

Today is the conclusion of our 6 weeks of reading through Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, a letter which we call Galatians. We have learned that Paul writes this letter to a group of churches made up of non-Jewish people called Gentiles to give them instructions about the Christian life. The main question before them is whether or not they have to abide by Jewish laws and customs in order to become Christian.

This concluding chapter which we are about to read is an odd chapter. As professor Mark Douglass explains, "on the one hand it is a summary of the arguments that Paul has made in his first five chapters of the letter. A summary about the relationship between circumcision and the law, Spirit and flesh, individual responsibility and concern for the whole church."

But on the other hand, this concluding chapter raises paradoxes. Paul seems to contradict some of the statements that he had shared earlier in the letter. So how do we handle that? How do we handle that Paul within this one letter offers up words which seem to contradict what he said earlier?

How do we handle things in the Bible which don't jell with itself? Do we toss some of it away? Do we explain it away? Do we ignore these contradictions? Let's first read this chapter and then try to put it in a context that can help us understand what Paul may be saying to us today.

Paul did not actually write the words in Galatians. He told the words to someone else who transcribed them for him. However, in our reading today we will see that in verse 11 he does write the last portion in his own handwriting.

**Read Galatians 6**

We Americans just celebrated the anniversary of our independence. We may have celebrated with fireworks. We may have celebrated by spending time with friends. We may have celebrated by taking part in fun activities in the area. Our independence is something that we Americans take pride in.

But I wonder if Paul's words here cause us to reflect upon our interdependence upon one another. How we are linked with one another and how when we recognize that interdependence we may catch a glimpse of God's Holy Spirit in action.

Interdependence may be hard for some of us to admit. We Americans like to think of ourselves as self made. But Paul tells the communities in the region of Galatia that they are part of one another. He tells them that they need one another.

JC Austin tells the story about a trip he took to East Africa. He and his wife were traveling through East Africa and they decided to go to Uganda to try and see some of the last remaining Mountain Gorillas in the world. The gorillas lived on the western border of the country, but they had to go to Kampala, the capital, because you could only get into the park on an official permit on a particular assigned date.

The only organized trips to do this were geared to luxury tourists, which they couldn't afford, so they had to make their own way across the country using local buses in order to use their permits. And that was a bit of a problem, because they only had one day to get there. Even worse, there was only one bus going that day, leaving at 5:30 am, and their guesthouse was about four miles away from the bus station.

So, JC and his wife made careful preparations to make sure they didn't have a problem. They asked the guesthouse to help them find a reliable driver to pick them up the next morning, since that was too early for public transportation to be running. They were given the name of a driver whom they contacted and he assured them that he would be at the guesthouse no later than 4:30 am.

The next morning, JC and his wife staggered bleary-eyed out the door a little before 4:30 am, backpacks on their shoulders, and waited in the dark. And waited. And waited. A little before 5 am, they decided he was not coming, and they started walking into town, still in the darkness, mostly because they didn't know what else to do.

After about ten minutes of walking, a lone car roared past them; it suddenly slammed on its brakes and swerved into the gravel in front of them on the side of the road. The doors opened and two young men got out. "Where are you going?" the driver demanded. "To the bus station," JC replied. The two men looked at JC and his wife for a moment. "Get in the car," the driver barked finally.

JC and his wife looked at each other for a moment and shrugged. Either the two men were going to hurt them or help them, and there wasn't really anything they could do about it in either case, so JC and his wife got into the car. After about ten minutes, the driver pulled off the road and slammed on the brakes. The two men got out into the dark, then one stuck his head back in through the window. "Get out of the car," he ordered. Warily, JC and his wife climbed out, turned around...and saw that they had pulled in right in front of the bus station, with their bus still waiting under a big street light.

JC turned back and looked at the driver. The driver smiled and said, "Have a good trip." JC tried several times to give the driver some money for gas, which is the custom when someone gives you a ride there, but the driver would not accept anything. "I hope you enjoy Uganda," the driver said simply, climbed back into the car, and drove off.

In looking at Paul's concluding words to the Galatians, he encourages them to be interdependent with one another. He tells them to show this interdependence by restoring those back into the community who have done wrong. He tells them to show this interdependence by bearing one another's burdens.

He tells them to show this interdependence by students and teachers supporting one another in their learning. He tells them to show this interdependence by working for the good of all.

I would challenge any of us here who have come to worship in order to get something out of worship. I hear that a lot in our culture. People who say, "I go to church in order to get something out of it and if I don't I am not going back or I am going some place else."

I would challenge the American notion that we come to a church worship service in order to get something from the experience like we expect when we shop in order to get something from a store. Our American culture has taught us to be church consumers like we are Wal-Mart consumers looking for the best deal for the best price.

Instead, I would challenge us to view being a part of a faith community as an opportunity to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. To be a part of a faith community in order to inspire and encourage one another to be more together than we can be a part. To allow God to work through us to create something bigger through us than our individual parts can create alone.

Paul says that it doesn't matter whether one is Jew or Gentile. What is important he says is to be a new creation. For us it does not matter where you were born, what is the color of your skin, how much money your family makes or where you live. What Paul says is important is that we are open to being made into new creations.

We just celebrated our American independence. Maybe what Paul teaches us in his concluding words to the Galatians is to celebrate our interdependence with one another.

And maybe by celebrating our interdependence we are able to allow God to re-create us into new creations. AMEN.

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-Mark Douglass quote from "Feasting on the Word" commentary, Year C, Vol. 3.

-Austin, JC, "Changing Plans", [http://day1.org/4898-changing\\_plans](http://day1.org/4898-changing_plans)

### Prayers of Confession

Holy One, why is it that we can grow so weary of doing what is right, yet always energetically do that which we know is harmful to us and others? We sow seeds of hurt and anger, and wonder why we harvest so much bitterness. We spend too much time comparing ourselves to those around us, and too few moments in following Christ's example.

Rather than letting our sins gloat over us, Healing God, we open ourselves to your mercy and grace. As you reach out to heal us with your forgiveness, may we embrace your love, your mercy, your grace for our lives. As you pour out your Spirit of gentleness, may we bring the peace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to all the world.

### Prayers of the People

Creator God, you call us to love and serve you with body, mind, and spirit through loving your creation and our sisters and brothers.

Open our hearts in compassion and receive these petitions on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.

We praise your abiding guidance, O God, for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah, to model for us the way of love for the whole universe. We offer these prayers of love on behalf of ourselves and our neighbors, on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures. We know that as we learn more and more about you and about ourselves and how important it is to affirm our interdependence of one another.

We lift up prayers for our country. We are so thankful to live on this land where we can gather to worship freely in the way that we choose. Empower us to stand firm so that we support one another in this country to maintain our freedoms to worship freely. We express thanksgiving for those who sacrifice their lives so that we can maintain our freedoms to assemble openly.