

THURSDAY 06 October 2022 "Galatians Conclusion" (Gal. 6:11-18)

Good morning my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

[Do you find yourself frequently under great pressure to do something contrary to your values or to believe something contrary to what you hold as truth?](#) When we were young, especially in our teenage years, we'd do almost anything to be accepted and affirmed by our peers, right? As we grow older have you found the pressure to conform mounts? Conform to the expectations of your boss or your clients. Conform to the expectations of your spouse or your children or ageing parents. Conform to the pressure of your social media friends or, in an election year, to the political pressure. Would you believe there is even pressure to conform in the retirement years?!

So, here's an important question for all of us, regardless of age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, religious background, socio-economic status, or even where we live in the world: [How do you handle the pressure to conform?](#)

As you may know, that has been a relevant question in ever since the beginning of time. Here are a few ancient examples of great wisdom for those times when you are being pressured to conform to what you know is unwise:

1. **"Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong."** (Exodus 23:2)
2. **"Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous."** (Ex. 23:8)
3. **"My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them...do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths."** (Prov. 1:10,15)
4. **"Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, turn from it..."** (Prov. 4:14,15)

The apostle Paul wrote about this subject on several occasions. To the Christians in Rome Paul wrote: **"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."** (Rom. 12:2)

And in his letter to the Ephesian Christians Paul wrote: **"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit..."** (Eph. 4:1-3)

"Be imitators of God as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity..." (Eph. 5:1-3)

The apostle Peter joined the refrain by writing to the Christians all across the Roman empire: ***"Dear friends, I urge you to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God..."*** (1 Peter 2:11,12) *So, my friends, how does the matter of conforming to the sinful lifestyles pressure you and other Christians in your area of the world?* How are you standing firm against the pressure?

2600 years ago, God gave this message to the prophet Isaiah at a precarious time in Israel's history: ***"This is what the Sovereign LORD says, 'If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'" (Is. 7:9)***

So, let's rejoin the apostle Paul in Syrian Antioch, about 48ad, as he is now in the final paragraph or two of this letter, he's been writing to the first generation of Gentile Christians in central Asia. Paul has received a report that many of these Gentile Christians are succumbing to powerful pressure from Jews to add Jewish practices and rituals to their Christian faith. Specifically, the Gentile Christian men are being pressured to undergo Jewish circumcision and are being told this act will make them more complete Christians and more God honoring since they'll then have the ancient mark of the Hebrew Abraham covenant coupled with the contemporary, redeeming faith in the Gospel of Jesus.

This dilution of the Gospel made Paul livid. So, Paul wrote this in response: ***"Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your action. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation."*** (Gal. 6:12-15)

We understand, don't we? *Those pressuring the Gentile Christian men to undergo Jewish circumcision were only trying to gain the approval of those Jews who were persecuting them as traitors because they had trusted in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior.*

Oh my, that is so often the harsh reality about pressure to conform, isn't it? It is so often about appearances and seeking affirmation rather than a clear identification of what is right, what is true. We rarely see what the real price will ultimately be in our conforming or our compromise, do we?

Every person who has ever come to me seeking help in kicking an addiction, especially alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography has a common story. *They remember their first time, very clearly and almost always they felt some pressure from those they thought were friends, to 'try it, just once'.* They knew better. They didn't want to. They felt shame in going against their conscience, but they tried it once, and then after pressure, a second time, and eventually they were addicted and felt they were in self-destructive, inescapable bondage.

Did you notice Paul's powerful statement **"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."** For Paul, the atonement death crucifixion of Jesus and then His resurrection from the dead, became the most significant event in all human history and in Paul's life, for when he changed from being passionately opposed to Jesus, to being confronted and saved by Jesus, and then a passionate follower of Jesus, Paul's entire life was transformed. Paul was a totally new person after turning his life over to Jesus and while Paul mentions this transformation here, he spends a whole chapter more fully unpacking this concept of becoming a new creation in Christ in 2 Corinthians 5.

It begs the question... *have you and I had Paul's life transforming experience? Are we new creations in Christ with a totally new values priority, new world view, new purpose in life?*

Finally in closing this remarkable letter I see Paul makes three simple but powerful statements:

1. **"See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!"** (Gal. 6:11) This is yet another apparent reference to Paul's failing eyesight and while he may have written Galatians in his own hand, most all his other letters he dictated to a scribe to write for him.
2. **"Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God."** (Gal. 6:16) The rule Paul refers to is his previous statement that **"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything: what counts is a new creation."** Salvation for the Jews, the same as for Gentiles, is by our full trust in Jesus Christ's death to be sufficient to pay our sin penalty with God, and our confidence God will forgive our sins as He accepts Jesus' payment for us. Notice the phrase **"even to the Israel of God."** It means this applies to the people of Israel, the Hebrews, God's people.
3. Finally, Paul closes this Galatians letter with these words: **"Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."** (Gal. 6:17) Paul was stoned and left for dead in Lystra, according to Acts 14:19,20, and those rocks had left scars on Paul's body. *Paul viewed them as badges of honor, for he nearly died bringing the Gospel of Jesus to the people of Lystra.*

And then with one final sentence Paul completes Galatians. **"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."** (Gal. 6:18) Oh how Paul

cherished the wondrous, glorious GRACE of God toward him and all humanity. And oh, how Paul cherished the Holy Spirit at work in him and in all Christians as He accomplishes God's life transforming work in us. Paul loved to call these Gentile Christians his "**brothers**" in the family of God. And can you see the smile on Paul's face as he writes that final word, "**amen**" and sets down his stylus?

Oh my, what a remarkable letter, Galatians! For a final time, Paul goes over and looks out the open door to the busy streets of Syrian Antioch, wondering I think, what difference this letter will make when it reaches and is read to the Gentile Christians in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, and then is taken to other cities in that part of the Roman Empire.

I urge us to pause right here and let's thank God for this remarkable letter, Galatians.

Today's Scripture is Galatians 6:11-18.