

Galatians 6: 11-18: Study

Leader's Note: Paul uses his own hand to summarize his letter to the Galatians in order to emphasize his seriousness. As he brings his statements to a close he seems to say that the reason that he has made such a big deal about circumcision and uncircumcision is because it's not a big deal! - It counts for nothing! Ultimately, Paul says, the heart of your belief system is what you boast in. Religion leads us to boast in something about us. The gospel leads us to boast in the cross of Jesus.

Pray for your time together in God's word

Read Galatians 6:11-18

¹¹ See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. ¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Ask the Group: In 6:11-12 Why does Paul state, "see with what large letters..."? Why is this important? Here, near the end of the letter, Paul takes the writing utensil away from his scribe and writes with his own hand. Other places, the signature comes at the very end. In Galatians, Paul starts with this and then goes into a summary of his major themes. The large letters are not due to Paul's poor eyesight or trouble with writing for another reason. They signify the importance of the conclusion.

Ask the Group: Consider what Paul writes about his opponents here.

- What do you think Paul means when he says, "[they] want to make a good showing in the flesh"? What is their motivation and what are they trying to avoid?

Possible Answers: They have gotten into religion for the fame, prestige, honor, and conformity to the world. In other words, their ministry was a form of self-salvation. They're trying to avoid suffering and are motivated by the options of others.

- Do you find an irony that their 'religious' pressure for circumcision is motivated by human pressure? Do you think this is common today? That religious action is motivated by concern for things in the world, human things, and not over concern for God?

Possible Answers: They are not aiming at Jesus, trying to earn a "vertical" salvation with God but rather are going "horizontal" and trying for self-salvation in this world and among their peers.

- Are there aspects of your faith walk that are motivated by the concern for the approval or persecution of other people and not by your relationship with God?

Ask the Group: Read verse 15 again. If circumcision and uncircumcision both count for nothing, what counts? Are there things that "count for nothing" upon which you are placing too much importance concerning your Christian walk or community life at Hope?

Possible Answers: Neither being known as a “duct tape church” or having a brand new building counts for anything - but the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and the “new creation” it brings.

Ask the Group: Read Romans 12:2. Define and contrast conforming & transforming.

Possible Answers: Conforming has to do with compliance or morphing to appear a certain way.

Transforming is a change that is intrinsic, change that is fundamental.

- How do you see the contrast of conforming and transforming in this passage? Do you think the agitators were interested in transformation?

Possible Answer: No. They are clearly about appearing a certain way (conforming to an image). Their motivation has nothing to do with a heart change.

- Do you think conforming is limited to what happens to us outside of Christian culture? Are there aspects of Christianity that are conforming you to a “Christian cultural norm”?

Possible Answer: This has to do with everything that we do to change outwardly, even seemingly good things to fit in with the Christian culture is conforming. Our focus should be on the Gospel, on Jesus Christ alone. To be changed inwardly - transformed!

- Are you conforming or being transformed by the Holy Spirit?

Ask the Group: How does verse 14 challenge you? What does it mean to have the world crucified to me and vice versa? *Possible Answer: Nothing in the world now has any power over me. Why? If nothing in the world is my righteousness or salvation, if there is nothing in the world that I boast in, then there is nothing in the world that controls me — nothing that I must have. Paul is saying he is free to enjoy the world. He no longer needs to fear it or worship it.*

“Now that we have seen ... Christ crucified as our sin-bearer, we do not care what the world thinks of us or does to us.” - John Stott

Ask the Group: Circumcision or uncircumcision doesn't matter. Rituals don't matter. How does being a new creation matter in your life today?

Ask the Group: What are the marks of Jesus on Paul? What are marks of Jesus that you bear?

Possible Answers: The marks refer to the various wounds and scars that were likely on his body from the sufferings he experienced on his journeys. The marks belong to Paul because of him proclaiming the cross (5:11) which was contrary to the opponents who had no such marks because they avoided persecution.

Ask the Group: What is our community application of this passage?

Leader's Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.