

Galatians 6:11-13: An Outward Circumcision

[See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.] Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. – Galatians 6:11-13

Introduction

After exposing the errors of the Judaizers for the whole book, laying out the insufficiency of the works of the flesh for justification, sanctification and salvation Paul concludes with one last argument against circumcision. Previously circumcision was pointed out as not being part of the believer's life in Galatians 2:3 as well as not being beneficial, burdensome, and life dominating in Galatians 5:2-3.

Paul's Own Hand

While some have levied an argument that this verse points to eye problems for Paul there is historical evidence that many letters were dictated to a scribe and then a closing statement would be penned by the author to affirm the authenticity of the letter. Paul does this in several places including 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:18, and 2 Thessalonians 3:17-18. If the Judaizers had attacked Paul and his position, this would further verify that Paul's position and his message were unchanged and personal.

A Good Showing

The legalistic Jewish believers who were pressing the Gentile believers in Galatia to be circumcised were concerned with the outside details such as the circumcised male could boast, but they were focused on maintaining a relationship with everyone around them except for their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul points out the motive for these legalists: their desire to appear as merely a sect of Judaism so as to avoid aggressive persecution. While the immediate compromise may have been socially convenient, the longer term compromise and decay of doctrine would only bring about problems for the church locally as well as bringing question to the efficacy of Christianity on a global scale.

Boasting in Other's Flesh

While the aforementioned legalists do not keep the Law, they push at least part of it onto the new converts and force them into the difficult position of compromising the gospel they first believed. The ability to boast in something that was an outward sign of a past covenant was a blatant disregard for the work of Christ on the cross, God's plan for salvation, and the Holy Spirit's work in the conditional life of the believer. This would have contrasted strongly with the ideas presented by Paul in the latter half of his letter. Verse 10 is explicit about doing good to those in the

body, and pressuring others to be circumcised for compliance with Old Testament Law is simply not doing good.

Discussion Questions

- Contextually what makes sense about this verse being placed here if this is a side note of Paul's eye problem?
- As a believer who received the gospel from Paul what would your thoughts be in finding this closing statement in Paul's own hand? What if you were a "second generation" convert?
- Why do people use compromise for "ministry" purposes?
- What is the cost/benefit analysis of compromise?
- Why would Paul be critical of them being afraid of persecution?
- How does this passage tie into our needing to have an eternal perspective?
- Who are they boasting in the flesh to?
- Which covenant did the circumcision belong to?
- Why (or why not) would circumcision pacify a Pharisee?