Gal 6:16-18; Rom. 4:9-16; The Parting Benediction on God’s People I. The Recipients of this Blessing II. The Content of this Blessing

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, do you know who you are? Many people enjoy diving into family history. Back in PEI there was a member of the church who had traced his family history back to the 1700s. He could clearly show you on his basement wall where he came from and who his forefathers were. Connected to family history is that of heritage and inheritance. Many parents pass on more than just their last name- they also pass on possessions. Like land or houses- goods are passed to the next generation as well. I received an email once advertising a program that will search your family name and history to see if there is any unclaimed accounts of your forefathers- to see if this money could be claimed by you as a living heir. So then, it is important to know who you are! But as Christians, do we really know our family heritage? Do we know our true family linage- and the blessings that are linked to that heritage of faith? If I were to ask most people about the history of the Reformed church, they would likely link us to Dort in 1618 or perhaps the Reformation of 1517. But our history goes back much further than that! So today, as we conclude our series in the book of Galatians, we find that the God of Israel pronounces His parting blessings on His people.

**I. The Recipients of this Blessing**

In our first point we consider the recipients of these blessings. If v. 16 and 18 pronounce the blessing, the question is this: to whom does this blessing come? Upon whom is it pronounced? Back in the old days when people used to send letters by the USPS, it was vital to get the recipient line correct. If you did not put the right name and address on the front of the letter, your note would get lost in the mail. So Paul addresses this blessing in v. 16 to those who walk by this rule. Now to walk by this rule is to let a certain truth govern your life. To walk this way is to live out of this truth- to be grounded and guided by a set of principles. So what is this rule that guides the walk certain people? What is the principle that unites those who will receive this blessing? In order to answer that question, we have to remember the context. Paul is concluding his letter here- and the rule that guides the walk is this- they walk by the rule of faith! The standard is this- they trust in Jesus Christ! They boast not in their own works- but rather these boast in the cross of Jesus Christ! These people are the ones who are a new creation as v. 15 concluded. They were born again by the Spirit- jointed to Christ by faith! They did not trust in their own ceremonial actions- they did not look to circumcision to save. They refused to boast in man’s ability or to cower beneath these Judaizers. So those who walk by this rule are those who live by faith. Added to this- those who live by faith also walk by way of the Spirit. If you love Jesus, you will keep His commandments. To walk in the way of the Spirit is to produce the fruit of the Spirit. We walk by the Spirit as 5:16 says. They are dedicated to walking by the rule of obedience. This is really the point that Paul has been making this whole book. He has refuted the wrong use of the law- obedience to the ceremonies cannot and does not save. But that does not make us lawless- rather we seek to obey the Law as we love the LORD our God and love our neighbor. Doing good to all- through love serving one another. So the Christian life is a walk of faith and obedience- which is in fact the way in which Abraham walked as well. Living by faith- and trusting in the LORD his God to save while he also sought to obey. God’s people will continue to live their own lives in gratitude for this great salvation.

As we continue in v. 16 we find these words as well- peace and mercy are for those who walk by this rule and upon the Israel of God. In reading this you may be thinking that Paul has two groups in view. One walked by the rule of faith and the other group is the Israel of God. But this verse could be translated- even upon the Isarel of God. Paul is not introducing a new group, but rather equating the two. Those who walk according to the truth of this book are in fact the Israel of God. Remember that Paul has been making this point all along- it is not circumcision that makes you a child of God- the mark of the flesh does not make you a child of Abraham. Being born of certain parents does not make you right with God! No, it is having the faith of Abraham! This living by faith is what makes a person a true Israelite! Paul makes the same point in our reading from Rom. 4:16- the promise does not depend on the Law but is guaranteed to the one who shares the faith of Abraham. Also in Gal. 3:26- we are sons God by faith. If we are in Christ, then we are Abraham’s offspring and heirs. Or as we find in Phil. 3:3- we are the real circumcision. So it is clear, Abraham is the true father of us all- the father of all who live by faith! We are the true Israel of God! If we could trace our family history back far enough- we would not only see our biological forefathers- but since we live by faith we would see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in our family tree! So the question that these Galatian Christians needed to answer is this- who is the true Israelite? These Judaizers or the church? What makes someone the true Israel of God? Is it the works of the ceremonial law- circumcision or some other work of man’s hand? No- it is faith! So who is true Jew- who is true child of Abraham? Those who are joined to Christ by faith! This family heritage is not external, but internal! Being circumcised in the heart- believing the promises! This is what makes us closer to Abraham- more like Abraham than the ethnic Jews of today! The church is the true Israel of God! OT and NT saints that trusted in God’s appointed mediator! This is what unites us! So we are the members of the covenant- the Israel of God- and as such the promises and blessing of the covenant belong to us as well! So now we continue by considering the content of the blessing that God pronounces on His people.

**II. The Content of this Blessing**

In our second point we see that there are specific blessings that God has reserved for His people. From the pen of Paul in v. 16- peace and mercy be upon these! Now being a part of a family usually includes certain blessings. Specifically when it comes to passing down these blessing to the next generation. Family heirlooms and other matters of the estate. So some parents pass down a family business to their children. Others pass down coins or other collectables. Sometimes parents pass down things to their children that their children do not want! Collectables like Precious Moments, China plates or other knickknacks that do not have lasting value. You may receive something that you do not want from the estate as well. So what about those who belong to the family of God? What specific heirlooms or possessions do the Israel of God receive? What is the birthright that all of God’s people share? Remember that Jacob stole the blessing and firstborn birthright from his brother, Esau! Praise God that we cannot have this blessing stolen from us! For the first blessing that belongs to all of God’s people is that of peace! “Eraine” in the Greek- meaning rest, quiet, tranquility and peace. Those who are part of God’s family- who have ransomed by the blood of Jesus- enjoy a security and harmony. They will be at peace- and live at peace! Sinner who were once enemies are now friends- once cast off are now dearly loved! It is interesting that even to this day- the traditional Jewish greeting is “shalom alekhem.” Whenever you enter the house of a Jewish family, the father will say- “shalom alekhem.” Peace be upon you. Peace is the quiet heart of those justified by faith. But this pronouncement of peace has now become the Christian’s birthright! Peace be upon you- all is well and will be well with you! Added to peace, we have mercy. Mercy is a kindness shown to the miserable. It is relief given to the afflicted. Help given to those in times of trouble. God’s mercy is the help directed to those living in desperate need! We need mercy because we deserve nothing but anger and wrath! We need mercy because we are poor and miserable creatures! We cannot save our own souls- we cannot earn our own way. So God in His mercy gives us what we need.

And then let’s jump to the last verse- the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace is a gift that is undeserved. And grace is a loving gift given to the poor. God’s grace is contrasted to man’s work- by grace we are saved- not by our works. Grace is God’s lovingkindness- in that we are lovingly blessed by God. God’s favor has fallen upon us. Again- this grace is our through Jesus Christ! We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! What Christ has earned for us- forgiveness and life- He freely grants to us. The grace of Christ will be with our spirit. Not only do we have His peace, we have His presence! Christ goes with us- by way of His Spirit- giving us the comforting presence we need! He goes with us in our coming and going. Where can we go that His gracious presence is not felt? He is with us- never will He leave us- never will He forsake us! Where we are, He will be! His presence remains our constant source of comfort and peace! He will never leave you alone as an orphan as He promises in John 14. He will come to us and will give us His comforter! This is the work of our gracious God!

Before we close, there remains the application of these words and of this book as a whole. First of all, if you are in Christ, then these blessings are yours! You are the Israel of God- and to you belongs the peace, mercy, grace and presence of Christ Jesus! This is incredibly good news! You can have a calm and quiet soul- comfort in life and in death! Because you belong- you are the Israel of God! He is your God, and you are His people! You also have a great reason to rejoice- because God’s mercy and peace are yours and will never be taken away! Joy comes from a heart that knows and appreciates the gifts it has received! Its hard to be joyful when you are not very thankful! So as we meditate on the message of this book, give thanks for the sufficiency of Jesus Christ! Boast in the cross! Delight in that Jesus has secured your complete salvation! Be glad that you do not have to work for or earn your place in God’s house. The ceremonies and rituals that prepared the way for Jesus have now been fulfilled- no longer practiced. Our hearts are circumcised by the Spirit- we are a new creation- we have eternal life through Him!

As we close our sermon and this book, understanding the proper use of the Law is critical. Can the law save? No- not what my hands have done. Circumcision matters not- only faith working through love. Our book opened this way- grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. To him be the glory forever! Understanding who this book is written to helps us apply it rightly! Do you know who you are? You are the Israel of God- the chosen race and a holy nation! The God of Israel pronounces His parting blessings on His people. So now our book concludes- peace and mercy be upon you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits. Amen.