

I grew up in the Goondiwindi district. And back in the day, there were very few buildings in town, that were constructed of brick. One of the rare ones, was what was known as “The Macintyre Club” – In its operational years, I never got to go in there. It was a ‘gentleman’s club’ (you see), and my dad obviously wasn’t a gentleman, because he wasn’t a member.

But it had a:

- *bar;*
- *restaurant;*
- *pool tables;*
- *a ‘lady’s lounge’; and*
- *a tennis court out the back...*

And this brick building, from the front, it looked “Wow, this is pretty swish” ...

But in time, I got to know that building pretty well, because when “The Macintyre Club” went bust, the church we were in, bought it. And apart from the very front section, that was ‘newish’ and brick, the rest of it was almost bordering on ‘ramshackle’ ...

I think it had started out as an old house, and rooms had been added to the front, and a flat had been added to the back, and there were leaks in the roof, and then you get underneath it, and you could see how old it really was.

*It was a great building for a church (quite functional)... But it was nothing like what the front portrayed. The **face** of it – the **appearance**, was a modern, solid brick structure. But overall, it was nothing of the sort.*

It was little more than a façade. Do you know what a façade is? It's when the front part of a building – the facing aspect, is built to present as a grand imposing structure, but behind the façade, is just as likely to be, a small, dingy building...

It's common for a shop to have a façade that makes it look like it's 2 stories high, but in reality, it's only a lowly, old, single-story shop.

And some **people** are like that – trying to make a good show of themselves, and trying to make themselves appear all very holy, but that's all it is – a show – it's all 'outward appearances', and not of the heart.

It's 3.5 months now, since we started our series on Galatians, and today's the last day. And as is often the case, Paul finishes off the letter with his own hand-writing... It was quite common back then, to have a scribe do the writing for you, because not many people could read or write. Paul could, but the papyrus paper was so expensive, you were better off to get a professional to do the writing for you (neater; more words on a page; more legible for the readers).

But Paul liked to finish off his letters (in his own hand) – to give a personal touch – and it was almost like an authentication thing – “look, here's my own writing”, and maybe some people would recognise it... And even though he could write, it obviously wasn't his profession: ¹¹ **See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.**

(Paul's scrawl was much bigger than the professional's script)... *It sounds like his writing was a bit like mine – sometimes I think I should've gone to medical school (my writing is so terrible)...*

Now, sometimes when Paul finishes off his letters, it seems like he's rushing to try and fit in a whole heap of stuff that he hasn't managed to squeeze into the main body of the letter... But it doesn't seem at all like that this time. It's pretty-much a succinct summary of what this letter's been about...

Now, for those who haven't been here for the whole series, this is that it's been about:

- Paul had been the one who had taken the Gospel to the region of Galatia; and
- the Gospel message he proclaimed, was the same as the message he preached everywhere else he went – salvation by faith in Jesus Christ...
- This is the message they received; This is what they believed.

But then, after Paul had moved on, to preach elsewhere, some agitators from out of town came along, and said, "It's good that you believe in Jesus, but you realise, **Israel** are the people of God, and so if you really want to be a child of God, you've got to get circumcised, because that's the sign that you belong to God..."

But Paul wouldn't have a bar of that. We're **not** to be slaves of the Law. In Christ, we've been set free from slavery to the Law ...

And so he comes down really hard on these Judaisers (let's call them "the circumcision party")...

You see, the very essence of the Gospel was at stake... Jesus said "You don't put new wine into old wine-skins, otherwise they'll burst"... And that's exactly what the circumcision party were trying to do: They were trying to squeeze this new thing "**Grace through faith in Jesus Christ.**" into the Old Covenant... And they were saying "Grace through faith, **isn't enough.** You need to keep the Law – you need to get circumcised"...

But to Paul, that's just an outward appearance – it's a physical show – façade of holiness. And the real reason they were preaching "circumcision", was because they couldn't handle the cost of being a disciple of Jesus....

You see, at this point in history, this new Christianity thing, was seen as some kind of rebel heretical sect within Judaism... And the first persecutions that the Christian church suffered, came from God's chosen people Israel.

And as the Gospel was preached, it extended out into the territory of the Gentiles. And so circumcision became an issue... You see, before then, the gospel was being preached to Jews (already circumcised). But now, it's being preached to the Gentiles (not circumcised)...

And if the Gospel message was saying, "We don't need to embrace the Old Covenantal Law" – if it removed that which

distinctly marked a person as belonging to God, that would really get the Jews angry...

And Paul had been on the receiving end of that anger (and the giving end) ...

He'd been stoned for his faith. ^{2 Corinthians 11:24 (ESV) 24} **Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.**

No wonder in today's reading he says: **I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.**

5 times, he'd been flogged within an inch of his life... He knew what it meant to be persecuted for not keeping the Law...

But the strange thing is, even those who were pushing circumcision, they weren't keeping the whole Law themselves – they were more concerned about the outward appearance – façade of holiness... And by getting circumcised, they wouldn't be persecuted – they wouldn't risk getting flogged themselves.

Throughout the last few weeks, we've been hearing about the difference between the flesh and the Spirit... And I think, what we're finding here, is another 'craving of the flesh', is to appear holy/Godly, without actually undergoing a Spiritual transformation...

This gets me wondering about false gospels that get preached today... They have the appearance of being holy/godly/Spiritual, but if it's not the true gospel, it's merely a façade???

Many of you will remember Ron Schoenfisch. I think, probably the best evangelist St George has ever had.

And one day somebody proudly told Ron, "I became a Christian at such-and-such a church". And Ron (knowing that church, and the sort of message that was preached there) said, "Tell me what it meant for you to become a Christian. What was the gospel you received..."

And I think basically the answer was, "If I believe in Jesus, Jesus is going to bless me; I won't get sick; and things will go well for me; and I have eternal life." ...

And then Ron explored with that person, the true Gospel:

- *to have a conviction of my utterly fallen, sinful state;*
- *so that we realise we are totally corrupt and in need of a saviour;*
- *repentance of sin;*
- *recognising that Jesus died to set us free from our sin;*
- *And that the Holy Spirit will now be transforming us to become more and more like Jesus ...*
- *And how the true Gospel has a cost to it – that I die to self, and I make Jesus to be Lord...*

*And no, that person had **not** been told any of that. I don't know the outcome, and I don't know if that person's now walking with the Lord or not...*

You see, for Paul, the Gospel is unashamedly about the cross of Christ. And how, for us to embrace faith in Christ Jesus, we also embrace the cross, and how that means our own death, to things of the flesh.

In V¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast **except in the cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

There once was a time when belonging to God was signified with circumcision. It was a physical cutting away of the physical flesh, to mark someone as being one of God's people...

But it was only **ever** a symbol¹... The true, spiritual circumcision, is to have a circumcised heart. It's a cutting-away of the flesh alright – we put to death the flesh – we crucify the flesh, and the Spirit comes alive.

There's 3 deaths involved in our salvation, and 3 “comings to **life**”.

The first death we know well. Every Easter we celebrate it – the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus died to pay the penalty of our sins. But death couldn't hold Him down. Jesus is risen, and now He reigns in life; He is seated at the right hand of The Father. And everybody says: "Hallelujah"...

The second death, is as Paul says: that by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ:.... the world has been crucified to me

When we respond to Jesus, it's not just a turning **to** Jesus – it's a turning away from the world. Why is that necessary?? Why do we nail all that this world has to offer, along with its passions and desires, to the cross?

It's because the world represents everything that the flesh has to offer. And if my focus is on:

- things of this life;
- cravings of the flesh;
- everything that the world is enticing my fleshly nature with...

I cannot be a disciple of Jesus...

In Luke 14, Jesus is talking about 'counting the cost', and whether I'm willing to bear the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. And He tells me:

- if I feel my family is more important to me, than I cannot be His disciple;
- If I'm not willing to suffer and die for Him, I cannot be His disciple;

And He says: Luke 14:33 (ESV) ³³ **So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**

When's the last time you heard **that** at an altar-call... When's the last time the evangelist said, "Don't you dare come to Jesus:

- unless you're willing to count the cost first;
- if you're looking for an easy life;
- if you love life more than Jesus;
- if your heart is set on physical blessings;

This is what Paul was talking about, when he said **the world has been crucified to me**. He counted the cost. And with great joy, he embraced a life of suffering for His Lord.

What an awful corruption of the Gospel, we hear being preached today, where the Gospel is being presented as a way of enhancing the things of this world; and prospering in the things of this world,..... when for a true Christian, the world has been crucified for me – I do not seek it. I desire it no longer...

We're going to sing a beautiful hymn shortly.

I have decided to follow Jesus

No turning back

The world behind me

The cross before me

No turning back

though none go with me, I still will follow.

No turning back

And the third death, is the death of self, because:... by **the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ:.... the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**

We don't add a bit of Jesus to our lives to enhance our lives – We die to self. We nail the world to the cross, and we die, to be born again...

Through Jesus Christ, and what He did on the cross, we put to death, who we once were. My life was so far gone, it couldn't be repaired – it had to be re-created. That's why he says that circumcision counts for nothing / uncircumcision counts for nothing... What counts, is to be a new creation...

What a wonderful message the Gospel is. We put to death the flesh, that in Christ, we may be born again...

And so he says in v16:

¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule...

What's this rule? To put to death the flesh, and to be born again in the Spirit. **5:24 (ESV) ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

This is the rule. If I truly belong to Christ Jesus, I **have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

- I'm not toying with them;
- I'm not repressing them;
- I'm not looking for ways to satisfy them;
- I'm not putting up a façade up in front of them;

Because we belong to Jesus, we **have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

....

There's been a fair bit of ink spilled over what precisely Paul means by **the Israel of God**. I think he means "all those who have been circumcised in the heart" – the true circumcision – the true Israel of God, are those

- who receive His son;
- put to death the flesh;
- and walk by the Spirit.

So in other words, "Peace and mercy belong to genuine disciples of Jesus, who through Christ, have crucified the flesh and walk by the Spirit"...

Peace and mercy. What does the world need more than this??? Many, many people are looking for peace, but it eludes them, because they search for peace everywhere, but its only eternal source – The Prince of Peace.

True peace comes only when we experience the mercy of God, as we come to the cross of Christ.

The final verse of Galatians says:

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

The message has been clear: It's not by religiously keeping ceremonial laws and customs that we're saved. We fully depend on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But that doesn't mean that we do good works. As the Lord transforms our hearts, we become a new creation. The Holy Spirit is at work, and our job, is to keep in step with the Spirit, to the glory of God.

My prayer, is that through this series in Galatians, we have all come to better understand what it means to walk in the Spirit. It's not about a show/façade – it's about the new creation we become, in Christ Jesus...

And if you want to experience that – if you're willing to take the hard road and follow Jesus – if you're willing to crucify the flesh, so as to live by the Spirit, don't delay. Make that decision today.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

we want to thank You for Your life-giving word.

It seems a strange turn-of-phrase,

that spiritual life comes from crucifying the flesh.

But what a wonderful creative work this is, that You do.

Lord, forgive us
for when we have put up a façade – an appearance of
holiness,
to hide the wickedness and the works of the flesh that
come from a corrupt heart.

Lord, it is our resolve, to crucify the flesh;
The world is crucified to us, and we to it.

Lord, we submit ourselves to You
(for that is what it means for you to be Lord).
We not only give you permission (as if you need that),
but we seek this with our whole being:
That You would strip away the flesh;
That You would strip away our carnal desires;

That we would walk by the Spirit to Your Glory,
Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ,
Amen.

ⁱ Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)

⁶ And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.