

July 27, 2008

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Let Us Not Lose Heart in Doing Good

Galatians 6:6-10

Throughout this letter Paul has been preaching the gospel – the whole gospel – not the abbreviated gospel – but the whole gospel in all its glory and grace and its implications in our lives. Salvation is the grace-gift of God – nothing we have done, can do, or could do – would ever be enough to earn it. We are brought to Christ by grace, justified by grace, sanctified and glorified by the grace of God. On the cross, Jesus Christ redeemed us from the fall, purchased our freedom from sin and condemnation, by grace doing for us what we could never do ourselves. Our response to this grace is not to work harder to be worthy of it – but simply to stand in the freedom which Christ won for us. Christian liberty is not a license to keep on sinning – but to receive salvation is to begin a process of working it out in our lives. Though the heavy, unwearable yoke of the law has been removed – we live at the cross, dying to those things to which Christ died – putting to death the deeds of the flesh – walking by the Spirit.

We recognize that the Christian life is a life of war – a war between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is hostile to the Spirit and the Spirit to the flesh and there can never be peace between the two. Peace is only possible when one of the combatants is dead. And that can only come as we walk by the Spirit. **Walking by the Spirit means that we are actively engaged in killing sin. And the way we walk is to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. And the way we set our minds on the things of the Spirit is to set our minds on the word of God and the realities of what it imparts.**

To walk by the Spirit also means that we recognize our weakness in the flesh – our proneness to wander from God – our profound inability to keep His law – and with humility of heart and mind lean into the things of the Spirit with all our energy. It is recognizing that although Christ won the war for our freedom on the cross, the battle against lust, greed and pride still rages within – and we dare not let down our guard for a moment. It is walking with a holy humility before God and man. **Humility is having an accurate estimate of yourself in the face of God** – knowing that without God we are without hope.

Walking by the Spirit also means that we are bearing one another's burdens. If we are bearing one another's burdens, we are fulfilling the law of Christ which says – **'Love God supremely and love your neighbor as yourself'**. **And in this context, Paul makes it clear that it is helping to shoulder the burden of our brother or sister when they fall.** It is taking the time and effort it requires to help your brother or sister recognize their sin and lead them to the throne of grace for timely help. It is lifting up your brother's hands that are drooping – strengthening his weak knees – helping the joints to heal and not be twisted – working hard at being at peace and walking in holiness – seeing to it that you are leading one another to the throne of grace.

And so in this same context of walking by the Spirit, Paul says: *The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.* Galatians 6:6 If you are not aware of the context – you might get the idea that Paul just plops this verse down haphazardly. But if we know one thing about Paul is that he is not haphazard when it comes to the word of God. And context is important. Saying the same thing in different contexts produces different results. When our children are young, one of the ways we teach them language is to ask them questions and give them the answer. When our granddaughter was with us earlier this year, one of the things we had fun with was asking her “How big are you?” And then we'd throw our hands in the air and say, “I'm soooo big!” And she would copy us and look real cute. But you can't use this in every context. For example, if your wife were to ask, “Do my hips look big to you?” you might not want to throw your hands in the air and exclaim, “Your hips are soooo big.” Context is important.

What I think Paul is saying here in this context, is that the one who is walking by the Spirit – killing sin, setting his mind on the things of heaven by setting himself before the word of God, bearing one another's burdens, recognizing his own weakness in the flesh – **is also the one who cheerfully gives to support those who preach and teach the word of God.** And the thing is – this is a mark of those who are walking by the Spirit.

This is a somewhat difficult text in that it may sound self-serving coming from your pastor. But that would be wrong on two counts: the first being that I'm not picking and choosing texts to either tickle your ears nor to line my pockets – this happens to be next in line and I would be a poor pastor to not give you the whole story. I am compelled to preach the word of God whether I receive anything material from this work or not. That is just the call on my life. The second reason it is not self-serving is that Paul – the premier preacher of the New Testament evidently felt that this was important enough to set it down in writing and obviously did not feel that he was self-serving in doing so.

And this is not the only place Paul brings this up. In 1 Timothy 5:17-18 he tells Timothy: *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain, and, The laborer deserves his wages.* 1 Timothy 5:17-18 And in 1 Corinthians 9:11-12a he asks the rhetorical question: *If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?* 1 Corinthians 9:11-12a

The point Paul is making is that **those under the ministry of the word have a Spirit-led responsibility to give to those who are teaching the word.** This is important for several reasons. Teaching the word of God in the church is essential. Without sound, whole-counsel-of-God biblical teaching, we will not know God as we ought – our worship and appreciation of Him will be shallow – our obedience to His word will be weak – and our testimony in the community will suffer. It is important to support those who preach and teach also because this is their main job. Whatever else pastors think they need to do – **prayer, meditating and studying on the word of God and preaching it is their main occupation.** As Lee Iaccoca once said: *'Keep the main thing the main thing.'* Supporting those who preach and teach allows them to take that time to pray and meditate and study.

And this I think sheds more light on the next verse which says: *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.* Galatians 6:7 Now this is true in the general sense that if you plant apple trees – you're generally going to get apples – not tomatoes. If you want tomatoes you need to plant tomato seeds. But Paul uses this in the particular sense of sowing to the ministry of the word. Listen to how he puts it together: *The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.* Galatians 6:6-7

Paul uses this sowing – giving metaphor in 2 Corinthians 9: *The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 It is clear that when he talks about sharing all good things with the one who teaches that he is talking about contributing to their support – and then he gives the warning – that if you don't want to share in that support – it is not the preacher or the teacher you have to deal with – it is God. *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked;*

And then he goes on to make the point that when you give to the support of the ministry you are actually planting something that will bear fruit. **That is in your giving, they will have their needs met and you will reap a harvest:** *For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.* Galatians 6:8 We need to understand that when we pander to the flesh – to pleasing ourselves and not one another – when we indulge the flesh with its passions and lusts – we WILL reap a harvest that looks just like the stuff we've been planting. Now the deceit and treachery of sin tells us that the stuff we are planting looks good, looks sweet. But when the brilliant sun shows up after the night of sowing to our passions – the stuff doesn't look so good anymore.

Like the guy who fell in love with an opera singer. He hardly knew her, since his only view of the singer was through binoculars - from the third balcony. He was convinced he could live "happily ever after" married to a voice like that. He scarcely noticed that she was considerably older than he. Nor did he care that she walked with a limp. Her clear, pure soprano voice would take them through whatever might come. After a whirlwind romance and a hurry-up ceremony, they were off for their honeymoon. She began to prepare for their first night together. As he watched, his chin dropped to his chest. She plucked out her glass eye and plopped it into a container on the night-stand. She pulled off her wig, ripped off her false eyelashes, yanked out her dentures, unstrapped her artificial leg, and smiled at him as she slipped off her glasses that hid her hearing aid. Stunned and horrified, he gasped, **"For goodness sake, woman, sing, sing, SING!"**

Don't be deceived – God is not mocked – we reap what we sow. We cannot sow wild oats and then sit back and pray for crop failure. This is an inexorable law of God. And look at the implication here: **if we pander to the flesh – what results is corruption.** There really isn't a lot of wiggle room here. The word literally describes a process of corruption that ends in destruction. Using this word 'corruption' 2 Peter 2:12 says: *But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction* ' 2 Peter 2:12 The two times Peter uses this descriptive word it is translated 'destroyed'. And this speaks of eternal corruption or destruction – not just a little rot. And this is contrasted with *'the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.'*

So what is this saying to us? I think it says a number of things to us. **Firstly, I believe it says that if we have a pattern and habit of life that panders to the flesh, then we will reap what we sow – namely eternal destruction.** Just as sowing to the Spirit reaps salvation – sowing to the flesh reaps damnation. Some would read this text and think that reaping a little corruption with a little flesh sowing is not so bad. But that is not what Paul is saying. Sowing to the flesh – pandering to our appetites and passions – has the consequence of missing out on eternal life. Again, as we have said in the past – the warnings in the Bible have the effect of awakening the lost to salvation and of keeping the faithful, faithful. Paul is not saying that those who have been truly converted and born again run the risk of falling away to eternal destruction. **But what is explicit in the text is that if you think you are a Christian and yet habitually sow to the flesh – don't expect to reap eternal life.**

The second thing is that the specific sowing Paul is talking about here is in relation to the one being taught the word and sharing all good things with his teacher. **In other words there is a relationship between what he is doing with his money and eternal life.** We might say it this way: **We demonstrate that we have been born again and we honor God and His word when we take our money which might have been used for our own personal advantage, or security, and give it to support the ministry of the word at home and abroad.** Now I am stretching the context a bit here because Paul seems to be speaking locally – however, he was speaking to the churches in Galatia to which teachers of the word, including Paul were ministering – some of them itinerantly and some homegrown. However I think this is consistent with the tone and tenor of this passage and in no way tortures the text unrealistically. **On the other hand, if we spend our money on our own private pleasures – if we are deceived and think there is no connection between how we spend our money and eternal life – then God is mocked, and our greed will reap corruption.**

Lastly, in contrast to the one who sows to the flesh, *'the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.'* And again, if we understand the context here – it is in relation to our support of the ministry of the word. **Which tells us that how we spend our money has eternal significance** – either for corruption or for eternal life. Not that just giving money will somehow guarantee eternal life – but the way we spend our resources is a great indication of our spiritual condition. There are attitudes toward money and giving that cannot continue with real, saving faith in the all-sufficiency of Christ. Sowing to the Spirit is finding out where God intends to produce a crop of goodness and sowing the seed of your resources there. And sowing to the Spirit here means supporting those who teach and preach the word with your money.

So Paul, still in the broader context of walking by the Spirit, encourages the Galatians: *Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.* Galatians 6:9 Again, this is a characteristic of those who are walking by the Spirit – perseverance – not growing weary, in doing good – literally – **well doing. Those who walk by the Spirit do so with perseverance.** It is doing what we have been commanded to do even if we do not see much tangible result. The promise is that we **will** reap – **if** we do not grow weary. And the implication is that if we do grow weary – if we do lose heart – we will not reap the good reward. **Which means,** given the clear revelation of Scripture that those who are chosen, will persevere – will endure – all the way to glory – **that if we somehow fall by the wayside – our commitment to Christ was not what we thought it was.**

Walking by the Spirit means that we persevere, endure, not lose heart. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24:13: *'But the one who endures to the end; it is he who shall be saved'*. Matthew 24:13 Endurance is the hallmark of those who are walking by the Spirit. When I think of what it means by not losing heart I think of men like David Livingstone, the pioneer missionary to Africa, who walked over 29,000 miles to spread the Good News. His wife died early in their ministry; he ministered half blind; and he faced stiff opposition from his Scottish brethren; and he persevered.

I think of men like **Victor Plymire** who traveled the length and breadth of Tibet in the early part of this century; slogging through snowfields and avalanches, facing dangers from nature and men, burying his wife and son on some nameless mountainside in Tibet; stopping at every nomads tent and Tibetan village he came to just for the opportunity to share the gospel.

I think of men like **Charles Simeon** who ministered to a congregation in England who for the first twelve years of his ministry refused to let him preach the Sunday afternoon service but hired an assistant and changed the locks to keep him out. They locked the pew doors on Sunday mornings and those who owned them refused to come or to let others sit in their pews – and so Charles Simeon ministered to those who did come standing in the aisles and corners. When he tried to visit his parishioners, hardly a door would open to him. When he did finally get a legal decision that the pew holders could not lock their pews – he never used it. He simply let the relentless, steady ministry of the Word and prayer and his witness in the community batter down the defense and overcome the resistance of cold hearts until he had, as he said the **'joy of ministering to a united and affectionate flock'** – thirty-three years after he had begun.

He eventually served the Lord in that church, Trinity Church in Cambridge, for fifty-four years until his death in 1836. When after 49 years of ministry a close friend wrote and asked him how he had persevered through all of the opposition and persecution he responded: **'My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake...let us rejoice in the remembrance that our Holy Head has surmounted all His suffering and triumphed over death. Let us follow Him patiently; we shall soon be partakers of His victory.'** **Walking by the Spirit means that we persevere, endure, not lose heart.**

And Paul's concluding thought on this comes in verse 10: **So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.** Galatians 6:10 If we understand the context again, **we understand that the good here we do to all people** and especially those of the household of the faith – **is the good that comes from our resources.** Walking by the Spirit means that we are doing good – giving of our time and resources to those in the world, and especially toward those in the church. **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** Ephesians 2:10

Walking by the Spirit means that we are actively engaged in killing sin; setting our minds on the things of the Spirit; drinking deeply of the well of water in His word and letting it transform our thinking. Walking by the Spirit means that we recognize our own weakness in the flesh and are shouldering the burden of our brother or sister when they fall. It means that we are contributing to the support of those who preach and teach the word. And finally it means that we persevere and not lose heart.

Our gracious God and heavenly Father,

Grant that we would be Spirit-filled, Spirit-led lovers of Jesus – sin-killing, burden-bearing, Spirit-sowing men and women who do not grow weary in doing good. Cause our hearts to be inflamed with a deep desire for the things of heaven and to saturate our minds with Your word and the realities that it imparts. Make it our chief joy to commune with You, to meditate on You, to sit at Your feet like Mary and lean on Your breast like John. Forgive us for our prayer-less days, our lack of love, our apathy in the heavenly race, our wasted hours and unspent opportunities. Fill us with a holy ambition and abiding passion to live for the glory of Your name – to make ourselves supremely glad in You and live to make others glad in God, we pray, in the precious and powerful name of Jesus, Amen.

**May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto You.
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.**