

**A FINAL GOSPEL APPEAL**  
PART 4

TEXT: GALATIANS 6:11-18

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

May 20, 2012

In 6:11-18, Paul concludes with one final gospel appeal. In his appeal he reiterates five main themes that he wishes to impress on the minds of the Galatians so that the gospel remains central and sufficient in their lives and churches.

- I. Paul reiterates his authenticity and authority as an apostle. vv. 11, 17
- II. Paul reiterates the sufficiency of the cross for salvation. vv. 12-14
- III. Paul reiterates the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in applying salvation. v. 15

Paul says that what really counts is the Holy Spirit working through the gospel to raise the dead and apply the saving benefits of Christ's finished work in us. In the matter of salvation, the only thing that counts is whether this inward transformation—regeneration/becoming a new creature in Christ—has taken place. It doesn't matter whether one is a circumcised Jew—like Paul—or an uncircumcised Gentile—like Abraham (Gal. 3:7). Now, in v. 16, Paul pronounces a final gospel blessing on everyone who is a new creation.

**LESSON:**

- IV. PAUL REITERATES THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD. V. 16

Paul prays, "And for those who will walk by/keep in step with this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God."

In this final benediction, there are two blessings that Paul prays for God to shower upon His people: peace and mercy. Paul's concluding blessing is similar to his opening greeting in 1:3, "Grace to you and *peace* from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..." (emphasis mine).

Peace and mercy are inseparable. Peace is the fruit of mercy/grace and it comes through the announcement of the gospel (Isa. 52:7, cf. Rom. 10:15, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, *who publishes peace*, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns," emphasis mine).)

Peace is both objective and subjective. Objectively, peace refers to the believer's state of wellbeing and reconciliation with God (cf. Rom. 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."). Subjectively, peace is the inner condition that all is well as a result of having been justified. It is an inward rest that God gives to us through His gospel and Spirit. "Peace" is (εἰρήνη) a fruit of the Spirit in 5:22. It may be that Paul prays for peace one final time because of the trouble (1:7) and turmoil (5:15) the Judaizers had caused among the Galatians. As Kostenberger notes, "Peace is something visible, including the idea of a productively harmonious relationship between people. Thus it may be argued that Paul, by wishing "peace," expresses his desire for harmonious relationships among the Galatian Christians" ("The Identity of the Israel tou theou (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16," *Faith & Mission* 19/1 (2001), 13). Legalism is destructive not only vertically but also horizontally. Only a heart filled with the gospel and thus led by the Spirit brings results in peace.

The word "mercy" (ἔλεος) was one of the most evocative (remindful) terms Paul could have chosen for Jews (Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 344). "Mercy" (ἔλεος) is the Greek NT translation of the Hebrew, רַחֲמֵי (i.e., God's covenant love/faithfulness; lovingkindness; steadfast love; loyal love).

Throughout the OT, the people of God regularly appeal (invocation) to God to remember His mercy/covenant faithfulness (Gen. 39:21; Ex. 15:13; Num. 14:18; 2 Sam. 7:15; Ez. 9:9; Neh. 13:22; Pss. 25:6-7; 36:5; 40:11; 51:1; 86:15; 98:3; 100:5). For example, in Psalm 51:1, after Nathan the prophet exposes his great sin, David prays, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to your steadfast love (רַחֲמֵי); according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." In Psalm 86:15, David again confesses, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (רַחֲמֵי) and faithfulness."

God's covenant faithfulness/steadfast love is the sinner's sole basis for hope of salvation. The ground of God's covenant faithfulness to His people is based on the covenant of promise he made with Abraham (prior to that Adam- Gen. 3:15) never the Mosaic Covenant of law. Our hope is found in the fact that God is a promise keeping and performing God. He is faithful to keep His promises to us because of Christ! He showers His people with mercy who are deserving of nothing but judgment. If God's mercy had not been given to us—and continue to be given to us!—we would never have nor continue to enjoy peace.

Paul's final benediction seems to be an allusion to Isaiah 54:10 (see G.K. Beale, "Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background in Galatians 6:16," *Biblica* 80 (1999): 204-223. Beale notes, "Isa 54,10 was likely not the sole influence on Gal 6,16, but such texts as Psalm 84 (LXX), the Qumran Hymn Scroll (1QH 13,5), and Jub 22,9 may have formed a collective impression on Paul, with the Isaiah text most in focus," p. 223).

In Isaiah 54 God promises both mercy and peace to His people who are in exile for their sin. But, judgment was not the final word for God's people. God makes a promise of mercy and peace that their exile would end. The Lord, through Isaiah, promises,

“<sup>7</sup> For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. <sup>8</sup> In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer. <sup>9</sup> “This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you. <sup>10</sup> For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love (חַסְדִּי) shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace (שְׁלוֹמִי) shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.”

This passage employs new creation language (Beale, "Peace and Mercy Upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background in Galatians 6:16," 211. ). Isaiah describes Israel's return from exile like the receding flood waters in Noah's day, which was a re-creation—a renewing of the creation. Similarly, in Galatians 6:15, Paul has just said that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters. Rather, what really matters is becoming a new creation! God, Paul is saying, will bring His people—Jew and Gentile—out of judgment, make them a new creation and shower mercy and peace upon them all because of what Christ has done through the cross rather than what we have done—circumcision—or not done—uncircumcision!

It is important to note how Paul restricts this blessing. Paul writes, “And as for all who walk by this rule...” Paul uses the same Greek word “walk” (στοιχέω “keep is step with”) in 5:25, where he argues that since the Spirit of God has brought us to life and now lives in us, we are to let Him govern our actions (i.e., gently restore 5:25-6:5 and generously give 6:6-10). We are to follow after/keep in step with the desires of the Spirit rather than the desires of our flesh. Here, Paul states that the blessings of the gospel—peace and mercy—are only given to those keep in step with “this rule.” What rule is Paul talking about?

The rule Paul is referring to is the truth he set forth in v. 15. In v. 15, Paul says that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything in the matter of salvation. Rather, what really matters is the necessity of being made a new creation by the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther writes,

“It is this rule, that they are new creatures in Christ, that they shine with the true righteousness and holiness which come from faith, and that they do not deceive themselves and others with hypocritical righteousness and holiness which come from the Law. Upon the latter there will be wrath and tribulation, but upon the former will rest peace and mercy” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 27, p. 406).

In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul argues that the Galatians are like Isaac, “children of promise” (4:28) rather than Ishmael, “born according to the flesh” (4:29). In Romans 9:7, Paul writes, “Not all are children of Abraham because they are His offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” Paul says the sons of Abraham are reckoned “through Isaac.” Then he writes in v. 8, “it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.” How was Ishmael born? He was born by the unbelieving, fleshly efforts of Abraham and Sarah. How was Isaac born? He was born by the sovereign power and gracious promise of God. How are Christians born? Christians are also born by the sovereign power and gracious promise of God. What matters is a new creation!

The rule or norm for the Judaizers was circumcision. This was the standard by which they measured whether a person was counted as a son of Abraham (i.e., belonged to the Israel of God). But, Paul has shown that we do not work or earn our way into the family of God. Becoming a new creation does not come about by ethnic identity or works of the law (circumcision/uncircumcision).

The Holy Spirit is the source of the new creation. Thus, the rule or standard by which a person is accepted into the people of God—counted a son of Abraham—is by the grace of regeneration. As we learned previously, the gospel is the seed of regeneration (1 Pet. 1:23-25). Faith in Christ alone is the sole standard, which determines whether a person is a true son of Abraham—a covenant member of the people of God. Through the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit makes the believer a new creature in Christ. Therefore, the rule that determines whether a person—Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised—is a part of the Israel of God is faith in Christ crucified. As far as membership in God’s family is concerned the only thing that matters is whether this inward transformation—regeneration—has taken place.

Moreover, the gospel is also the source from which the Holy Spirit grants peace and mercy. Peace and mercy flow from the gospel. Peace and mercy do not flow from the law. Neither can we obtain peace and mercy by our works of the law. There can be no peace or mercy for those who depart from following the rule Paul establishes in v. 15. Peace and mercy are found only through faith in a crucified Messiah. This is why Paul boasted in Christ’s accomplishment rather than his own (6:14).

Paul’s final benediction also serves as a warning to all who after reading his letter do not choose to follow the “rule” he has established (see Betz, *Galatians*, p. 321). Thus, as Paul concludes his letter, he is seeking to motivate the Galatians (and us) to make a choice. What matters is living by the rule of faith rather than by the rule of works. Trusting in things such as ethnic identity and outward religious observances (i.e., circumcision) are irrelevant in the matter of salvation. Paul prays that the Galatians will live by the life-giving work of the Spirit and gospel. All who walk by this rule will receive the blessings of peace and mercy. But, all who fail to live by this rule will come under the curse of the law (cf. 1:8-9; 3:10).

Paul concludes his benediction with a climactic rebuke of the Judaizers and a word of assurance for the Galatians. Paul writes, “Peace and mercy to *all who keep in step with/follow this rule, even to the Israel of God*” (emphasis mine).

First, the ending of Paul’s benediction serves as a climactic rebuke of the Judaizers. Andreas Kostenberger writes, “Galatians 6:16 is part of the epistle’s summary statement in Gal. 6:12–16 and rests on Paul’s strong anti-Judaizing (not anti-Jewish) polemic throughout the entire letter” (“The Identity of the Israel tou theou (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16,” *Faith & Mission* 19/1 (2001): 2.).

To begin with, it is important to note that Paul’s concluding blessing is strongly characteristic of a Jewish benediction (see Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 343-344). The Jewish character of this blessing is reinforced by his use of the phrase “peace and mercy” (Ibid, p. 344). For example, in Psalm 125:5, the Psalmist concludes, “Peace be upon Israel!” (cf. 128:6). But, notice, Paul doesn’t refer merely to Jews but to all who keep in step with the rule of faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles!

Second, the phrase “Israel of God” was a self-designation that the Judaizers used to assure the Galatians that by observing the works of the Law they would become full covenant members of God’s people (see Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 299). Paul, however, takes their self-designation and turns it against them. Here he is saying that what the Judaizers were claiming to offer the Galatians by works of the law, the Galatians already possessed through faith in Christ (Ibid, p. 299)!

Thus, Paul’s application of this Jewish benediction to both Jews and Gentiles would have been unmistakable to the Judaizers (and perhaps to the Galatian believers who were influenced by them.). His strongly Jewish benediction was stunning to the Judaizers! They failed to understand the inclusive and universal nature of the promise made to Abraham. In Psalm 86:9, David confesses, “All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.” The OT saints anticipated a time in which this will actually happen. And here Paul claims that the great promise God made to Abraham, “In you shall all the nations be blessed,” (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8) is now being fulfilled as the scope of the people of God has widened to include Gentiles.

God called Abraham and made a covenant with him so that his family would be the vehicle of bringing blessing to all of mankind (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:8). In Galatians 3:16 Paul states that Christ is the “offspring”—the ultimate fulfillment—of the covenant made with Abraham. Through Christ the promised blessings come to the Gentiles! Therefore, we must not forget that God’s promise to Abraham included both his descendants (Israel) as well as all the nations (Gentiles).

Paul is simply reiterating his argument from Galatians 3:6-14 and 4:21-31 where he argues that it is those of faith who are the Sons of Abraham and not merely descendants of the flesh. In Galatians 3:29, Paul concludes, “...if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

In Galatians 4:28, Paul tells the Galatians, “Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise” (cf. vv. 30-31). All who are a new creation by the Spirit (v. 15)—Jew and Gentile—are counted as the true sons of Abraham, children of promise (i.e., the Israel of God, 6:16).

Not only were Paul’s words a stinging indictment against the Judaizers but they were also a source of great comfort to the Galatians. In closing his letter, Paul wanted to assure the Galatians that they would not forfeit the benefits of being part of true Israel by refusing circumcision (cf. Guthrie, *Galatians*, p. 152). Throughout this letter, Paul has painstakingly sought to assure the troubled Galatians (1:7) of their status as true sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:6-14).

The great barrier standing in the way of the Gentile mission in Paul’s day wasn’t physical—mountains and seas—but rather a religious principle—particularism. J. Gresham Machen writes,

“Particularism was written plain upon the pages of the Old Testament; in emphatic language the Scriptures imposed upon the true Israelite the duty of separateness from the Gentile world. Gentiles might indeed be brought in, but only when they acknowledged the prerogatives of Israel and united themselves with the Jewish nation. If premonitions of a different doctrine were to be found, they were couched in the mysterious language of prophecy; what seemed to be fundamental for the present was the doctrine of the special covenant between Jehovah and His chosen people” (*The Origin of Paul’s Religion: A Classic Defense of Supernatural Christianity*, p. 17).

This barrier found its way into the Galatian churches through the demands of the Judaizers. By appealing to the traditional Jewish exegetical tradition about Abraham, the Judaizers insisted that if the Galatians wanted to belong to the true people of God (i.e., become true sons of Abraham), they had to receive the seal of circumcision (i.e., the true sign of God’s covenant with His people) and keep the requirements of the Mosaic Law (i.e., a Gentile had to become a Jew).

In reply, Paul appeals to the life of Abraham (Gal. 3:6-14) and shows how the father of the Jews was justified when he was an uncircumcised Gentile—just like the Galatians! Thus, belonging to the people of God is not a matter of law-keeping but rather of faith in the God of promise and performance. Incorporation into the Israel of God is by grace/the miracle of regeneration rather than self-effort/works. Again, as previously noted, Paul is merely reiterating the same point he made in Galatians 3:6-14, 29; 4:21-31. The true people of God in both the OT and NT are those who receive and rest in Christ alone. In the OT, it was the promise of Christ to come and in the NT it is the fulfillment of Christ who has come and will come again!

Those who trust in Christ have been brought to life by the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit and made a new creation and incorporated into the people of God. The

good news Paul is saying is this: Anyone—circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile—who receives and rests in Jesus Christ/Messiah alone is the Israel of God! This isn't replacement theology but rather addition theology! Kostenberger writes,

Paul's own focus is on a new creation brought about by Christ's cross, faith exercised in love, and a life lived by the Spirit. Thus, if Paul is teaching a "replacement theology" at all, it is not so much concerned with the church replacing Israel, as of the cross replacing circumcision and of the Spirit replacing the Law as the energizing and organizing principles of the Christian faith ("The Identity of the Israel tou theou (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16," 3.).

The church doesn't replace Israel. Rather, we are incorporated into Israel! All who by faith look to Christ alone for salvation are incorporated into the people of God. As John Stott writes, "The Christian church enjoys direct continuity with God's people in the Old Testament" (*Galatians*, p. 180). God has always had one people not two. Michael Horton notes, "There are not two programs, covenants, or peoples, but one, and this one people is saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone" (*The Christian Faith*, p. 731). Again, Horton notes, "The only way a Gentile can belong to the elect and redeemed people of God is to be grafted onto the vine that is Israel" (*Ibid*, p. 731). In Romans 11:17, Paul writes, that we (Gentiles) as "a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree." Understanding the church as the Israel of God doesn't mean "replacement" it means engrafting! Israel's tents, then, are not replaced they are simply enlarged (Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 731)!

This is what we should expect since God's covenant with Abraham included both his descendants (Israel) as well as all the nations (Gentiles). The church, therefore, is not to be understood as replacing Israel but rather by grace through faith in Christ incorporated into God's people along with Israel! The church fulfills the promise God made to Abraham that in him and His seed—Christ—all the nations would be blessed (Ps. 86:9). Gentiles as well as Jews enter into the blessings promised to Abraham by faith in a crucified Messiah (Gal. 3:13; 6:14).

Calvin appropriately summarizes the issue at hand when he writes,

This is an indirect ridicule of the vain boasting of the false apostles, who vaunted of being the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh. There are two classes who bear this name, a pretended Israel, which appears to be so in the sight of men,—and the Israel of God. Circumcision was a disguise before men, but regeneration is a truth before God. In a word, he gives the appellation of the Israel of God to those whom he formerly denominated the children of Abraham by faith, (Gal. iii. 29,) and thus includes all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church. On the contrary, the name and lineage are the sole boast of Israel according to the flesh; and this led the apostle to argue in the Epistle to the Romans, that 'they are not all

Israel which are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children.’ (Rom. ix. 6, 7)” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, pp. 186-187).

**(ADDITIONAL NOTE:** The phrase, “Israel of God” has been a source much debate. This is regrettable because of the significance and assuring news Paul sets forth here for believers. First, grammatically, there is debate over the Greek conjunction καὶ. It can be taken in two ways: (1) “and” AV, RV, NASB, NEB; ESV; (2) “even” NIV, RSV omits it). When the background and context of Galatians is taken into consideration καὶ, should be taken as being explicative, exegetically clarifying in a further clause the expression ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς (“on those”): “even on the Israel of God” (Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 298). “Even” instead of “and” (or even left untranslated, cf. RSV) is the translation of choice. However, as Kostenberger—and Schreiner *Galatians*, p. 381—notes this debate cannot be settled on the basis of grammar alone. Kostenberger writes, “the syntax of this passage is notoriously difficult, and grammatical arguments by themselves remain less than conclusive and need to be supplemented by larger contextual and theological considerations” (“The Identity of the Israel tou theou (Israel of God) in Galatians 6:16,” 11).

Second, this debate cannot be settled on the meaning of the term “Israel,” which doesn’t always mean ethnic Israel (cf., Rom. 9:6 with 1 Cor. 10:18; see Schreiner, *Galatians*, p. 382). William Hendriksen notes, “It is very clear that in his epistles the apostle employs the term Israel in more than one sense. In fact, in the small compass of a single verse (Rom. 9:6) he uses it in two different senses. Each passage in which that term occurs must therefore be explained in the light of its context” (*Galatians*, p. 247).

In all matters of interpretation, the context must always determine the meaning of words. Thus, Galatians 6:16 must be interpreted in view of Paul’s entire argument in this letter. When the whole letter of Galatians is taken into account the meaning of the phrase, “Israel of God” becomes clear.

The phrase, “Israel of God” is found only here in the NT. The reason is because of the immediate situation concerning the Judaizers use of this phrase among the Galatian churches. As noted previously, the phrase “Israel of God” was a self-designation that the Judaizers used in their message to the Galatians, assuring them that by observing the works of the Law they would become full covenant members of God’s people (see Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 299). Paul, however, takes their self-designation and turns it against them. In an astounding, climactic point of emphasis, Paul states that what the Judaizers were claiming to offer the Galatians by works of the law, the Galatians already possessed through faith in Christ (Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 299)!

Throughout Galatians, Paul has taken pains to show how God is indifferent to the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile believers in the matter of justification (cf. Gal. 3:28). This is why it is doubtful that this phrase refers to Jewish believers in



Christ (see John MacArthur, *Galatians*, p. 210). That Paul singles out Jewish believers and thus has two groups of people in mind contradicts all that he has argued for throughout this letter. Moreover, if Paul were speaking of two separate groups of people, this would lend credence to the Judaizers arguments! Longenecker writes,

...in a letter where Paul is concerned to treat as indifferent the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile Christians and to argue for equality of Gentile believers with Jewish believers, it is difficult to see him at the very end of that letter pronouncing a benediction (or benedictions) that would serve to separate groups within his churches—whether he means by “the Israel of God” a believing Jewish remnant within the broader Church of both Jews and Gentiles, a nonjudaizing group of Jewish Christians in Galatia, or an eschatological Israel that is saved at the time of Christ’s return. Certain elements within Paul’s other letters may be used to support one or the other of these views, but Galatians itself cannot easily be used in such a manner, (*Galatians*, p. 298).

We have demonstrated how Paul argues that a true son of Abraham is not a matter of physical descent from Abraham (3:7, 9). Neither is it based on outward observance of works of the law (circumcision-justification by addition or uncircumcision- justification by abstinence; 2:16; 6:15). The true sons of Abraham—both Gentiles and Jews—are those who by grace through faith receive and rest in Jesus, the Messiah. Paul declares that God bestows His blessings on all who believe regardless of their nationality, race, social status or gender (3:28). Having argued thus throughout this letter, would Paul now end his letter by undoing his arguments by pronouncing blessing on those who walk by the rule of the gospel and those who do not (see Hendriksen, *Galatians*, p. 247)? Why would Paul, after affirming as indifferent the distinctions that separate Jewish and Gentile Christians throughout the letter, close it by pronouncing a benediction that upholds this very distinction?

Thus, it seems best to understand the phrase, “Israel of God” in this context as referring to one people, namely the church of Jesus Christ composed of both believing Jews and Gentiles; see Schreiner, *Galatians*, p. 382). The Israel of God refers to all “those who keep in step with this rule,” (i.e., Jewish and Gentile Christians alike). Schreiner writes, “...seeing the church as the Israel of God is the argument of Galatians as a whole” (*Galatians*, p. 383). Longenecker writes, “In fact, in the context of the total argument of Galatians, where the issues focus on the question “Who really are the children of Abraham?” (cf. esp. 3:6-9, 14, 16, 26-29; 4:21-31), to conclude with a declaration that Gentile converts are rightfully “the Israel of God” would be highly significant and telling” (*Galatians*, p. 298).

Christ came to save Jewish and Gentile sinners and to make them, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, Abraham's children (see R. Scott Clark, *The Israel of God*, <http://clark.wscal.edu/israel.php>). This would have been a bombshell dropped on the Judaizers and at the same time deeply assuring to the troubled Galatians (1:7.)

The Judaizers believed they were the true Israel of God because of their adherence to the law—circumcision—the rule of works = Jesus + circumcision. Paul, however, in one final, climactic statement, declares that membership in the people of God has nothing to do with circumcision or uncircumcision. The true Israel of God are those who walk according to the rule of faith that Paul has taught throughout this letter (i.e., “Christ came to save Jewish and Gentile sinners and to make them, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, sons of Abraham). Fung writes, “...Paul limits the blessing to those who follow the ‘norm of true Christianity,’ which recognizes that participation in the new creation is the only thing that matters. In this new creation circumcision or uncircumcision is irrelevant; that which is vital is a new relation with God which is accepted by faith—in other words, justification by faith” (*Galatians*, p. 311).

**REFLECTION:**

Has it gripped you that you—a Gentile—are the Israel of God? In Ephesians 2:11ff. Paul says we—Gentiles—were once separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus we who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Through faith in Christ we are “no longer strangers and aliens, but now are *fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...*” (cf. Eph. 2:11-19; emphasis mine).

Through faith in Christ alone, we are the sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:6-14), the children of promise (Gal. 4:28) and the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Thus, as Paul brings this letter to a close, he ends on this high note of blessing and assurance for God’s people. To belong to God’s people is to be showered with peace and mercy. By grace, through faith, in Christ alone, we are forever under God’s steadfast love! His covenant faithfulness has been and continues to be lavished upon us in view of our sin and wretched condition and ongoing failures. Because we are objects of God’s covenant faithfulness, we are no longer at war with God. We now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). No longer His enemies, we are now His beloved, adopted sons in His family (Gal. 4:1-7) and have the immeasurable privilege of being called the Israel of God!

The only way for a physical descendant of Abraham—Jew—or for a wild olive root—Gentile—to be counted among the people of God, is to be joined to the true Israel of God, Jesus, by faith. Jesus is the true Israel of God. In Matthew 2:15, Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 and tells us that Jesus is the true Son of God, the True Israel of God. Throughout His entire life, Jesus repeated the history of national Israel. What rebellious national Israel would not and did not do, Jesus did! Jesus, as God’s Son, loved the Father with all His heart, soul, mind and strength and His neighbor as himself (Matt 22:37-40). Therefore, everyone who is united to Him by grace alone, through faith alone becomes, by virtue of that union, the true Israel of God.

J.V. Fesko writes, “Indeed, if Christ is the true Israel of God, then those who look to Christ by faith and are united to Him become the Israel of God. We now share in all of the blessings promised to Israel because of Christ. Indeed we are new creatures through Christ” (Fesko, *Galatians*, p. 209).

This privilege is ours not because of works (v. 15) but solely by grace through faith in a crucified Christ. We have nothing to boast in within ourselves (6:3). So, with Paul we confess, “far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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