

Letters in the ancient world often involved using an amanuensis, that is, a person who did the writing of the letter for you. But then it often happened that at the end of the letter the author would take up the pen himself, and this is what Paul is doing here. ‘See what large letters I use as I now am writing in my own handwriting’ ¹! When the Galatians get the letter, one of them will read it to the Christians and will hold the letter up so that everyone can see Paul’s handwriting. It will prove that the letter is genuine. It will be a personal touch from the apostle himself. And it will be a chance for him to emphasize a few things he wants them to remember.

¹ 6:11

Large words were apparently a way of being emphatic. It is as if Paul is writing with heavy underlining. His next few sentences will repeat the main things that are on his mind. ‘All of those who, in the worldly manner, want to make a good impression – they try to force you to be circumcised. They do so only to avoid suffering persecution for the cross of Christ’ ¹.

¹ 6:12

1. There is a kind of Christianity which is popular but which is not authentic. In Galatia, Paul’s enemies wanted to bring in a kind of Christianity which would be respectable in the Roman Empire. Christians were often persecuted, but Jewish people were officially tolerated. So if the Judaizers could persuade the Christians to impress people with their Jewishness, then their Judaized Christianity would escape persecution. Yet there was something wrong with this. This would mean that the Christians would become just a sub-section of Judaism. It would be nothing but another Jewish sect. The Judaizers wanted to make a good impression upon the people around watching the Christians. To do that they had to persuade the Galatians to be circumcised, and they had to avoid saying much about the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be careful not to do the same thing today. For there are still versions of the Christian faith which want to be popular, which try to make a good impression on everyone, and yet which hardly ever mention the cross of Christ. Instead they emphasize externalities, baptism, their good works for the neighbourhood, their support of the businessmen, their interest in the family, how much they want to pray that God will prosper you. It all makes a good impression but if it avoids the message of the cross then it is nothing more than putting on a good show! Of course we want to be kindly and winsome towards everyone, but there is no way of making the cross of Christ respectable. If we get rid of the cross so as to be more impressive to those around us, we have surrendered our gospel in order to get converts – but what sort of converts will they be?

2. Legalists love the law in theory, but only in theory. It is easy to use impressive talk about keeping God’s law, but actually the law is not so easy to keep and even those who claim to love it do not keep it. Paul says, ‘For not even these circumcised people themselves keep the law, but they want to have you circumcised, so that they may glory in something purely physical’ ¹. The Jewish visitors from Jerusalem wanted to get everyone under the entire Mosaic system, but did they themselves keep the law? Did they keep the tenth commandment? Were they free from coveting? Somehow legalists persuade themselves that because they are enthusiastic about the law they are actually keeping it and are in fact godly people. The truth is: no one can interpret the law spiritually without being burdened by its condemnation. Many people do not take it spiritually and it is read only as a kind of list of crimes for society to avoid, and rituals for society to follow (which is very largely what it was). But then its level of godliness is actually not so high after all. In one way the law is too low a standard for us. In

¹ 6:13

another way it is impossibly high and those who talk about keeping it are making false claims altogether.

The motivation of the Jerusalem-based legalists was not really a quest for godliness at all! Their real motivation – and Paul knows it – was simply to have this respectable Jewish- Christianity which would give them a career as religious teachers but not bring upon them any persecution. Of course it was all entirely useless! It was not the gospel at all. It is no wonder Paul has almost cursed it ¹. It is useless in two ways: (i) it pushes aside the cross of Christ. It pushes justification only-by-faith to the side and presses its own legalistic version of Judaized ‘godliness’ upon every one. (ii) It has no doctrine of new birth. For new birth is instantaneous. It takes place not in steps and stages, not by ceremony but by God’s act of creation, in which He makes people new in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul presses those very points upon us.

¹ Gal 1:8-9

3. There is no gospel without the cross of Christ. Paul says, ‘But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I am crucified to the world’ ¹. The preaching of the cross will never be popular with the world. That is why we must not try too hard to have a message that everyone loves. A Judaized Christianity would be easier in the first century than true Christian faith. But it would be a gospel of Jewish culture. It would not be the one-and-only gospel of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel of the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but it is the only gospel that is true.

¹ 6:14

This is the gospel! The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ! Do not glory in miracles or in the social by-products of the gospel. Do not run after healings or financial prosperity. All of those things might come as a by-product of the gospel but they are not the central matter of the Christian faith. The heart of the gospel is the cross of Christ. It is the cross which atones for our sins. It is because of the blood of Jesus Christ that we are able to be ‘justified’, clothed with the righteousness of Christ in the eyes of God. Because of the cross of Christ we have parted company with the world. The world does not like us, and we do not like the world! Any gospel which tries to be popular in the eyes of the world will not be the gospel at all. For myself, I agree with Paul! God forbid that I should glory, in anything except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way of salvation.

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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