

CHAPTER 6:1-18

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.

Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

COMMENTARY

{1} - Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

There are a few key designations in this verse that need a bit of clarification. The verse starts with "brethren," Paul's designation for Christian members of the "ekklesia." The second term he employed was "a man," the Greek "*anthropos*," which is a generic name for people, as opposed to animals, regardless of gender. Paul's use of the term "man" instead of "brother" has led some to conclude that Paul was referring to sinners, unbelievers outside the body of Christ.

However, the third essential term in this verse is "restore." It's the Greek "*katartizo*." It is a combination of the intensive "*kata*," and "*artios*," which means, "to adjust, fit, finish or complete." So, the fundamental meaning of "*katartizo*" is, "to put a thing in its appropriate position; to establish, to equip or to fully instruct." As a picture word, it means to repair or mend a broken limb, or to reconcile a schism or rupture.

So, what we have here is a man who was "overtaken in a fault." Paul gave the brethren, as a group, instruction on how to repair and restore that man to an appropriate state. Clearly, a man who has never been under the gospel cannot be restored to the gospel, and one who has never been in fellowship cannot be returned to fellowship. So, I am inclined to believe that Paul used the generic term "man" loosely and was speaking specifically of instructed Christians who are guilty of some infraction and need restoration to their previous state.

Nevertheless, Paul's instruction was not focused on the stumbling "man." It was directed at the ones who would seek to restore him. Plenty of high-minded churchmen, considering themselves sufficiently "spiritual," have viewed this verse as a directive to go sniff out every human imperfection and point out every flaw in an effort to restore some poor wretch who was "overtaken in a fault." What such men fail to recognize is that Paul was not scrutinizing the sinner; he was scrutinizing the attitude of the one seeking to restore him.

Now, how are we to go about such a task? Well, with humility. Paul used the term "meekness," one fruit of the Spirit. Consequently, such restoration is only to be undertaken by those who are genuinely "spiritual," or who operate under the headship and authority of the Spirit. Such a person will approach the fallen compatriot meekly, watching themselves carefully so as not to let their pride become a snare. When we endeavor to confront a brother about his sin, it is important to recognize that none of us is above falling into any and all temptations were it not for the grace of God protecting and guiding us.

So, should we condemn him? Should we be unsympathetic and bully him into submission? Should we browbeat him with the Word and insist that he straighten up and fly right or else we'll toss him into the street? Do we threaten excommunication or pronounce an anathema?

Nope.

We should lift the stumbling brother to his feet, understand his burden and help him carry it.

{2} - *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

True fellowship weeps with the heartsick and rejoices with the blessed. We are all bound to stumble. We are all one step away from our next infraction. And, if all we do is sit around like legalistic cops waiting to catch our brother in a fault, we will never have time to restore him properly. We must put our shoulder to his burden and help him lift the oppressive weight that led him to fall in the first place.

Here's a bit of Biblical math: A burden shared is divided by half. A happiness shared is multiplied by two.

The law of Christ is satisfied in such gestures of sacrificial love.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35)

"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." (Phil. 2:2-3)

{3} - *For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*

This is a continuation of the "consider thyself" warning. We've all seen the "holier than thou" attitude that permeates some church groups. They look condescendingly down their pompous noses at anyone they deem lower than themselves. They certainly think they are something! But, their attitude undermines the very "law of Christ." They refuse to stoop down and share a brother's burden. They get great comfort and egocentric satisfaction from telling

others how "wrong" they are. But, they deceive themselves. All the while, they are nothing. They have not embraced the true Christian conscience. They are tied up in Pharisee-ism.

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.” (Matt. 7:2-5)

{4} - But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

In considering himself, the "restorer" should consider his own work, not the work of the fallen man. I call those "horizontal comparisons." It is pointless to compare ourselves with others. We may be slightly better than some, but we are infinitely worse than others.

Still, the standard is not some other fellow. The standard is Christ and His law. We must look "vertically" to the One who saved us, rather than looking sideways at other sinners. Then, when we are at peace with God and living in accordance with His Word, we have something to rejoice and glory in when we are rewarded for our faith.

Look, let's make it simple. Every one of us will stand before God's judgment alone. We all build on the same foundation, which is Christ. But, every man's work will be made obvious and God will burn away the debris, leaving behind only the precious works of faith, tried in the fire.

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” (1 Cor. 3:9-15)

No matter how masterfully another man builds, we do not share in his reward. And, no matter how much loss a man suffers in the burning of his "wood, hay, stubble," we do not share in his loss. So, every man ought to consider himself. Consider his walk. Consider his work. That way we will spend much less time poking our noses into each other's business. And if the church would truly operate this way, we'd have a stronger body as each member strove to prove his own work.

{5} - For every man shall bear his own burden.

On the surface it appears that Paul just flip-flopped between bearing one another's burdens and every man bearing their own. But, let's review and you'll see his point clearly.

Here on earth, as we wander around in these fleshly tabernacles, we are bound to stumble and sin against the perfection of God. When that happens, truly spirit-driven men, meek and humble, ought to seek the restoration of their fallen brother. They should be willing to help lift his burdened soul and help him find his way back to the Christian life. But, the only way to accomplish that is for the restorers to consider themselves carefully so as not to get caught in a snare. They will end up thinking they are really something special - "God's chosen vessels of mercy" - when they are in fact nothing but servants doing the will of the Almighty. When they seek to restore the sinning brother, they should not concentrate on his fallen behavior, they should concentrate on their own behavior. They should be primarily concerned with their own work, not anyone else's. That way they will have something to rejoice in when they are rewarded. After all, they will one day appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and on that day they will bear only their own burden --- no one else's.

Got it? Pretty cool, eh? Moving on ---

{6} - Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

Okay, time to learn another Greek word. This time it's "*koinoneo*." It is translated "communicate" in this verse. The root of "*koinoneo*" is "*koinos*," which means, "defiled, common, or unclean." It has to do with having things in common, or belonging to several people who all partake of the same things. So, "*koinoneo*" means, "to communicate, to share, to be joint-participant in." It has to do with distributing or imparting of goods.

Paul told his Galatian audience that they who had been taught in the Word were to share with their teacher in every good thing. They were to partake in active "joint-participation," the distribution of their "good things" to their teacher. By the way, that two-word phrase "good things" translates the single Greek word,

"*agathos*." It means, "good and benevolent, profitable or useful." So, Paul was specific that the things they were to share with their teacher were to be "good, profitable and useful" things.

A BIT OF PAULINE GIVING THEOLOGY

It is impossible to read the letters of the Apostles without noticing how frequently they mentioned giving and supplying the needs of God's ministers. In fact, when Martin Luther wrote concerning this passage of Galatians, he said that he was almost embarrassed at how often the Apostles insisted on this very thing. He found it difficult to teach on such passages, as it would appear that he was promoting them for personal gain. Nevertheless, Luther came to understand that, whereas people were willing to generously plow their material goods into every Godforsaken activity and every aberrant church that held them in bondage, the Apostles had to instruct their readers repeatedly of the importance of shoring up God's work of the gospel, because it was against their basic nature to do so.

A fair amount of confusion has developed through the years over the subject of providing for the ministry, and both the pulpit and the pew have made much of Paul's tent making and his boasting to the Corinthian church that he had never taken anything from them. It is true; Paul did work at making tents -

“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth: And, found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla: (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.” (Acts. 10:1-3)

However, Paul never shied away from teaching the Corinthian church the necessity of supporting those who labored in the gospel –

“Or, I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, not doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if weshall reap your carnal things?” (1 Cor. 9:6 -11)

Still, knowing that the heathen priests and satanic ministers (2 Cor. 11:14-15) worked their chicanery in order to make a profit off the people, Paul insisted on

offering them the gospel of Christ without charge, so that no man could ever hold him accountable or accuse him of being in it for the money.

“If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.” (1 Cor. 9:12)

Still, he laid out the same principle that he taught the Galatians -

“Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” (1 Cor. 9:13-14)

Nevertheless, having clearly stated the Lord's ordination concerning such things, Paul was steadfast in his decision not to make use of it in Corinth.

“But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.” (1 Cor. 9:15)

Now, this decision of Paul's not to take money from the churches at Corinth has led some to believe that Paul never took any money or wages, and paid his way throughout his ministry. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. The reason Paul was able to resist money from Corinth was that he took wages from other churches, "robbing" them in order to give the gospel without cost to the Corinthians.

“Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And, when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.” (2 Cor. 7-9)

In the end, Paul concluded that his lack of "*koinoneo*" with Corinth had cost them the opportunity to give, depriving them of one of the basic spiritual principles of Christian life.

“For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong.” (2 Cor. 12:13)

Still, Paul clung fiercely to his dedication to them -

“Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And, I will gladly spend and be spent for you: though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.” (2 Cor. 12:14-15)

My point, as concerns the Corinthians, is that they were the only church Paul refused to burden with the necessity of providing for his needs. However, he was only able to accomplish that by taking wages from other churches. In the end, he knew that the Corinthians had been shortchanged, but he hoped that by spending himself for them, they would grow to insist on caring for him. Nevertheless, the more he offered them the gospel freely, the less they cared for him.

Meanwhile, Paul's theology of giving remained constant. The Philippian letter is often called "The Joy Letter." It was written in response to a gift that was brought to Paul from Macedonia, at the hands of Epaphroditus. This may well be one of the gifts Paul told the Corinthians about. Earlier, the church at Philippi had failed to care for Paul, causing Paul to send Epaphroditus, who had ministered to Paul's wants, to look in on them. Epaphroditus had become sick as he labored for Christ, and was near to death, not regarding his own life, to make up for the lack of supply from Philippi (Phil. 2:25-30).

Nonetheless, as Paul waited in a Roman prison cell, their care for him had once again flourished, inspiring this wonderful letter. As he closed, he wrote -

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, (therewith) to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate [*koinoneo*] with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated [*koinoneo*] with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:10-19)

There's neither sufficient time nor space to exegete this passage fully, so I'll just hit the high points.

1. Paul had learned through his various trials how to be content with whatever God provided for him at that moment. So, while he did not insist on the gift, he knew that they needed an opportunity to give. Principle: Giving to God's ministry may benefit the receiver, but it is of greater benefit for the giver.
2. Paul commended them for their joint-participating. They had done well.
3. They gave repeatedly to Paul throughout the course of his ministry.
4. Their gifts were counted as good fruit that was accruing a heavenly account. As they abounded in their giving, their account was also abounding.
5. Paul equated their gift with the Old Covenant "sweet savor offering." That was a precious offering made to God when an Israelite would burn the best thing he had so that the smoke of the offering would ascend into the nostrils of God (Gen. 8:20-21, Exod. 29:15-18, 22-25, 41, Lev. 1:8-9, 13, 17, 2:2, 9, 12, 3:5, 16, Num. 15:3-4, 7, 10, etc.). Paul called their offering "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God."
6. As a result of their generosity in providing for his needs, Paul assured the givers that God would surely supply for all their needs. What a promise!

So, once again, the giver benefits from sacrificial giving as much as the receiver does...and perhaps more! Paul also carried his giving instruction over to Timothy as he laid out the structure and responsibilities of church leadership -

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward.” (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

Same instructions. Same "ox" reference. Same point.

Okay, back to Galatians -

{7a} - Be not deceived; God is not mocked:

Despite the popularity of this verse and the diversity of its misapplications, Paul's context had to do with sharing "all good things" with the ones who teach the gospel. His point is that God expects generosity to flow toward His ministers and that withholding such support is a mockery of God's Word. Paul taught

repeatedly that the law contained specific instruction to support those who served God. To do less was to ignore God's own commands.

{7b} - For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

There's your basic, fundamental, agricultural truth. Plant apple seeds; reap apples. Sow watermelon seeds; reap watermelons. What you sow, you reap. Clear enough. Now carry that principle into sharing good things with those who teach.

{8} - For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

You can hoard your money to yourself and spend it on yourself. That's sowing to the corruptible flesh. But, what you get in return is corruption. That's the seed you planted and that's the fruit you reap. But, generosity toward God's ministers is likened to sowing to the Spirit. And, from that seed you will reap Spiritual fruit – life everlasting.

"Okay," you say, "but what if I start giving today? Do I have to continue it the rest of my life? I mean, when have I sown enough to get the reward?"

{9} - And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

The phrase "well doing" is a combination of the Greek words, "*kalos poleo*." "*Kalos*" means, "constitutionally good without necessarily being benevolent." And, "*poleo*" means, "to appoint, to constitute, or to endow someone with a certain quality." It is not "*prasso*," which means "to do, or perform." Paul was not simply talking about good performance. It's deeper than that. "*Kalos poleo*" is to do good toward someone as a means of testifying to the value or quality of the object toward whom the good deed is done.

In other words, when we share our good things with God's ministers, we testify to the value of the Word they teach. It is a way of recognizing that God has gifted that person to instruct the saints, and it declares the value of that gift.

Now, Paul knew that giving our hard-earned substance to another person is difficult on our flesh. It is easy to grow weary of it and find reasons to discontinue the practice. So, he admonished his readers not to let that weariness overtake them. We will certainly reap the fruit of our faithful sowing if we continue without fainting.

Paul carried this "sowing and reaping" analogy into his Corinthian letters as well -

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 6-7)

That's one of the few places in all of Scripture where God eulogized a particular sort of person. God loves a cheerful giver. By the way, that word "cheerful" is the Greek "*hilaros*," from which we get the transliterated term "hilarious." God loves a person who abounds in giving with hilarity.

{10} - As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

The giving spirit ought to permeate every Christian. Follow along -

God gave His Son. The Son gave His life. That sacrifice gave us the Spirit. The Spirit gives us everlasting life. I refuse to believe that the giving stops once it gets to us. To the contrary, once the Spirit indwells us, it will make us cheerful givers. Sacrificial giving is built into the warp and woof and God's redemptive plan.

“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” (Mat. 10:8)

Of course, Jesus continued by saying to His apostles –

“Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.” (Mat. 10:9-10)

He expected those who were taught to provide their teachers with everything they needed. But, you've grasped that concept by now, right?

So, as we have opportunity we should do well and react generously to all men. After all, God is our supply. But, among those who are of the household of faith, we are to pay particular attention and thank God for the opportunity to give, to help, to share a burden and to show Christian charity.

I understand Luther's concerns about teaching on this "delicate" subject. In this day and age, the matter of money and the ministry has become practically taboo. But Jesus, Paul and the apostolic authors were bold concerning the subject. They made no apologies for what God taught.

Nevertheless, every man is responsible to his own conscience, "according as he purposeth in his heart." If any man desires to act as Paul did among the Corinthians and share the gospel without cost or remuneration, that teacher has the same freedom that Paul had. Nevertheless, the opportunity to give is a necessary part of Christian growth. And, "doing good" to testify to the value of God's word should never be quelled. The promise remains. "For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

{11} - Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

Probably as a result of his eye problems, Paul normally dictated his letters. For instance, Tertius wrote Romans (Rom. 16:22). But, as if to emphasize how heartfelt his passion for these bewitched brethren was, Paul took the time to point out that he had written this entire letter with his own hand.

{12} - As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

Paul ended his letter right where he began - law versus grace. Once again he reminded his readers that the men who were persuading them to be circumcised desired an outward show of law keeping. Such men used converts to Judaism as a means to glorify themselves. They also knew that - given the political/religious environment of the day - wrapping themselves in Moses would shield them from the persecution that believers in Jesus suffered.

But, it was all for show. The Judaizers were not concerned for the spiritual well being of their proselytes. They simply accrued converts to make an open display of their own religious importance. And, in so doing, they represented themselves as righteous, law-keeping leaders.

{13} - For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

But, hypocrites that they were, they were incapable of living up to the law's righteous standard. Nevertheless, they zealously sought the foreskins of others to make themselves appear righteous.

{14} - But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Paul, on the other hand, acting by grace, refused to seek his own glory. If he were to brag about anything, it would be the finished work of salvation, wrought on Calvary. But, Paul added an interesting bit of theology - "by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Christ was crucified by the unbelieving world - the same world of whom John would say,

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:5)

- although His crucifixion saved His elect out of the world. That same event stands as a promise of redemption for believers and a firm judgment against unbelievers. So, Paul expanded that notion and applied it to his own conversion and the power of the cross.

When Christ laid down His life as the vicarious sacrifice, He paved the way for the Holy Spirit of God to indwell those for whom He died. The Spirit of God and the spirit of this world are always at odds. "The prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2) has blinded the minds of the unregenerate, but the Spirit of God has enlightened the redeemed. So, Paul concluded, the cross of Christ draws a dividing line between the saint and the lusts of this world. Hence, by the cross, the world and the lusts thereof are crucified in the heart of the believer, and the believer is crucified in Christ, casting away the things of this world.

Think about it. A malefactor hanging on a plank of wood has a hard time being charmed by the things of this world. He has only one option - death. And, if we reckon ourselves dead with Christ (Rom. 6:11), then we will live again only as He lives again, and seek only those things that redound to His glory. As we embrace the cross, the things of this world are reckoned as dead, and we are dead to the things of this world.

{15} - For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Circumcision of the flesh, as a means of attempting perfection by the law, is part of the "world" that was crucified. It is a dead issue and a powerless activity. So, where is bragging, or boasting, about one's circumcision? What a ridiculous thing to boast of. Paul's only boast was Christ's atonement, accomplishing salvation on our behalf. Where our standing before God is concerned, neither

circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. Only one thing counts - the new birth.

More than simply a man's foreskin needed to change. The whole man needed to be changed. An outward sign in the flesh is of no consequence. Only an inward change, creating an entirely new person, is of any Heavenly value. Manmade cuts in the flesh do not impress God. Only a God-ordained inner conversion can satisfy the demands of eternity.

That is the theme of this entire letter. Works of the flesh cannot jibe with the grace of God. Only the overwhelming power of the Sovereign God can produce an acceptable righteousness. Only the grace of the Omnipotent can infuse a wretched sinner with the perfection of Christ. Only God can satisfy God.

{ 16 } - *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*

Paul wrapped up his letter with a traditional Hebrew blessing. He claimed God's peace and mercy for all those who walk according, or live in harmony, with Paul's teaching of gracious salvation. He also, as was customary with such Hebrew blessings, prayed for peace and mercy on Israel, speaking distinctly of "the Israel of God."

I'd be remiss if I wrote an entire commentary on the book of Galatians and let this verse pass without addressing the controversy that surrounds it. It has been used as a "proof text" to infer that believers in Christ - the Christian church of Jews and Gentiles - are synonymous with "the Israel of God." With that assumption as a jumping-off point (it being completely an assumption, since Paul never stated such a theology in so many words), this verse has been misused to shore up the notion that God is finished with national Israel and that the promises made to that nation have been fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the New Testament Church.

It's no surprise to anyone that I disagree with the "Spiritual Israel" theology, so I think this verse warrants closer inspection.

The heart of the controversy stems from the little Greek conjunction "*kai*." It appears three times in this verse, and each time the King James Version translates it "and."

And [kai] as many as walk according to this rule, peace on them, and [kai] mercy, and [kai] upon the Israel of God.

But, here's where it gets tricky. The word "kai" has more than one use, and more than one definition. Strong's dictionary says of "kai" -

“Apparently, a primary particle, having a copulative and sometimes also a cumulative force; and, also, even, so then, too, etc.; often used in connection (or composition) with other particles or small words.”

Now, normally the science of language translation requires that one resort to a secondary meaning, such as "even," only when the primary meaning makes no sense. However, in this verse the primary meaning ("and") makes perfect sense. To translate "kai" any other way would require a textual or exegetical reason to do so.

Nevertheless, the NIV translates Gal. 6:16 –

“Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.” (Emphasis mine)

Every other reputable translation renders it "and." It is an inexplicably odd bit of translating, but the NIV gave the "Israel/Church Replacement" crowd the proof they needed to jump to all sorts of conclusions. By the way, this is also the **only** verse that this camp has in trying to prove that the New Testament applies the term "Israel" to the Church. Their entire view stands or falls on the proper interpretation of one small Greek conjunction.

As I mentioned earlier, Paul was closing his epistle by implementing the common form of Hebrew blessing. Such blessings appear in the Psalms. For instance -

“Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.” (Ps. 128:4-6)

Even though the blessing was aimed at individuals, it closed with a prayer for the peace of Israel. In fact, we have a very recent example of such a prayer of blessing. Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman Yasir Arafat of the PLO met on the Whitehouse lawn to sign a peace treaty on Monday, Sept. 13, 1993. They shook hands and pledged to return the ancient lands of Judea and Samaria to a time when "the land had rest from war" (Joshua 11:23). On the lawn, Rabin recited the seasons of Ecclesiastes and declared, "The time for peace has come." Then, he closed with a line from the Hebrew prayer book: "May He who brings peace to His universe bring peace to us and to all Israel."

Certainly, no one hearing Rabin's prayer would interpret it to mean that the people gathered on the White House lawn had become "all Israel." That's absurd logic. Yet, it's the same logic that is applied to Gal. 6:16.

Rabin prayed to the God who made an immutable covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He prayed that God would bring peace between his nation and the Gentile nations that surround him. But, in keeping with the tradition of Hebrew prayers, he added a prayer for the peace of Israel, the nation.

If we read Gal. 6:16 the same way, we realize that Paul was making a distinction between two groups, both of whom were believers. First were the "them," which referred to the Gentile believers Paul had been writing to and about. The second group was "the Israel of God," who were Jewish believers, or the Remnant of Israel, the genuine Jews of Romans 2:28-29. This is very consistent with the tone and tenor of the entire Galatian letter, where the Jew/Gentile issue was Paul's central point.

An important theological reality is that Paul never said anything in any of his epistles about Gentiles becoming "spiritual Israelites." In fact, proponents of this view consistently fail to produce a single clear and obvious example of New Testament writing where the Church is called "Israel." And, for such an incredibly important paradigm shift, we would expect it to be mentioned clearly at least once.

Gal. 6:16 is Paul's prayer of blessing on all those who follow after Christ, from the Gentiles and from Israel. He maintained the distinction that permeates his epistles, but he prayed for God's hand of blessing on them both.

To conclude more than that from Paul's words is to force Paul into a theology that he never espoused. In Chafer's Systematic Theology, he wrote, "The use of the passages [Gal. 6:16 & Rom. 9:6] to prove Israel and the Church to be the same is deplored in the light of the truth which these Scriptures declare."

I'll use more gentle language. When we hunt for something in a passage that is not there, we are prone to miss the truth that actually is there.

{ 17 } - From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Having laid out his concise theology on the matter, Paul drew a line in the sand. He refused to hear anymore about it and declared that no man should upset him with it again. He had the marks of a bondsman, he was sold to Christ and would serve his Master unflinchingly. It was a warning that Paul would neither bend nor bow.

The word "marks" is the Greek word, "*stigmata*." It is the same word used to describe the wounds in Jesus' hand, feet and side. Some have inferred that Paul

was claiming to have similar marks in his body, carrying out his crucifixion parallel. But, I'm inclined to think that Paul was referring to the scars he received during his various whippings and tortures. He suffered them for Christ's sake and they bore witness to Paul's devotion to his Master. And, if he had undergone such agony for what he preached, no man should assume that he could be dissuaded from his convictions.

{18} - Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

And, with that benediction, the letter to the Galatians closed. Paul was ever mindful of the brethren. And, his greatest desire for them was the grace of Christ. If, in fact, that grace is with our spirits, we are secure and at peace with the Sovereign of the Universe.

With Paul, I say, "Amen."