

Galatians Chapter 6

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Whenever I finish a book, I always ponder "Why did God want me to study this book?" I'm convinced He wanted me to teach Ephesians and Galatians over the last 12 weeks. The question is why, and what does that have to do with all of you reading these lessons? Best I can figure, God wanted to assure that I'm saved, "can't blow that" but I can be a bad witness to Him, when I get caught up in sin, or worse the times where I'm thinking, "God must be impressed with what I'm doing"! Both letters and Galatians in particular, are in effect written as encouragement to believers to stick to believing Jesus died for all our sins, and we can't add to it by doing anything more! I'm aware that's common knowledge to us. Still in times where we're messing up or trusting in our religious efforts, Galatians reminds us that Jesus alone did it all. As my father asked me when I explained the Gospel message to him years ago, "What do we do now?" What's the point of living? Yes we need to provide for ourselves and our families but if that's all there is to life, ultimately it's a waste of time. As I pondered why did God create us, the idea that He made us for a purpose, started to sink in: God created us to glorify Him through good works so we can be a good witness for Him.

OK John, that's all well and good and I suspect deep down we believe that. What does any of this have to do with Chapter 6 of Galatians? As most of you know there are no chapter breaks. The first part of the chapter focuses on encouraging other believers who are well, turning to sin which can be as simple as trusting in anything other than what Jesus did, let alone turning from how God wants us to live. As I pounded home in my last lesson, freedom in Christ doesn't mean we can sin all we want. It means that we're to live as a witness for Him and live as God desires we live. It means we obey such laws as to not steal, sexual immorality, etc. The issues isn't about sinning enough to lose our salvation it's about using our lives again, as a witness for Him.

Which leads me back to Chapter 6. Let's be honest we all fail at times and having other believers deal with us to encourage us to go down the right path is a good thing. Yes, when we deal with people who turn from God there's always the danger of them influencing us. Of course, we don't want "bad apples" to ruin things for the church, but at the same time we need to remember that God loves people, and He wants to see as many people as possible turn to Him and be a witness for Him. It does not mean we hit people on the head with our bibles and say, "repent or else". All that does is put a dent in our bible and it makes people turn away. Verse 1 of this chapter emphasizes "gentleness". It's considered a Christian virtue to gently encourage people to turn back to God. Once people "taste" how God expect us to live, gentle encouragement or living by example are the best way to help others go back on the right path. I listened to a sermon by a famous local pastor who asked someone struggling with a sin to visit him on a weekly basis with a report card. The struggler stayed clean for a long time because he feared what it meant to face that pastor. Just saying that's one way of gentleness to ask someone to report regularly to them to encourage them to live as God desires.

That is why Verse 2 says to "bear each other's burdens" in that God wants us to work with believers so we can each work together to grow in our faith. There's a fancy Christian word called "sanctification". It simply refers to the time between when Christians first get saved to when we go to heaven. It's when we grow in our faith and relationship with God. Part of the growth is helping others when they struggle in their faith. Verse 2 seems contradictory to Verse 5 which says we must each bear our own load. Paul in that verse is discussing the fact that God will judge each of us, based on how we live as a witness for Him. So in one sense we're to help each other, but each believer will be judged based on how He lived!

I don't believe Christians are punished in heaven, but we can lose eternal rewards if we're a bad witness for Him.

From there we get the reminder that those who taught are to share with those who teach. No, it doesn't mean I'm demanding payment! God called me to do this, and I can't stand not doing it! I suspect it just means that those who benefit by growing in God's word should help support where they learn. What I was taught a long time ago is first to give where one is "growing" (i.e., one's church). After that, if God puts a ministry on your heart and you see it bearing fruit, support it! Paul didn't write this to demand a payment for him. I suspect he wanted to encourage those who are teaching the Gospel message correct to be supported for the time and trouble of their studied.

Then Paul jumps back to the reminder in effect to "keep at it". Verse 7 says that God is not mocked. It is another reminder of whatever path we go down, God is aware of it and will work to get us or keep us on the "straight and narrow" because He desires we all be a good witness for Him! All of us go through times where we feel like we're beating our heads against the wall and not making any progress. Paul is giving us a reminder that God called us for a specific path in life. (I always say if you're not sure what God wants you to do at any moment, pray! God can't resist a prayer of surrender to His will!)

Paul also has a closing remark about why he wrote this letter. Many Christians Paul wrote to here, did turn back to Judaism thinking they had to live like Jewish people in order to be saved. It is an example in effect of trying to impress God with our good works in order to earn salvation. Paul pounds the idea all through the letter that we can't be "more saved" by trying to impress God with works. I know that if we live as God desires there are rewards in heaven. Those are separate concepts. One's about trying to earn our salvation and the other is about doing what God desires as a witness for Him. Hope that helps!

What is fascinating about this letter is there's no introduction. There is no, "It's your old friend Paul, I miss seeing you, hope all is well!" Instead, in effect Paul is ticked off that many there were turning to Judaism from Christianity. Paul cares about our salvation and wants to see all believers grow in God. So Paul gets "right to the point" as he started this letter. If you study Paul's other letters, he often will mention some people there he's thinking about. One reason for including such names is to prove what Paul is sending is not a forgery. In order to do that here, the letter states that Paul signed the letter for validation that it's not a forgery! Remember that the Galatians knew Paul and had people there who'd know about him. Some speculate Paul hand wrote this letter himself and others say he dictated it. All that matters is Paul included enough proof to say, "this is the real deal". He gives a final reminder that circumcision in the sense that trusting in it for salvation is a waste of time. (It's similar to the false idea that some people trust in their baptism as a form of salvation as opposed to what it is a public statement of one's faith in Jesus!)

By Verse 17 Paul states that he "bears the marks of Jesus". Not it does not mean Paul was crucified. It is just a way of saying Paul identifies with the cross. It's always been amazing to me all those who will wear a cross around their necks and not realize what it represents. In effect it was the cruelest form of a death ever invented. (First by the Persians and perfected by the Romans!) It represents how Jesus who is God suffered on our behalf. It is God Himself paying the price for our sins, so we don't have to. That is why God wanted me to study this book again. To remind myself and everyone reading we can't add to that, or can we lose what we believe in. Hope all of this has been helpful. The letter ends with Paul reminding us that the grace of God (eternal peace despite our sins) rests upon us. Remember that it is a blessing to those who were turning from Jesus but still trusted in that promise.

By the way, in my original study of this book 20 years ago is a list of my sources. Hasn't changed. All the best to you and hopefully we'll talk soon when I take on another project! If you're interest in seeing more of what I wrote on Galatians, click on one of the two links below. Everything else below is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Until next week thanks again for reading this, John.