

According to the Rule

Galatians 6:16-18

With Study Questions

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And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God. ¹⁷ From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁸Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen (Galatians 6:16-18).

In contrast to what we read in verse twelve “**As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh**” (Galatians 6:12), where Paul exposes hypocrisy, here Paul writes,

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

The Rule

So what is this rule which brings Paul’s benediction of peace and mercy? The immediate context would seem to suggest it is recognizing that human efforts (pertaining to justification before God) avail nothing for we are God’s new creation.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation (Galatians 6:14, 15).

The wider context, i.e., the entire epistle suggests the same concept. It is the rule, or standard, or canon, of walking in the Spirit versus the flesh. And what does it mean to walk in the Spirit versus the flesh? We treated this in greater detail in chapter five. Walking in the Spirit, contrary to popular belief, is not being the super-Christian. It is not a matter of finding the secret to power-Christianity. It is not a matter of Christians tapping into God’s heretofore-withheld energy. It is a much greater matter than this.

The rule – what we are calling walking in the Spirit – is the church preaching and believing that man is justified by faith alone. The rule is the rule of knowing we contribute nothing to our own justification before God and are, rather, recipients in the fullest sense. This is the gospel. And this gospel, according to Paul, will necessarily yield fruit – the fruit so many desire. But those who go after the fruit while ignoring the root will have neither. We live in a church age where fruitful living is the emphasis and justification by faith has fallen by the wayside. We now see a church that is unfruitful. But this is not the only danger. Its deemphasizing, and often complete rejection, of justification by

faith threatens its function as a bastion of hope for peace with God at any level. Paul is charging churches to be built upon this rule.

Peace

The churches, and only those churches, which observe this rule are the objects of God's peace and mercy.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1, 2).

How do we define this peace? Peace with God may oft times be accompanied by an experience of serenity or tranquility. But this type of peace isn't what Paul writes of here. It is the peace of a reconciled relationship. And Christians need not live with a sort of "Cold War" mentality with God. This is a sure and final peace. There is no threat looming over those who have faith in Christ. The great reformer, Martin Luther, elaborates,

To them who walk after this rule belongs peace, that is, the favor of God, forgiveness of sins, quietness of conscience, and mercy, that is to say, help in afflictions and pardon for the remnants of sin which remain in our flesh. Yes, although they who walk after this rule may be overtaken with any fault or fall, yet they are the children of grace and peace, and mercy upholds them so that their sin and fall shall not be laid to their charge.¹

Israel of God

Contrary to popular thought, Paul is not undoing here what he's been seeking to establish for six chapters. When Paul addresses the Israel of God, he is not giving credence to ethnic Jews as if they were in some special category in God's mind. In this very epistle he has demolished the notion that ethnicity, Jewish or otherwise, places men on any pedestal with God.

Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:9).

And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

¹ Luther, M. 1996. *Commentary on Galatians*. Index created by Christian Classics Foundation. (electronic ed.) (Ga 6:16). Christian Classics Foundation: Simpsonville SC

...for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—²⁶ but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all (Galatians 4:25, 26).

Notice how Paul associates ethnic Israel, not with Abraham or Sarah, but with Hagar, the mother of Ishmael. It is difficult for us to recognize how revolting this would be to ethnic Jews.

For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh;²⁹ but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God (Romans 2:28, 29).

Calvin explains,

In a word, he gives the appellation of the *Israel of God* to those whom he formerly denominated the children of Abraham by faith, (Galatians 3:29) and thus includes all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church?²

The Apostle elaborates in his epistle to the church at Ephesus,

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation (a wall which separated Jews from gentiles),¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace,¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:14-18, parenthesis mine).

All this to say that the popular notion (known as Dispensationalism) that ethnic Israel are still God's chosen people, apart from faith, is contrary to biblical doctrine.

From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus (Galatians 6:17).

The Marks of Jesus

The Judaizers gloried in the flesh of their converts (those who they were able to bully into getting circumcised). Paul gloried, not in the flesh of his converts but in bearing the marks of persecution. Paul has indignation against

² Calvin, J. 1998. *Calvin's Commentaries: Galatians* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Ga 6:16). Ages Software: Albany, OR

those who sought to avoid persecution by mutilating their followers. How easy it is for a cultural climate to determine in what the church should glory. Paul would have nothing to do with that game. He gloried in his own persecution. Today we might view martyrs as worthy of honor, such was not always the case. We read of Paul's account of his trials in 2 Corinthians,

Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. ²³Are they ministers of Christ? – I speak as a fool – I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ in journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – ²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation* (2 Corinthians 11:22-29)?

In 1 Corinthians 4 we read that this type of persecution was, as with Christ, a matter of humiliation.

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men (1 Corinthians 4:9).

May our hearts be tapered to glory in that which is precious to God, even if it be humiliating before men.

Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen (Galatians 6:18).

With Your Spirit

Finally Paul contrasts that which is gratifying to the flesh and outward observance to that which is spiritual. The emphasis of his epistle, from beginning to end, is a matter of exalting that which is invisible to the eye and often contrary to the senses. May our spirits and souls be our concern and the concern of the church.

We ought therefore to entreat that God would prepare in our souls a habitation for his grace.³

³ Calvin, J. 1998. *Calvin's Commentaries: Galatians* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Ga 6:18). Ages Software: Albany, OR

Questions for Study

1. What is the “rule” which brings a benediction of peace and mercy (page 1)?
2. Define peace as it is given in Romans 5:1, 2 (page 2).
3. Is it possible that this peace will yield some sense of serenity or tranquility (page 2)?
4. Who is the Israel of God (pages 2, 3)?
5. Why is it improper to view people’s ethnicity as something which God respects (page 3)?
6. How did Paul bear the marks of Jesus (pages 3, 4)?
7. What aspect of man is Paul most concerned with (page 4)?