

THE FINAL MESSAGE

Text: Galatians 6:11-18

Allow me to emphasize two phrases that stand out in our passage: "...that they may glory in your flesh" (Galatians 6:13c) and "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..." Paul now returns to his theme all the way through the book of Galatians: the Spirit versus the flesh; justification by grace through faith versus justification by the law and works. The apostle longs to drive home the truth spoken of in Colossians 2:10a: "And ye are complete in Him..." I see a threefold way that God through His apostle ends this great epistle of grace. I know we can go overboard in applying biblical numerology, however, in this finale I bring some very simple truths to your attention about the number three. Seven is the number of perfection. Did you know that three is the number of Divine perfection? We see clearly we serve a God who "...hath done all things well..." (Mark 7:37). God is a Trinity consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (I John 5:7). There are three qualities of the universe: time, space, and matter. To exist (except for God) all three are required. Each quality consists of three elements. Time = past, present and future. Space = height, width and depth. Matter = solid, liquid and gas. Therefore, we live in a trinity of trinities. God made man in His image: body, soul and spirit. Man fell and Christ came to earth to redeem man. Our Lord's mission was accomplished in three years of ministry. The approach to God in the Old Testament was through the Outer Court, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The New Testament consists of 27 books, which is 3x3x3, or completeness to the third power! Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest. He was placed on the cross at the 3rd hour of the day (9 a.m.) and died at the 9th hour (3 p.m.). There were three hours of darkness that covered the land while Jesus was suffering on the cross from the 6th hour to the 9th hour. Christ died and was buried, but on the third day He rose again!

Consider three observations:

I. THREE HANDWRITINGS

A. Paul's Handwriting (Galatians 6:11)

Paul normally had a secretary to whom he dictated the message God gave him. But in this letter, the importance was so significant that he wrote the entire letter in his own hand. Most scholars would agree that this was reflecting his compromised eyesight (II Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 4:15). Why was it so important for Paul to write with his own hand? II Thessalonians 2:1,2, says, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our

gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." From this passage we see that some were writing as though they were Paul. So the apostle wanted there to be no doubt that he was writing this letter, which denotes the immense importance of Galatians.

B. Religion and the Law's Handwriting (Galatians 6:12, 15)

Circumcision was a physical signature of the Abrahamic covenant. The Judaizers were insisting that this was required to be a genuine Christian. Paul pointed out in Romans 2:29, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Galatians 6:16).

Even today people will use outward signs as proof of their spirituality. Take for instance the outward appearance of the cross. When asked why Christ died on that cross, some will answer "just to show His love for us." I promise you it was much more than that. He died to make atonement of our sins and create through His death, burial and resurrection a changed life in us.

C. Christ's Handwriting (Galatians 6:16, 17)

Paul said, "...I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus...." The Greek word "marks" is the word "stigmata"- meaning, "scar marks." If you want to see the handwriting of Jesus, look upon the body of Paul (II Corinthians 11:23-27). In Paul's day stigmata was used three ways. When a runaway slave was captured and returned to his master, he was branded on the forehead. When a Roman soldier was in a famous company, he had the name of his commander on his forehead. A person who was a devout worshipper of a pagan goddess, would have her name branded on his forehead. Three times in the Revelation, we see the followers of Christ were branded in their forehead in a spiritual sense (Revelation 7:3; 14:1; 22:4). This speaks of our designation as spiritual priests unto the Lord, (Exodus 28:36, 38a; Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

II. THREE STRIKES (Galatians 3:12,13)

If I were to ask you to finish this sentence, "Three strikes and you're ____!" I am certain; the missing word you would supply will be "out!" And in these two verses we see where the Judaizers strike out.

A. Strike One: Show of Pride ("As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh...")

B. Strike Two: Substitution for Persecution ("...they constrain you...lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.")

C. Strike Three: Summons for Performance ("...neither they themselves...keep the law...that they may glory in your flesh.")

The performance-based mentality exists to this day. People want to believe it is what they have done, not on Christ's finished work that justifies a person before God. There are basically only two religions in this world. One believes it is what man achieves; the other is what God has accomplished. Accepting the accomplished work by the Gospel is the only true religion or faith.

III. THREE CROSSES (Galatians 6:14)

A. The Cross of Christ ("...the cross of our Lord Jesus...")

This is only way of peace! "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Colossians 1:20).

B. The Cross of the World ("...the world is crucified unto me...")

I John 2:16, declares, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." James 4:4 emphatically charges, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." We are to live as though we are dead to the world's wicked influences upon our lives. I heard one Bible scholar declare, "This word is not your pal!"

C. The Cross of Paul ("...and I unto the world.")

The Lord Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." We are to identify with Jesus so thoroughly that cross-bearing becomes our daily activity. The testimony of Paul should be ours as well: Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Conclusion: Appropriately, Paul, in his last sign off, says, "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen" (Galatians 6:18). He reminds us it is the Spirit of God within us who shall bring us to the place we need to be, not the Law's performance.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.