

Paul typically dictated his epistles to a secretary, but he seems to have personally handwritten these final eight verses of his epistle to the Galatians. The fact that these words were personally handwritten by him implies how important that he felt they were. Paul contrasted the selfish motives of the false teachers with his own, which was to celebrate the cross of Jesus Christ.

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

Many commentators believe that Paul had a problem with his eyesight and that the phrase “how large a letter” refers to the size of the Greek letters that he was forced to use when adding his handwritten salutation. Paul’s practice was to dictate his epistles to someone else who did the actual handwriting (perhaps due to his poor eyesight) and then write a few words of salutation in his own handwriting at the end in order to authenticate that the epistle came from him. Paul specifically said this in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, an epistle written to correct false teaching that had apparently sent to them under the guise of being written by the apostle Paul (**2 Th. 3:17** “*The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token [sign] in every epistle: so I write*”). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that they could recognize his epistles as genuine when they saw his handwritten salutation. Here, Paul seems to have handwritten vs. 11-18 and he wants the Galatians to notice how large of a section he had personally written. The difficulty in handwriting more than a simple salutation due to his eyesight indicated how important it was to the apostle Paul that these final remarks be written in his own hand, perhaps so that the Galatians would pay particular attention to them.

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.

“**As many as desire** [to wish; to take delight in] **to make a fair shew in the flesh** [to put on a show; to look good outwardly]” – Speaking of the false teachers that insisted that the Galatians should be circumcised, Paul points out that their priority was having the appearance of righteousness. They were not as concerned with having true righteousness. This is similar to what Jesus said about the scribes and the Pharisees (**Matt. 23:27** “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness*”).

“**they constrain** [compel] **you to be circumcised**” – These false teachers were compelling the Galatians to be circumcised because they were only concerned with an outward appearance of righteousness.

“**only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ**” – These false teachers weren’t as concerned about the spiritual well-being of the Galatians as they were in avoiding being persecuted for depending solely upon the cross of Jesus Christ for salvation. Their insistence on circumcision was motivated by selfish reasons.

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

“**For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law**” – The Judaizers (Jews who were teaching that the Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law) had been circumcised as part of their Jewish upbringing under the law. However, there was a limit to how faithfully they were keeping the law. Jesus exposed the Pharisees, who prided themselves for keeping the law, by showing that they were more faithful to the traditions of men than to God’s law (**Mark 7:6-9** “*He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition*”).

“**but desire** [to wish; to intend] **to have you circumcised, that they may glory** [to boast] **in your flesh**” – These Judaizers were proud of themselves each time they convinced a Gentile to be circumcised. Paul exposes this as the selfish motivation they had in teaching the Galatians that they should be circumcised.

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.

“**But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**” – In contrast to the Judaizers who boasted in the number of Gentiles they convinced to be circumcised, Paul declares that the only thing that he can boast in is the cross of Jesus Christ. The boasting of the Judaizers was centered in themselves but Paul’s boasting was in the salvation that came through the cross of Jesus Christ.

“**by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world**” – Faith in Jesus Christ had caused Paul and world to become dead to one another. Paul did not seek the approval of the world (such as might be obtained by teaching circumcision to the Gentiles) nor was the world going to give it. Paul’s preaching came from God and the world does not approve of the things of God. This is what Jesus told His disciples (**John 15:19** “*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*”).

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

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth [to have strength or power] any thing, nor uncircumcision” – Paul repeats what he said previously in Gal. 5:6 (“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love”) but with a different ending. As before, he states that neither being circumcised or not being circumcised has the power to affect your salvation.

“but a new creature [creation; something created]” – Paul is referring to becoming a new creation in Jesus Christ through the new birth (2 Cor. 5:17 “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”). Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision can affect your salvation but something that can result in salvation is becoming a new creation in Christ. This can only happen when we become born of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ (John 3:5 “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”).

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

“And as many as walk according to this rule [measuring stick]” – This could be paraphrased as “as many as walk according to this yardstick...” Paul is referring to those Galatians (and Gentiles) who live according to the yardstick of faith in Christ and not measuring their salvation by whether or not they are circumcised or how well they keep the law.

“peace be on them, and mercy” – Those who are trusting in Christ alone in faith are genuinely saved and have the benefits of salvation: peace with God and His mercy.

“and upon the Israel of God” – The “Israel of God” will also be recipients of God’s peace and mercy. Notice that Paul did not say “upon Israel” but “upon the Israel of God.” The benefits of salvation are not for Israel in general but are reserved for those Jews who have believed on Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Paul mentioned in Rom. 9:6b that “...For they are not all Israel who are of Israel” because not all Jews were believers in Christ.

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

“From henceforth let no man trouble me” – Commentators have different theories on what Paul’s intent was here. Some believe that “trouble” refers to the worry and distraction that occurred when churches abandoned his teaching about Christ and followed the false teachers who insisted on adherence to circumcision and the law. Others suggest that it refers to the persecution he suffered for teaching that Jew and Gentile alike can only be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

“for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” – The “marks of the Lord Jesus” likely refers to the scars in Paul’s body that he gained from the various abuses he’d suffered for the name of Jesus Christ, such as being stoned at Lystra and left for dead (Acts 14:19), being beaten with many stripes at Philippi (Acts 16:22-23), and the fact that he would have been beaten to death at Jerusalem if the Roman authorities had not intervened (Acts 21:31-32). If the “trouble” mentioned by Paul refers to the distraction caused by churches straying away from faith in Christ, then perhaps Paul is saying that he has had enough to deal with in physical abuse without the additional stress of worrying about the churches (2 Cor. 11:28 (Paul describing the things he had suffered for Christ) “Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches”). However, if the “trouble” refers to the persecution he’d suffered for Christ, then Paul might be saying that if “the marks of the Lord Jesus” wasn’t enough abuse to convince him to change his mind about Christ, then anyone wanting to “trouble” him was wasting their time.

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

Paul ends this epistle with his desire and prayer that the grace of Jesus Christ would be with them. Rather than saying “with you” he says “with your spirit.” Their spirit refers to their human spirit, which had been born from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps Paul’s intent was that the grace of Jesus Christ would lead them back to the truth of salvation through faith in Christ alone. This leading would be through the Holy Spirit guiding their spirit. Thus the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would cause them to abandon reliance on circumcision and the law for their righteousness and fully trust Him in all things. The final word is “amen” which means “so let it be.”