

Galatians

Our Ministry to One Another

Galatians 6:1-10

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July 31, 2005

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Scripture

In the book *Stories for the Journey*, William R. White tells about a European seminary professor named Hans and his wife, Enid. World War II forced them to flee to America where he found a job teaching. He was warm and gentle, loved by his students, and he brought Scripture to life for them.

Hans and Enid were very much in love. Nearly every day they took long walks together, holding hands, and they always sat close in church, until Enid died, overwhelming Hans with sorrow. Worried because he wouldn't eat nor take walks, the seminary President, along with three other friends, visited him regularly, but he remained lonely and depressed. Experiencing the dark night of the soul, Hans told his friends, "I am no longer able to pray to God. In fact, I am not certain I believe in God any more."

After a moment of silence the seminary President said, "Then we will believe for you. We will make your confession for you. We will pray for you."

So the four men met daily for prayer, asking God to restore the gift of faith to their dear friend.

Many months later, as the four gathered with Hans, he smiled and said, "It is no longer necessary for you to pray *for* me. Today, I would like you to pray *with* me."

The dark night of the soul had passed. Instead of carrying Hans to Jesus on a stretcher, they had carried him on their prayers. This is a wonderful example of carrying each other's burdens.¹

In the section we are studying today, the apostle Paul explains our ministry to one another. Let us read Galatians 6:1-10:

¹ Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you

¹ William R. White, *Stories for the Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1988), 47-49.

also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, ⁵ for each one should carry his own load.

⁶ Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:1-10)

Introduction

General William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army in the late nineteenth century. He was a remarkable man whose ministry has influenced countless numbers of people.

Late in his life, General Booth was unable to attend one of the Salvation Army's international conventions because of his failing health. So he sent a telegram to the delegates at the convention bearing a message that contained one word: "OTHERS!"²

In the popular comic strip *Peanuts*, Lucy asks Charlie Brown, "Why are we here on earth?"

Charlie Brown replies, "To make others happy."

Lucy ponders his reply for a moment and then asks, "Then why are the others here?"³

"One another" is a key phrase in the New Testament. "Love one another" is found at least a dozen times in the New Testament, along with "pray for one another" (James 5:16), "encourage one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:11), "be devoted to one another"

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Free (Galatians)* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1975), 139.

³ *Ibid.*, 139.

(Romans 12:10), “offer hospitality to one another” (1 Peter 4:9), and many other similar admonitions.

In the section before us, Paul adds another “one another.” He says in Galatians 6:2a: **“Carry each other’s burdens.”** The Christian who is led by the Spirit and not by his sinful nature thinks of others and how he can minister to them.

Lesson

In Galatians 6:1-10, Paul describes two important ways Christians minister to one another: bearing burdens and sharing blessings.

I. Bearing Burdens (6:1-5)

The first way Christians minister to one another is by bearing burdens.

Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians to refute the teaching of the legalists. Legalists are not interested in bearing burdens. Instead, they add to the burdens of others (cf. Acts 15:10).

Jesus criticized the Pharisees—the legalists of his day—for this sin. He said concerning them in Matthew 23:4, “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

You see, legalists are always harder on other people than they are on themselves. The Spirit-led Christian, however, finds ways to bear the burdens of others.

Paul presents a hypothetical case of a believer who is tripped up and falls into sin. The Greek word for **“caught”** carries the idea of being surprised, like slipping on ice. The apostle is referring to a person who has slipped up badly and is not involved in deliberate and willful sin.

So why does Paul use this illustration? Because nothing reveals the sin of legalism better than the way legalists treat those who have sinned. In this paragraph, Paul is really contrasting the

way legalists and Spirit-led Christians deal with someone caught in a sin.

A. *A Contrast in Aim*

The first thing we notice is a contrast in aim.

Legalists tend to exploit the sinning brother, while Spirit-led Christians seek to restore the brother in love.

Paul says in Galatians 6:1, **“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.”** The word **“restore”** means “to restore a broken bone.”

One Sunday evening in March 2004 we received a phone call informing us that our son Jon had just broken his arm. He was at a Youth Group meeting, and had fallen off a truck. When we arrived at the scene, it was evident that Jon had broken his left arm about 4 inches from his wrist. We took him to the Emergency Room at the hospital. After a long time Jon was eventually seen by an orthopedic specialist who reset Jon’s broken bone. I can still feel Jon’s pain as he screamed when they reset his broken bone.

If you have ever had a broken bone, you know how painful it is to have it set. The sinning believer is like a broken bone in the body of Christ, and he needs to be restored. Spirit-led Christians will seek to help the erring brother.

Legalists, however, instead of trying to restore the erring brother, will condemn the sinner and use him to make themselves look good.

Spirit-led Christians, on the other hand, are not competing with other Christians or challenging them to become as good as they are.

Legalists, however, live by competition and comparison, and try to make themselves look good and others look bad. That’s why Paul says in verse 4, **“Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.”**

B. A Contrast in Attitude

The second thing we notice is a contrast in attitude.

Legalists have an attitude of pride and condemnation, while Spirit-led Christians approach the whole matter in meekness and love.

Paul says in Galatians 6:1, **“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”**

Spirit-led Christians know that they live by the grace of God and that no-one is immune from falling. They are humble and know that they have many weaknesses. Their motto is, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Legalists, however, don’t follow Paul’s admonition to **“watch yourself”** because they don’t think that they will commit sin. Their attitude is that they are so committed to Christ that they will not sin.

I remember myself as a young legalist at the University of Cape Town, thinking that I could never fall into sin. I remember saying to my roommates, “I could never fall because I love Christ too much.”

And one of my roommates said, “Freddy, don’t ever say that. Think of the apostle Peter. He spent three years in the company of our Lord himself. And then look how grievously he fell when he denied Christ.”

Over the years I have come to see how foolish I was to think that I could not fall into sin, especially as I have come to realize how dreadfully deceitful my heart is (cf. Jeremiah 17:9).

There is a second contrast in attitude. Legalists want to *implement* laws whereas Spirit-led Christians want to *fulfill* the law of Christ. And what is the law of Christ? Jesus said in John 13:34: “A new commandment I give you: Love one another.” Paul told the Galatians in Galatians 5:13: “Serve one another in love.”

Paul is exhorting “tender loving care” in restoring a sinning brother. If you had a broken bone that needed to be restored, you

would much rather have a doctor set it who exercises tender loving care as he sets it, wouldn't you?

The orthopedic specialist who set Jon's broken arm did not do a good job in this respect. He told Jon that setting his arm would not hurt. He said to Jon that his young, six year-old daughter had broken her arm a few weeks earlier, and when he set her broken arm, she did not cry. Saying that to Jon was careless and unkind, because it did hurt. It hurt a lot, and it would have been much better to tell the truth. It would have been much better to say that it was going to hurt a lot for just a short time and then he would have some relief from the sharp pain.

When seeking to restore a broken life, we should tell the truth, but tell it in love. We should use tender loving care when we seek to restore a broken life.

C. A Contrast in Actions

The third thing we notice is a contrast in actions.

Legalists add to the burdens of the sinning brother, while Spirit-led Christians seek to bear one another's burdens.

Paul says in Galatians 6:2, **“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”**

The Greek word for **“burden”** here in verse 2 is *baros*, and it means “something heavy.” This kind of burden is meant to be shared. Legalists do nothing to ease the burdens of the sinning brother. Spirit-led Christians help share the load and carry it for the sinning brother.

Martin Luther gives us a beautiful word picture of the application of this command. He says: “Run unto him [i.e. the one who has fallen into sin], and reaching out your hand, raise him up again, comfort him with sweet words, and embrace him with motherly arms.”⁴

⁴ Martin Luther, *Galatians* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1535), 538.

I think the difference between fathers and mothers is a good illustration of the difference between legalists and Spirit-led Christians.

When my son, Jon, was a little boy he was playing with a stick. I had warned him that he could hurt himself, but of course he kept on playing, and it wasn't long before he did hurt himself. What happened then? Jon burst into tears and ran to his mother. She reached out her arms, raised him up, comforted him with sweet words, and embraced him with her motherly arms.

What was my reaction? The usual reaction. I said, "Jon, I told you that you would hurt yourself playing with that stick."

Now I do believe that Moms and Dads react differently to their children when they get hurt. Moms are like Spirit-led Christians because they seek to bear the child's burden, whereas Dads are like legalists because they do nothing to ease their child's burden.

So, the next time your child gets hurt, comfort him or her and think about the difference between Spirit-led Christians and legalists!

By the way, there is no contradiction between verse 2 where we are told "to carry each other's burdens" and verse 5 where we are told that "each one should carry his own load." As John Stott says:

The Greek word for burden is different, *baros* (verse 2) meaning "a weight or heavy load," and *photion* (verse 5) being "a common term for a man's pack." So we are to bear one another's "burdens" which are too heavy for a man to bear alone, but there is a burden which we cannot share—indeed do not need to because it is a pack light enough for every man to carry himself—and that is our responsibility to God on the day of judgment. On that day you cannot carry my pack and I cannot carry yours. "Each man will have to bear his own load."⁵

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today series (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 159-160.

II. Sharing Blessings (6:6-10)

The second way Christians minister to one another is by sharing blessings.

Just as “one another” is a key phrase in the New Testament, so is the word “fellowship” (which is translated as “**share**” in verse 6).

From the very beginning of the church, sharing was one of the marks of Christian experience (cf. Acts 2:41-47). In the context, Paul is referring to sharing material blessings with one another.

A. *The Precept (6:6, 10)*

Paul begins with a precept, urging us to share with one another.

He gives us the precept in verse 6: “**Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.**” Then reiterates it in verse 10, “**Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**”

The teacher of the Word of God shares spiritual treasures. And those who are taught ought to share material treasures. Remember, Jesus told us that what we do with material things is an indication of how we value spiritual things. He said in Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

B. *The Principle (6:7-8)*

We must realize that there is a spiritual principle that lies behind the precept.

God does not command Christians to give simply that pastors and teachers and missionaries might have their material needs met, but that Christians might receive a greater blessing. And so Paul says in verses 7-8, “**Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.**

A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

The basic principle of sowing and reaping is found throughout the Bible. God has ordained that we reap what we sow. The farmer sows corn and expects to reap corn.

But God has not only told us *what* to sow, he has also told us to be careful *where* we sow. The old adage is true: “Sow a thought, and you reap an act. Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit, and you reap a character. Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.”⁶

Paul sees the material blessings as the seed, but there are two possible soils: the sinful nature and the Spirit. We can use our material blessings to promote the sinful nature or we can use our material blessings to promote the things of the Spirit. Once we have finished sowing, however, we cannot change the harvest.

Sowing to the sinful nature produces a harvest of destruction, a harvest of moral decay. Sowing to the Spirit produces a harvest of moral and spiritual growth.

Paul says, **“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked”** (6:7). The Greek carries the idea of a person thumbing their nose at God.

Ernest Hemingway became famous for thumbing his nose at morality and at God, declaring that his own life proved a person could do anything he wanted without paying the consequences. Like many others before and after him, he considered the ideas of the Bible to be antiquated and outdated, completely useless to modern man and a hindrance to his pleasure and self-fulfillment. Moral laws were to him a religious superstition that had no relevance. In a mocking parody of the Lord’s Prayer he wrote, “Our nada [Spanish for “nothing”] who art in nada.” But instead of proving the impunity of infidelity, the end of Hemingway’s life proved the folly of mocking God. His debauched life led him into such

⁶ This quotation is attributed to Charles Reade, 1814-1884.

complete despair and hopelessness that he committed suicide by putting a bullet into his head.⁷

Other famous authors, such as Sinclair Lewis and Oscar Wilde, who openly attacked the divine moral standard and thumbed their noses at God, mocking his Word and his law, were nonetheless subject to that law. Lewis died a pathetic alcoholic in a third-rate clinic in Italy, and Wilde ended up an imprisoned homosexual, in shame and disgrace. Near the end of his life he wrote, “I forgot somewhere along the line that what you are in secret you will some day cry aloud from the housetop.”⁸

C. *The Promise (6:9)*

Having given us the precept (6:6) and the principle behind the precept (6:7-8), Paul now gives us a promise in verse 9: **“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”**

The seed that is planted does not bear fruit immediately. There are seasons in the soul just as there are seasons in nature, and we must give the seed time to take root and bear fruit. There is no such thing as instant character in the Christian. It takes time to cultivate and bear fruit in the Christian life. But if we persevere, we shall bear fruit.

Conclusion

So, Christians can minister in two very effective ways to one another. One is by bearing burdens. And the other is by sharing blessings.

Let me close by asking you: Are you a burden bearer? And do you share your blessings with others?

⁷ John F. MacArthur, *Galatians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), 184-185.

⁸ John F. MacArthur, *Galatians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), 185.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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