

*What is in view*

We're done! With this discussion we bring to a close our study in Galatians and, as we turn our attention to Paul's final words, we find him rehearsing key elements from his letter: peace, mercy, and grace. In these three words we encounter a summary of the message of the Gospel. Peace with God because of His mercy extended to us in grace.

*What is helpful to note*

Let's just walk through the last few verses of this wonderful epistle, noting a few items that may need comment.

## Verse 15

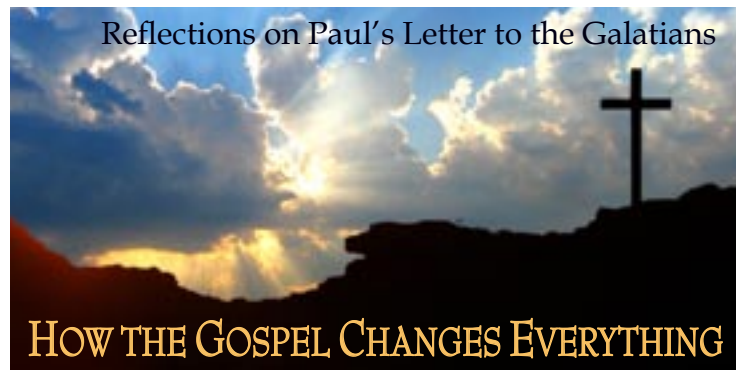
Here, in something akin to spiritual short-hand, Paul summarizes what he has been saying. Circumcision is the defining mark of the Judaizers; Paul uses it as the characteristic of the legalists, the rules-keepers. It isn't that circumcision is the sole issue, it simply serves as the prime example of what is wrong with the distorted Gospel. In other words, making it about the rules misses the point! What God is doing is making people new creations in Christ and by the Spirit through the Gospel.

## Verse 16

For Paul to speak of walking according to "this rule," he is not slipping back into legalism! He is not talking about rules in terms of laws or rules one keeps in order to live holy. The word he uses for "rule" refers to what was used for measuring; it came to refer to "canon" or principle of faith. Thus, he is praying a blessing of peace and mercy on all those who live by the Gospel!

Peace is a common greeting as well as benediction. As Paul uses it, it might well have a Jewish flavor. Peace (or "shalom" in Hebrew) was more than just the cessation of

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Reflections on Paul's Letter to the Galatians

  
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war; the word refers to wholeness and health. Mercy is what is bestowed by a benefactor upon a beneficiary when there is no claim upon the benefactor; it speaks of extending goodness and blessing out of good will.

This is the only place in Paul's writings that the expression "the Israel of God" appears; that does leave the scholars debating exactly what he meant! In the context of Galatians, perhaps the most appropriate way to understand the phrase is to think back to Paul's argument that all who believe are the true children of Abraham (3:7-9, 23-29). Thus, Paul is not supplanting national Israel with something else, but he is underscoring that those in right relationship with God are God's "chosen people" (i.e., a true, spiritual Israel). This way of reading the phrase is consistent with the blessing offered for all who walk according to the principle of the Gospel Paul has expounded in this letter.

## Verse 17

Rather than appealing to the marks of circumcision (which the legalists argued for), Paul makes it clear that he has given himself to the true Gospel and has suffered, in his body, for the privilege to freely proclaim this message—even if it brings him suffering.

## Verse 18

Here we encounter one of Paul's favorite words: grace! It is almost as if in one sentence Paul captures what he has been driving at all along. We might paraphrase this last sentence this way: May God's rich and free blessings that come through who the Lord Jesus Christ is and what He has done permeate your very souls, you who share this life with me!

*Talking to your group*

As you talk through these final verses, feel free to let your group explore what they are taking away from Galatians. As you turn your attention to the three words highlighted in the discussion questions (peace, mercy, and grace), let the richness of the epistle flavor what those words mean.

When Paul prayed these blessings into the lives of the Galatians, he wasn't just "being nice." He really knew that praying such things into the lives of others matters. Consider taking time, before your time is up, to pray for fresh experiences of peace and mercy and grace for all those in your group. Pray for a fresh and enduring grasp of the glorious Gospel of grace for all involved. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all! Amen.

*"God's aim in our lives is 'spiritual' in this sense, that we, redeemed by the death of Christ, might be empowered by His Spirit both to will and to do for the sake of His own pleasure. True spirituality, therefore, is nothing more nor less than life by the Spirit. 'Having been brought to life by the Spirit,' Paul tells the Galatians, 'let us behave in ways that are in keeping with the Spirit.'"*  
Gordon Fee

## Thinking . . .

Clearly it would be difficult to summarize your week in a single word; one word won't capture everything. But try it. Try to choose one single word to let others know what your week was like. What word best sums up this past week?

## Reflecting . . .

How would you summarize, in a word or two, what we have been learning in Galatians? How could you capture the essence of this great letter in a few words? It would be hard; but Paul does something much like that as he closes the letter in Galatians 6:15-18.

Three words stand out in these closing verses. In the context of this letter, how do you understand . . .

Peace (6:16)?

Mercy (6:16)?

Grace (6:18)?

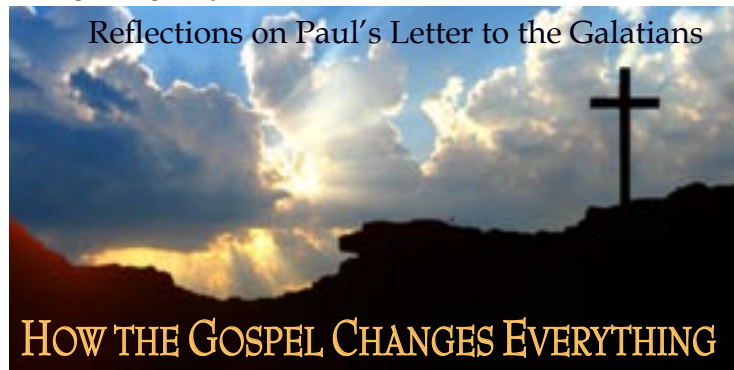
How do these words capture the essence of this epistle?

What is the connection between these blessings and Paul's affirmation that what really matters is "a new creation" (6:15)?

## Responding . . .

How will the message of the peace, mercy, and grace of God we encounter in the Gospel of Jesus through the Spirit bring lasting change in your life?

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