcome.
- I feel successful when I've met everyone's expectations.
- I feel like a failure when someone is angry, let down, or disappointed with me.

Although these feelings may be very real for us, they don't have to determine our worth, or our confidence in who we are. The cross reminds us that we don't need to earn love, prove our worth, or control every outcome to be secure. Our confidence is not determined by our performance, it's in what Jesus has ALREADY FINISHED on the cross!

- What is the difference in taking responsibility for your actions, verses using your actions as evidence to prove yourself worthy or valuable?
- How do you respond internally when someone misunderstands you, criticizes you, or seems disappointed in you?
- How would your life change if you boasted in Christ's abilities, verses your own?

Day 3: A new identity

Read : Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come

- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Paul explains that outward appearances, or religious acts, don't establish a right relationship with God. Instead, accepting His gift of grace and allowing Him to transform you into a new creation is what matters. God cares WAY more about your true identity on the inside, verses any outward sign or label. When we think about the labels we give ourselves or to others, we tend to think about those destructive negative labels. However, sometimes even seemingly "good" labels can be just as destructive.

Have you ever felt defined or pressured by these seemingly "good" labels in your life?

- The responsible, or reliable one
- The peacekeeper, or the glue
- The strong one
- The dependable one
- The leader
- The helper, or the generous giver
- The eternal optimist, or the positive one
- The advisor, advocate, or counselor

Ask God to reveal where you have confused outward labels with your true identity. Ask Him to distinguish areas where you have a God-given desire to serve verses a fear-driven desire to be needed or valued. *After praying, complete these sentences:*

- I often feel I have to_____ to be valued by others.
- Because I belong to Christ, I am free to _____.

GUMC Small Group Discussion

Use these questions for your weekly small group:

1. What are you leaving behind?

What old pattern of striving, approval-seeking, comparison, or control are you ready to surrender after completing this study? *Write it here, and also on a note card so that you can remind yourself when you try to pick it back up again -*

_____
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2. What are you receiving?

What truth about your identity in Christ do you need to believe & receive more deeply in your faith life? *Write it here, and also on a note card so that you can remind yourself of this important truth-*

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Day 4: A new way

Read : Galatians 6:15-16; Romans 6; Galatians 5:13

Living a new life in grace doesn't give us permission to live without responsibilities or an excuse to disobey God. It simply transforms our motives behind our choices. Grace helps us carry the responsibilities that are ours, without taking ownership of what we were never meant to carry.

Where might you be confusing living by striving, with grace?

Striving	Grace
I must keep everyone happy	I can love everyone without controlling responses
I must do everything myself	I can accept my limits and allow others to take responsibility
I must be dependable	I can act with integrity AND with healthy boundaries
I must earn rest	I can receive rest as a gift & a necessary part of life

Choose one area of striving this week and practice doing your part faithfully, while releasing the outcome to God.

For example:
Mine: Communicating honestly and respectfully with truth & love
Not Mine: Making sure the other person feels positive about it, doesn't feel disappointed, or agrees with me.

Day 5: A new perspective

Read : Galatians 6:17-18; 2 Corinthians 11:16-31

Paul's last verses refer to the "marks" he bears for Jesus. He is most likely referring to the physical scars and suffering that he experienced due to persecution in his ministry. This is a stark contract to the outward religious "credentials" that the Galatians were trying to establish. Paul's suffering is a testimony of his allegiance to Christ, not an effort to prove or earn his salvation.

When Paul gives them this final blessing of grace, he's emphasizing the daily grace that we all need in our faith journey. We will absolutely make mistakes, face conflict, experience disappointment, and have difficult decisions & circumstances in our lives. However, none of these things determine our value or worth. We can receive correction or conviction without collapsing into shame, apologize without feeling worthless, and set boundaries without being unloving. We can allow others to be disappointed or experience consequences without abandoning our convictions in order to restore their approval. Grace allows us the security to grow and mature without the unredeemable cost of attempted perfection.

- What is the difference between healthy conviction that leads to growth and maturity, verses the burden of shame that leads you to believe you are worthless, or beyond repair?
- What would it look like to trust Jesus with the parts of your life that you feel are out of control or beyond your abilities to repair?

3. What are you going to practice?

What is one concrete practical change or step that you can take to live a new life from a place of grace instead of striving, fear, or pride?
Write it here, and also on a note card so that you can remind yourself-

4. Questions or thoughts:

Write down any additional questions or thoughts you wanted to share with your group this week: