

# Circumcision or the New Creation: every church must choose

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[ 0 : 00 ] And we come this evening to the last section, beginning at verse 11. And it's been a long haul, but here we are. And the title tonight is this, Circumcision or the New Creation through the Gospel of the Cross.

There's no third way. All through the letter to the Galatians, we've seen that Paul's message has been one of monotonous insistence.

It can be summed up in just two words, Christ alone. It's by Christ alone that we begin the Christian life. It's living by Christ alone that we go on in the Christian life.

And it's by Christ alone that we reap eternal life through his Spirit. So from beginning to end, our salvation is in Christ and him crucified alone.

His death for our sins on the cross is all sufficient. It is the sufficient power that delivers us from this present evil age, as Edward read at the beginning, into the new creation.

[ 1 : 13 ] So that as chapter 2 verse 20 says, the life I now live is by the power of his risen life. It's the Son of God who lives in me.

And that is Paul's genuine gospel over against any other gospel. Any gospel that says, yes, of course the cross of Jesus is important, but you also need more for a full experience of salvation. You begin with Christ, yes, of course, but you go on. Well, if you want to go on and make progress, you must add some advanced aspects of religion to your faith, whether it be laws or customs or experience or whatever it is.

And that plus is a necessary extra for full acceptance, for full blessing, for full gospel experience.

And that plus is all summed up in one little word, circumcision.

And here, where Paul is now summing up his letter, he really focuses for the first time on that word, circumcision. He introduced it in chapter 5 verse 2, but here it's in virtually every verse of these last few verses, either explicitly or implied.

[ 2 : 34 ] And Paul is talking about this term circumcision in order to make stark and clear and absolutely unforgettable the two totally different gospels that he's been talking about.

The true gospel, the gospel of Christ alone, and the false gospel, which he says is no gospel at all, which has room for Christ, which has honour even for Christ, which talks about Christ, but, and this is crucial, because it doesn't make Christ exclusive and unique and central and utterly efficient, sufficient, sorry, it in fact removes him completely from the gospel, and it means that it is a false gospel, a pseudo gospel, a gospel of the flesh.

That's all summed up by that word circumcision. Because for Paul, as we've seen again and again, to add to the gospel is actually to destroy it. It means that Christ died for no purpose at all, as he said in 2.21.

Friends, this is so important, precisely because on the surface, it can actually be very, very hard to see the vast gulf, the vast difference between the true gospel and something that is no gospel at all. It must be hard to see, otherwise the Galatians wouldn't have fallen for it. And many, many churches and Christian sins would not have fallen for it either. Professor James Dunn, in his little book, which is brilliant in some things and totally wrong in others, is brilliant in this aspect.

[ 4 : 13 ] There's a chapter called The Fundamental Agreements. And there were many fundamental agreements between Paul and the false teachers. They were all agreed that justification was by faith and not by works of the law at the start of the Christian life.

Chapter 2, verses 15 and 16. Absolutely clear on that. They were all agreed that faith in Jesus Christ was essential for salvation. They were all agreed that it was the sons of Abraham, not others,

who would possess the promise of salvation.

Yet one was a true gospel and the other was no gospel at all. The one was the way of eternal life, says Paul, and the other was the way of corruption and death.

And yet they had all these shared convictions. If justification is by Christ alone, says Paul, then the whole, whole Christian life is by the Spirit alone.

It's not by any additions of man at all. That's what the gospel of truth implies. That if Christ is truly the fulfillment of all the Old Testament story, then the new creation has totally replaced the old.

[ 5 : 28 ] And therefore there is no longer any place in the Christian faith for things that belong to the old age. There is no longer any place for the guardians, the jailers, the things of earthly religion.

It's these implications of the gospel that divided Paul and his opponents. And so you see, he ends his letter with this stark dichotomy.

He wants to leave ringing in his listeners' ears as a sense of the absolute folly of turning back to what is a non-gospel, what is an anti-gospel, what is no gospel at all.

And it's all summed up in this choice, the choice between the cross of Christ and circumcision, between the new creation and this world, this present evil age.

You can't have both, says Paul. It's absolutely one or the other. And his message all the way through these verses is just very simple. Don't do it.

[ 6 : 27 ] Don't go back. Don't be circumcised. Because to do that is to embrace, once again, a dying and a dead world order. It's to go with it into corruption, into disaster.

To do that, says Paul, in the words of his letter, is to reject him who called you. Chapter 1, verse 6. It's to destroy the gospel and say that Christ died for nothing.

Chapter 2, verse 21. It's to return to slavery, to things that are not God's. Chapter 4, verse 9. It's to be severed from Christ.

It's to fall away from grace. Chapter 5, verse 4. It is not to inherit the kingdom of God. Chapter 5, verse 21. And it is, chapter 6, verse 8, as we read last week, to be on a road that leads only to reaping corruption.

And so it's deadly, deadly serious. Do not go back that way, says Paul. And that's what explains verse 11.

[ 7 : 32 ] See with what large letters I'm writing to you with my own hand. It's extraordinary. When you read the scholars and the commentaries about this verse, you find reams, pages, have all kinds of extraordinary ideas about why Paul would be writing with large letters.

Has he got bad eyesight? Has he got a broken hand? Has he got this, that, and the next thing? Absolutely extraordinary. It's the mark, you see, of the academic Bible scholar. Pages of fruitful speculation on things like that, but absolutely nothing of any use for the church today.

Bishop Lightfoot sees it very plainly. Quote, And that's absolutely right.

He goes on to say that Paul is summing up the letter in terse, eager, disjointed sentences. And indeed he does. And they are arresting, aren't they? They're striking. What he's saying to the Galatians is wake up.

Are you listening? Remember, this letter would have been read aloud to them. They'd have been hearing it. It's a long letter. It's a complicated letter. We find that. He's getting to the end. And he's saying, Wake up.

[ 8 : 46 ] Nudge your neighbour. Listen. Get the message. Here are the stark choices that face you as a church. And there's only two. There's no fudge. There's no ambiguity.

There's no mediating position and balance. Only two. It's either or. Are you listening? Either, as a church, Galatians, you embrace the one true gospel, the gospel of the new creation, and you actually live out its implications, or, you're not a gospel church at all.

Either, you're a church with Christ alone as your gospel, or, you're a church with Christ plus circumcision, and therefore, it's no gospel at all.

Either the cross of Jesus is sufficient for everything in your life, and your experience, and your loyalty, the power in your life from the beginning through the middle right to the very end.

Either the cross is utterly sufficient, or, the cross is utterly deficient. Chapter 2, verse 11. And Christ died for nothing. Add to it, and you destroy the gospel.

[ 9 : 57 ] It's no gospel at all. And it's that stark contrast that Paul wants to leave with his Galatian readers, to challenge them, even to shock them into action.

And so I suppose it's that sharp contrast that the Spirit of God wants to leave us with twenty centuries later as we examine ourselves, and as a church, as believers today. So let's look then at these verses, where Paul paints for us a portrait of the huge difference that there is between a church with the cross of Christ at its centre, a true church of God, and a church with circumcision at the centre, a church which may think it's a gospel church, but in fact is deluded and in grave danger, as Paul says, the Galatians were in.

And the distinguishing marks may be very subtle. Let's understand that. But when we expose them, we see that there is indeed a great gulf, a huge gulf, between the circumcision church and the gospel church.

But what does circumcision really stand for? What does it mean today? That's what these last verses, I think, make exceptionally clear for us. The first area that we see in these verses, where there is a clear and a decisive difference between a true gospel church and a circumcision church, is in the area of popularity.

A church centred on circumcision is a church that is at home in the world. Whereas a church with the cross of Christ at its heart, a true gospel church will always be alien in this world.

[11:46] The one, verse 12, wants to make a good showing in the flesh. It craves approval in the world's terms. It longs to parade its success with the criteria that the world understands.

So, verse 13, it's boasting in the flesh. Boasting, perhaps, in its achievements, in its power of recruitment and so on. It desperately shuns the disapproval and the opposition of the world, verse 12.

It does anything to avoid persecution. But the other church, the one with the cross of Christ at the centre, is very different. It has no interest at all in the glory of the world's terms or in glory in the world's eyes.

Verse 14, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world, says Paul. That's the cry of the gospel church. And it's willing to suffer for the cross of Christ.

And it expects to suffer for the cross of Christ because it knows that this world is not its home and never will be. It never has been. This church has its home in the new creation, verse 15.

[12:55] That's the only thing that counts. This church has its home, as we saw in chapter 4, verse 26, in the heavenly Jerusalem. And it always has had for the people of God, for the people of faith.

Paul says in chapter 4, verse 29, that just as with Isaac and Ishmael, the one born according to the flesh, that is, the person of this world, persecuted him who is born according to the Spirit, so it is now.

And so it was for Paul, chapter 5, verse 11. He is persecuted precisely because he does not preach circumcision. And he does stand firmly on the cross of Christ.

And so, chapter 6, verse 17, do you see that? He bears on his body the marks of the cross, the marks of Jesus. You just need to read some of his letters to see what that means.

2 Corinthians 11, he talks about imprisonments, beatings. He talks about often being near death. Five times I received the 40 lashes, minus one.

[13:59] Three times I was beaten with rods. I was stoned. Three times shipwrecked, a night and a day in the open sea. Danger, he says, from the Jews, from the Gentiles, in the city, in the desert, and on and on and on.

I faced toil, he says, hardship, hunger, thirst, cold exposure, not to mention, he says, the daily pressure of anxiety for the churches. And on and on it goes, the marks of Jesus.

Yes, marks that betray the vast difference in popularity between the true church and the circumcision church with the people and the culture of this world.

And nothing has changed in two millennia on that score, has it? The world over, it is evangelical gospel churches who are despised, who are scorned, who are persecuted, often by the religious establishment.

Many parts of the world also by the secular establishment. You'll know that in many parts of the East, in Russia, and in Greece, and other places, the Orthodox Church systematically persecutes the evangelical gospel churches.

[15:10] You know that in our own country, here in the media, it is the evangelical churches that are systematically scorned and rebuked and ridiculed in the media, fundamentalists.

It happens in the mainline denominations where it is the gospel churches that are regarded as oddities and irritants, as misfits to be pitied. In my Minister's Forum magazine that came through

this month, the thing that gets circulated to Church of Scotland ministers, I was amazed to read in an article about minority group interests in the church this sentence.

There are many disabled people in the church, Gaelic speakers, evangelicals, chaplains, and so on. You see, a pitiful group to be pitied.

You see, the true gospel church and the true Christian will always be alien. And aliens are always despised, aren't they?

But we boast gladly in that, says Paul in verse 14. The world and its values means nothing to the gospel church and believers. All of that is crucified to us.

[16:22] All that matters to us is the new creation because that's where our home is. But that's not so for the church that's centred on circumcision. And here we see just how many kinds of manifestation of the circumcision principle there are.

At its most basic, you see, the circumcision church has made its peace with the world. It's come to a peaceful resolution with the prevailing culture so that hostilities have ceased on both sides.

It's traded truth for peace. It's made an accord. In the first century that Paul was writing to, the Jerusalem church was in a hostile culture.

A culture of zealous Jewish zealots who were fundamentally anti-Gentile. They were enraged against the Jewish Christians because they associated with uncircumcised Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians.

And so naturally the church in Jerusalem wanted to make peace and avoid persecution. And if they could circumcise Gentile believers, well, not only would they avoid persecution, they could say, look, we've made them into Jews.

[17:33] Look, your culture has prevailed. Not only, though, could they avoid persecution, but they could also gain favour and respect even in the eyes of the culture. You can please the culture, you see, by stroking it, by affirming its sacred cows, its cherished values and saying, yes, we value what you value.

And that's exactly what happens today, isn't it? The church, desperate to make peace with our post-modern, secularised, pluralist culture, with the sacred cows of our culture, the sacred cows of feminism, so we feminise the church and seek applause.

The sacred cow of homosexuality, so we welcome that into the church, to the applause of the world.

The sacred cow of pluralism, that there can't possibly just be one way to God, so we immerse ourselves in interfaith things, to the applause of the world.

And wow, hey presto, suddenly, you get onto the media. You find your own thought for the day now. You get into the honours list, even.

You get into the establishment. All hostilities have ceased. Indeed, they've even more fettered by the powers that be. But of course, at the same time, you've become enslaved to them.

[18:57] And you've lost the gospel to circumcision. You've turned back to the weak and miserable non-gods of this evil age.

And it is a very powerful lure, isn't it? Avoidance of persecution and praise from the world. It's a very powerful lure for pastors, ministers, ecclesiastics, in denominations, to seek to climb up the ecclesiastical establishment.

In the Church of Scotland, the desire for promotion or being on committees or being made moderator or things like that. I don't know, it interests some people. In the Church of England, I've seen it even more powerfully with the desire for preferment to be made a bishop.

And it may be that you begin with the gospel, you're a firm evangelical, but oh dear, oh dear, the further on and the further up you become in the establishment, the harder and harder.

It becomes to rock the boat. Of course, you'll always have a place for that evangelical beginning in your heart, but in the end, it's circumcision that will be at the center.

[20:10] The nominal values have overtaken gospel values. And in the end, the gospel's gone. It's muzzled, silenced. Because it's not central and because you cannot have the cross at the center and circumcision at the center.

It's either or. Of course, it's quite easy to get smug as we talk about denominational things. It's quite easy to be like the Pharisee and the tax collector praying happily ourselves.

Well, I thank you, Lord, that our church is not like that. But it can also be true, can't it, in any congregation. And circumcision has many, many forms.

There are many things that ease out the cross of Christ, that ease out the new creation from being the center. And make way for other things which take the center place and become more important. Sacred traditions. what we do here, what we've always done. Conformity. How we like it here. Don't want it to be done differently. Or just plain comfort.

[ 21 : 20 ] All these things can edge out the demands of the cross. It's true personally in our lives as individuals too, isn't it? There are many, many ways of self-circumcision that neutralize gospel living, that just lead to self-congratulation taking the place of the challenge of the cross of Christ.

And maybe we need to ask ourselves, indeed I think, we do constantly, what are the telltale marks that my life bears, that our church fellowship bears?

Is it the marks of circumcision? Remarkably painless and remarkably admired by the world. Or is it the marks of Jesus?

scars which are painful, which are real, because they represent scorn and hatred by the culture around us.

The genuine gospel church and the genuine believer will always, always be alien in this world. And the genuine marks of the gospel are marks not done by us to impress the world or to get approval from the world.

[ 22 : 33 ] there are very likely things done by the world to us in scorn and disdain and even in hatred for the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel. There's a big gulf in popularity between a church with a cross at the center and one with circumcision at the center in this world.

And the marks that we bear, the stigmata, the tattoo brand of ownership that we bear, well that's the thing that tells who really is our master.

Is it Christ and his cross or is it the world and its circumcision? Second, there's a big gulf in theology between the gospel church and the church with circumcision at the center.

The gospel church focuses at its heart always on the finished work of Christ in history. Verse 14, you see it boasts, it lifts high the cross and the cross alone and therefore all power for living now and all power for blessing now comes from the ongoing application of the gospel in the life of the church.

Not moving on from an all sufficient gospel to some new source of blessing or new source of power offered by the church today and presided over by leaders and authorities and institutions in the present day.

[ 24 : 00 ] But that is exactly what a church with circumcision at the center is like. The church becomes the real focus and the church establishment the very real authority and the power that administers that spiritual blessing and power only if you submit to it and to its ceremonies and its blessings.

You see the gospel church always says to you go to the cross of Christ for power and for blessing. The circumcision church says come to us and we'll give you power and blessing and greater Christian experience.

Verse 13, they want you to be circumcised so they may boast in your flesh come to us. Just like in chapter 4 verse 17 Paul says they want to make much of you but only so that you'll make much of them.

In relation to the church of Rome for example that is exactly the issue that the reformation was all about. The Roman Catholic church says yes of course it makes lots of Christ and his cross.

There are many fundamental agreements. But where is the focus? Well the focus is not on the finished work of Christ in history.

[ 25 : 18 ] The focus is on the present work of the church today by the mass. There and only there with the correct priests and correct communion with Rome is the power for full absolution to be found.

Do you want true forgiveness? Well come to mother church and submit and we will give you that power. We will give you that forgiveness.

That's far from being unique to the church of Rome though. There are some churches that would call themselves evangelical and charismatic where it is just the same.

Yes the cross. Yes Christ's sufficient work but do you want real blessing? Do you want real power for holy living? Do you want real full Christian experience?

Then come to us and we will give you what your church lacks the fullness of the spirit. We can give it to you through our baptism in the spirit through our special blessings through the gift of tongues or

whatever it might be.

[ 26 : 20 ] You see it's actually very similar it's just another version of circumcision. That is why as Dick Lucas has said many charismatics and Roman Catholics are first cousins some may be offended by that but I believe it's true if the message that the way to move on in the Christian life and the way to get on is anywhere other than turning us back to the already finished work of Christ which is all sufficient which is all we need.

And that's why in a gospel church the way to fullness the way to blessing the way to going on is always the way of simply imbibing more of what we already have in the gospel of discovering more and more of the unsearchable riches of Christ so that you more and more live out what you already have so that you more and more act out what you already are.

Just turn over again to Ephesians 3 it's just exceptionally clear here in this cross reference Ephesians 3 verse 14 it's Paul's great prayer for spiritual fullness for the Ephesians look at verse 16 he's praying that you would be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being but how well verse 18 is the answer by having strength to comprehend to know to understand with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the gospel the love of Christ and that verse 19 is the way to knowing Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God that's the way to fullness of the spirit that's the way to fullness of Christian experience finding out more and being filled more with what you already have the greatness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that's why the form of ministry that Paul endorses in chapter 6 verse 6 is as we saw teaching ministry instruction in the faith it was

Agnes that pointed out this to me not long ago that it's a very good test a very good gauge of whether a church really is a gospel church or a circumcision church is in this question what does it mean by ministry does it mean as Paul means here teaching and instruction in the riches of the gospel of Christ or does ministry mean a time after the service when you put hands on people's heads and pray for special blessings that's a very good gauge of whether it's a gospel church or a church with something else that's the real focus there's a gulf in theology between a gospel church and a church centered on circumcision the one is always pointing you back to the cross and boasting in it and never exhausting it the other is putting the focus onto the now onto what it has and what it can do and the power that it can exert today third there's a great gulf in perspective and priorities the gospel church is one whose horizon is filled with the concerns of the new creation verse 15 things to do with this passing world are purely secondary the only thing that really counts the only thing is the new creation whereas a church centered on circumcision is a church greatly taken up with the things of this world in other words it's not really crucified and liberated from the concerns of this world and of course that kind of church is all too familiar isn't it where secondary issues where even tertiary issues even trivial issues become far far more important and push out the primary issues see it at a denominational level fighting battles about issues to do with the establishment or church parish systems or things like that whether ministers should wear dog collars or robes or things like that obsessed with passing regulations of all kinds of things about this that and the next thing endless hours spent rearranging chairs and managing decline lots of talk about who should be moderator and things like that does anybody care or anybody knew who moderators were instead of being taken up with the only thing that counts living for the new creation seeking to populate the new creation with believers in Christ seeking to prepare people in the church for serving in the new creation forever and ever for eternity which Alex loves to tell us is a very long time again it's easy to pop at denominations isn't it it's also true isn't it in any congregation circumcision churches have a perspective on this world and that tends to drive the priorities so we fight about trivia we grumble and obstruct over entirely secondary things trivial matters a church like that is far more concerned with who does what where what event happens when why something started or why something stopped or why it's just stayed the same why you used this room for that and something else for something else instead of being taken up with proclaiming the only thing that counts in every part of church life in every opportunity the message of the new creation you see circumcision can seem to be a very hidden thing and it can be very subtle but it's also a visible thing it's visible in a church's priorities what we're taken up with in terms of our time our energy our disputes our attitudes our money all sorts of things and again it's a good question to ask ourselves again and again is verse 15

really true of me is it really true of us the only thing that counts is a new creation can we say can we say with Paul in Philippians 3 the only thing I do the one thing I do is straining forward to what lies

ahead the prize of the upward call in Christ is that our perspective our priority there's a great gulf between a true gospel church and a church which really has circumcision at the centre fourth there's a great gulf in authority a gospel church with the cross at the centre will be a church under biblical apostolic authority where the authority of Paul and the other apostles is cherished and accepted and submitted to it will verse 11 take note of his emphatic large letters it will not verse 17 cause him trouble that is undermine his authority question him a gospel church will recognise the genuine authority of this man to whom

[ 33 : 32 ] God himself gave the gospel word by direct revelation as chapter 1 verse 12 says not from man but by revelation of Jesus Christ a gospel church recognises that Paul speaks for God and that God speaks his authoritative word through Paul whereas a church that is centred on circumcision that has made its peace with the world won't instead it will reject the apparent constriction of Paul's authority in favour of a changing contemporary authority it will not see his large letters it will not listen but it certainly will cause him trouble it will erode his influence it will go on and on doing so so for example it won't listen today won't read the large and clear letters that Paul uses in 1st Timothy 2 where he says he doesn't permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man in the church it won't heed his words large and clear in 1st

Corinthians 11 or Ephesians 5 where he insists that the husband is the head over his wife and it will reject that in order to curry favour with the world nor will it obey today when he says quite clearly that homosexual practice and indeed any extramarital sexual practice is sin to be repented of no instead it will seek to ordain such sin into the church nor when Paul repeatedly insists on the uniqueness of Christ and on the urgent priority of evangelising all nations and all cultures including Jews and Muslims and Hindus and all other religions no it will not listen to that and it will say rather all paths go the same way to God in the end and therefore interfaith fellowship is the way forward so you see a church can use Christian language it can use Christian symbols it can read Bible text it can talk about Jesus but it's not a true church it is no gospel at all if it rejects the authority of Christ's apostles the irony of course is that such a church thinks it's throwing off the shackles of apostolic authority it's getting free and yet the reality is all it is doing is keeping people enslaved in sin verse 13 such people you see have no interest themselves in holiness Paul says they don't even keep the law themselves they can't help you be holy but what they do want to do verse 12 is control you they want to force you to be circumcised they want to force you to submission to their institutional ways so that they can have the kudos and they can have the control C.K.

Barrett I think makes a very shrewd comment on this in his commentary he draws attention to this and says that in recent decades we have seen a loosening of the bonds of doctrine and morality but a tightening of the institutional bonds in church life and that is exactly what we have seen in the mainline denominations in our nation in recent decades certainly in the church of Scotland a tightening a centralising a constricting of the institutional bonds controlling personnel churches money all these sorts of things in fact choking the very life out of individual congregations churches whereas Paul's authority does not seek to control at all but to liberate chapter 4 verse 19 he's not out to shackle as the false teachers are no he wants to drive them to Christ he wants them to be driven to maturity in Christ it's his gospel and his gospel alone that liberates that sets free that takes us out of the bondage of this world and its institutions by crucifying us to this world it's his gospel that liberates us into the life of a new creation for freedom

Christ has set us free only Paul's gospel of power through the cross of Christ can liberate men and women from their bondage to the past from the bondage to our sin so that we can walk in the liberating truth of the gospel day by day so that we can walk in the spirit by faith alone so that we can walk verse 16 according to this rule the liberating gospel of the new creation the knowledge that Christ lives in me by his spirit and nothing else matters and nobody else's say so counts for my salvation or my blessing with God but Christ in his spirit in me that's what liberates to know that I have it all if I have Jesus Christ nobody can demand more from me nobody can give me anything more what can be more liberating than that and Paul says verse 16 that's the way of peace and mercy and it's the only way but it's an open way it's a way open for all who will walk in it for they all who walk in this way they verse 16 are the

[ 39 : 01 ] Israel of God peace and mercy to them even to the Israel of God the NIV translates that better than the ESV here peace and mercy on them who walk according to this rule they are the Israel of God so you see finally the gospel church is a united church these false teachers these Judaizers were saying to the Galatians we can bring you into the true Israel of God the elite just as

today in churches focused on circumcision you have that message we have something better we're the true blue real church because we're the national church we have special privileges we're the church of Rome and we have connection with the past we have the fullness of the spirit we have famous ministers or whatever it might be Paul says no a church with the cross at the center knows that all all who walk by the gospel of

Christ alone are sons of God by faith all who have put on Christ are in Christ all are one in Christ Jesus by faith alone by Christ alone nothing else no two tier divisions no superior status of some because of pedigree or because of knowledge or because of their bank balance as is the case in some churches no verse 18 all who walk according to this rule are brothers by the sheer uniting grace of the Lord Jesus Christ by grace alone and so says Paul to his beloved Galatian church as he ends his letter wake up see the large letters that are facing you on the page see that it's decision time what is it going to be for you my

Galatian church the cross of Christ or circumcision the new creation or a return to the bondage of this present evil age and we're listening in aren't we twenty centuries later as we travel to Galatia and Paul is saying that there's only one way to the peace and mercy of God to walk by this rule this canon to be a true gospel church crucified to the world in its valuations and stigmatized rather by marks of sacrifice centered on the cross alone and powered by a ministry that takes us again and again and again to the riches of the gospel and its proclamation focused on the new creation with an absolute priority for that and the ministry of that above all secondary issues submitted gladly to biblical apostolic authority in all things and united in brotherly love with one another to deviate from that one iota says

Paul is the road to ruin and that's just as true in Glasgow as it is in Galatia so we do well to listen to Paul as he ends his letter to the Galatians wake up listen heed the large letter warning do not be circumcised do not desert him who called you don't be taken in by a different gospel because that is no gospel at all no don't do that instead go on obeying the truth walk in the truth of the gospel walk in the spirit and you will reap if you do not give up for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation and as for all who walk by this rule peace and mercy be upon them even upon the

Israel of God well let's pray our gracious God and Father as we have listened in to these words penned to that church all these years ago we've come to see how like them so often we are and as we've listened to your words to them and understood them so often your word has touched our hearts and we do pray this evening that you would help us to see clearly the great gulf between a church that truly is a gospel church centered upon Christ and his cross alone living for the new creation alone and a church that has slipped from that help us we pray always to be the former always to be in our guard let anything should begin to lead us to being the latter keep us walking in your spirit keep us in step with the truth of the gospel every one of us and all together and may we as brothers and sisters in

[ 44 : 40 ] Christ know the true meaning of the gospel of grace alone through Christ alone guiding your church from beginning to end and we ask it for his glory and honor's sake amen well we end this evening by singing number 579 your hand oh God has guided your joy and one let spr kys Maria mer May to forward