

No Other Gospel: Sowing and Reaping

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Date: 18 November 2018

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[0 : 00] Chapter 6, we're going to read from verse 6 to verse 18, page 1172 in our church Bibles. I'm going to think about the two images of gospel sowing and reaping and gospel boasting.

Galatians 6, page 1172, beginning at verse 6. Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with his instructor. 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. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand.

Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law.

[1 : 20] Yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. What counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers.

Amen. So here we are at the end of our study in Galatians. Here is Paul as pastor providing closing wisdom, warning, encouragement to these young Christians.

And I think today it's perfect timing. This is God's timing as we welcome new members, as we have in our church, young Christians. It's a wonderful reminder at the end of the letter, what is it that we are to keep believing?

[2 : 29] And how is it that we are to live as God's people? And of course, these are important for us at any stage of our Christian lives. And for people who are here who aren't Christians, it's a really helpful section, in a sense, a summary of what lies at the heart of Christianity.

Keep on doing good, Paul will say, because of the goodness of God to you in sending the Lord Jesus. And keep the cross of Jesus at the heart of your life, at the heart of your faith.

These are the two big ideas we're going to focus on. Now, as with the whole letter, we've seen this as we've gone through Galatians. Paul presents two very different ways of life, two ways that people try and pursue acceptance with God.

There is the way of the false teachers, which was all about you need to save yourself. You need to do something to prove yourself. It's a religion based on appearance.

And it's based on performance. And Paul will remind us one last time, it's a road to nowhere. That's not the way to know God. Or there is Paul's message, the gospel message, the Bible message that says, you can depend entirely and trust completely only in Jesus for salvation.

[3 : 49] And you'll find acceptance from God through him. And you'll find both the power and the motivation to live for him because of this grace that comes to us.

So one last time, here is Paul. Like any good parent, like any good teacher, they know if a lesson is worth knowing, then it's going to need to be repeated time and time again.

Paul's lesson to us as a church is the lesson of grace. That it's all about God's grace. God acting out of sheer love and mercy to show undeserved favor and kindness to his people by dealing with our sin and bringing us back into friendship with himself.

And that's why it's all about Jesus because it all rests on his work for us at the cross. So there's those two big ideas. There's gospel sowing and reaping and gospel boasting.

We're actually going to start with gospel boasting. We're going to begin at verse 11 and think there. Now, in a document, in a modern document, if you were writing a piece of work or a letter and you wanted to get somebody's attention, how would you show that what was coming would be important?

[5 : 10] We might use bold type. We might go all capital letters. We might do bold capital letters and underline it to make clear this is something really important.

So what Paul is doing in verse 11. See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand. Here's Paul taking over from his scribe.

So normally Paul would speak. Somebody else would write. But here Paul takes the papyrus, takes the pen, and he begins in very big letters to deliver one last message.

One personal message from his heart. And he's saying, hear me loud and clear on this. And what follows is one last attack on the false teaching that was saying Jesus is not enough.

The cross is not enough. You also need to become Jewish and be circumcised. And there's also one more celebration of God's grace in Jesus as he calls us to boast in the cross.

[6 : 09] So he underlines two kinds of boasting. There's the bad boasting of the false teachers and there's good gospel boasting. Now we need to think, what is boasting?

What are we doing when we boast about something? To boast in something is to say, this is where I place my confidence.

This is something that I think defines me. This is something that I think earns my place. Means I am a somebody. And so we'll meet people and they'll boast perhaps in their intelligence.

In their academic or intellectual credentials. And they'll like to show intellectual superiority. Now we will find people who will boast in their wealth. I am somebody because of where I live, what I drive, what I wear.

We'll find people who will boast in their children. I am somebody because of the achievements of my children. And there is also boasting about our religion and our morality.

[7 : 20] And this is what Paul warns us against. He's going to say to us, don't think you'll be okay with God based on appearances.

Or based on the fact that other people approve of you and think that you're great and religious and moral and good. That's the wrong kind of boasting. Don't boast that you can save yourself.

This is the attitude that we find in these false teachers that Paul has constantly been writing against. Paul loves the church in Galatia.

And he hates to see them being led astray. And so he has hard words to say to those who are causing chaos in the church. So in verse 12, Paul effectively calls the teachers bullies.

Look at what he says at the beginning of the verse. Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to what? They're trying to compel you to be circumcised. They're exercising force to try and make people conform to the Jewish law.

[8 : 28] Paul calls them bullies. He says they're hypocrites in verse 13. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law. Yet they want you to be circumcised.

So they're not keeping the law. But they're saying to others, I'm going to force you to be law abiding. To try and keep the law that I myself am not keeping. So Paul calls them hypocrites.

And he calls them cowards. Second part of verse 12. The only reason they're compelling people to be circumcised, Paul says, is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

So they're delivering this message that says, you can be good enough for God by trying harder and becoming Jewish because they don't want to face opposition. So they are cowardly and they're avoiding the persecution of the cross.

And they're boasting in. What are they boasting in? Well, they're trying to make a good impression. So they're boasting in themselves. And end of verse 13, they want people to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.

[9 : 36] So they're boasting in, here's my good spiritual record. Here's my record of appearances and performance. And they're boasting in their ability to make others like them.

They're not trying to make others like Jesus, more Christ-like, more spirit-filled, to make them more like them. And so Paul delivers a warning.

He says, don't rely on religious habits. What we need is not habits. We need a new heart. See verse 15? Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything.

What counts is a new creation. We need God's power, God's grace in our lives making us new in Christ. And so Paul is saying to us, make sure that your religion is internal.

It's about our heart, not about the externals. And make sure that it's Christ-centered and not self-centered. So boasting.

[10 : 37] Boasting is a person saying, here's where I place my confidence. Here's where I find my identity. Here is what defines me. Paul says there's a Christian kind of boasting.

And that's a good thing. It's something that we should engage in as the church. So what is Christian boasting? What's gospel boasting? Verse 14, may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Our only source of boasting, our always source of boasting is Jesus and his death for us on the cross. We boast in God's grace in Jesus' sacrifice.

But the question I suppose that it raises is why would we boast about the cross, this brutal, shameful form of execution?

And what Paul has done throughout the letter of the Galatians is that he's shown what the death of Jesus has achieved for his people. So let's just refresh our memories.

[11 : 48] In chapter 1, we were told right at the beginning that God gave Jesus to rescue us from our sins. So we boast of the cross because the cross is the place where we're delivered from the power of sin, where we're set free to know life with God.

In chapter 2, we discover that it's because Jesus dies for us that we can die to sin and enjoy new life in him.

So we boast in the fact that this new life that we have is a gift secured for us at the cross. In chapter 3, Paul talked about being under a curse because of our law breaking, because of our disobedience.

And then Jesus comes and he goes under the curse for us to lift the curse from us. So instead of curse from God, if our faith is in Jesus, we can enjoy the blessing of God.

We can enjoy the goodness and the love of God because Jesus took the just anger of God against our sin to set us free.

[12 : 55] In chapter 4, we discover that it's through what Jesus does for us that we can be adopted as children of God. That right now we can live as sons and daughters of the King with that hope of glory to come because Jesus died for us on the cross.

In chapter 5, we're told that it's because of Jesus that we enjoy true freedom. And we're called to stand firm in that freedom.

So we boast because the cross of Jesus is everything to us. Jesus has given us everything. And here in chapter 6, verse 15, we already thought about it.

The cross is a part of that process of making us a new creation. God's powerful grace in dealing with our sin and bringing us back to God gives us new birth, brings us new life.

And then in chapter 6, in verse 14, we see that the cross makes this distinctive break for us with the world. The cross marks the end of the world's claims on us.

[14 : 02] Before, we were controlled by sin and we pursued the values of the world and we wanted approval from the world. But now we're no longer controlled by those desires.

Now we live to please God. Now we know we have approval from God, our Father in heaven. So Paul has come to understand that we must boast in something.

You can't boast in self and the cross at the same time. So we all must choose.

What we discover about the cross is the cross does two things for us. The cross, first of all, cuts us down to size. It humbles us. You know, the language that we find again in Galatians, there's language of curse.

There's death, there's suffering, there's death. Jesus experiences all of that because of me. And so there is inevitably a humility there.

[14 : 59] But the cross doesn't just cut us down to size. It also raises us up. It gives us dignity because we discover in chapter 2, in verse 20, the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

It's at the heart of every Christian confession of faith in Jesus. The cross is for me personally. So there is an invitation here to gospel boasting.

That we are able to boast in our weakness and to rejoice in and trust in Christ's strength. Boasting in the gospel means I bring nothing, recognizing that Jesus supplies everything.

Gospel boasting means keeping the cross of Jesus at the heart of our faith. It means reflecting on, meditating on, worshiping God because of what Jesus did for us at the cross.

So that's gospel boasting. Now let's return to the first picture that Paul gives us of gospel sowing and reaping.

[16 : 16] So we've discovered what we believe. That my only hope is God's goodness and love in sending Jesus to die on the cross for me. And then the question then is, how should we live in light of that?

What difference does the cross make? Takes us to verse 9 and 10. Let us not become weary in doing good. For at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. It's a great summary for how to live.

We are to do good to be those who do good because of the goodness of God to us. That's the main reason why we looked at verse 14 first. Because otherwise we might hear it as Paul saying, turn over a new leaf.

Here is me saying you need to be moral and to achieve a certain level of goodness. And if you can do that, if you can reach a standard, God will accept. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying be a better person in your own strength.

[17 : 19] Paul is talking to those who have already been transformed by God's grace in Jesus. They have that new power of the Spirit in their hearts and this new motivation to obey.

It's to those that he says, therefore, in response to what Jesus has done, do good. To give us a picture to help perhaps, my random piece of trivia from this week, I discovered that Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, not only is it difficult to say, it's also regarded by some as the water capital of Europe.

So you can walk around the city and you'll find 38 drinking fountains, all freely available, dotted around the city, all of them supplied by this pure groundwater that bubbles up below.

We, as Christians, our calling is to refresh our city. And we will do that. We will supply that goodness to others because or when we are connected to Jesus.

Jesus is that groundwater source. As he is the water of life, as we are connected to him by the Spirit, then we are able to do good and to bring refreshing to others.

[18 : 42] Now, let's begin. The first bit of our section, verse 7, contains a general principle that all of us will recognize. A man reaps what he sows, the law of just returns.

We know it in farming. You sow potatoes. You will expect to get potatoes. It applies in agriculture, but it also applies, Paul is saying to us, morally and spiritually.

So just as a farmer at planting time needs to think, come the harvest, what is the crop that I want? We also need to think, what eternal harvest do I want?

Because that will then influence how we live day to day. So again, there's a warning here from Paul.

Do not be deceived, in verse 7. God cannot be mocked. That's a way of saying that while we can fool ourselves about our own goodness, about our own religious performance perhaps, and we can certainly fool other people, looking like we're the people that have got everything all together, when it comes to God, we can never fool him.

[20 : 00] And Paul says, don't be deceived about that. Don't pretend like you can pull one over on God. Verse 8, the one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction.

If our desire is to please the sinful nature, we will reap destruction. Now what does he mean by that? Let's return to a passage that we looked at a couple of weeks ago.

So it's just over the page, well, chapter 5, verse 19 to 21. And we find there the list of the acts of the sinful nature as an example. And what we find in that section is actions that are self-indulgent.

This is something I want to do, and I'm going to do it regardless of consequences, regardless of who it might hurt. We see a lifestyle where relationships are very self-centered, quite happy to break and destroy and fracture relationships, and self-reliant in terms of worship and salvation, guilty of idolatry, deciding for ourselves what should be the central thing in our hearts and lives.

And what Paul is saying is that if this is our habit, if this is the kind of patterns that we pursue, if this is what we sow, to use the image, if we are to reject the gospel, the good news of God's grace to us and Jesus, in order to follow our religion of works and performance, or if we reject the gospel to live to please ourselves and live for the flesh and ignoring God, the Bible says we will reap destruction.

[21 : 47] The Bible uses destructive images when it talks about sin to give us that stark warning.

So in James chapter 3, we've seen the wildfires in California and the devastation that's happened there. James says our tongues are capable of sparking that kind of devastation.

Forest wildfires. We can destroy other people's reputation and character. We can spread lies and gossip and slander. The message of the Bible is that sin by its nature destroys.

The wages of sin is death. When sin came into the world in the Garden of Eden, relationships are broken. That Adam and Eve are hiding from each other.

They're accusing one another. They're shifting the blame onto one another. God comes and the man and the woman, they hide from God. And God has to banish them from the garden.

[22 : 52] They cannot have access to the tree of life and live forever in that state. So sin damages, destroys relationships with one another and with God.

And so Paul is warning us about the actions that we sow. Instead, there is an invitation in verse 8.

The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Here is an invitation to choose to obey God because of the joy of being a child of God.

Here is an invitation to live to please the Spirit, to pursue His values. His values are seeking to glorify the Father and the Son. In chapter 5, a little bit earlier, in verses 13 to 15, you've been set free.

You have the Spirit in you so that you might love and serve others, that you might obey God joyfully. Chapter 5, verse 22 and 23, that you might become more like Jesus, day by day and bit by bit.

[24 : 07] That here in verses 9 and 10, that there's an invitation to do good to others. And in these ways, we will reap, we're told, eternal life.

The joy of the new creation to come and the joy of knowing relationship with God right now.

So Paul says in verses 9 and 10, led by the Spirit, do good to the person who's right in front of you when you have an opportunity to help them.

He says in verse 10, it begins with the family of believers, love starts and the family charity begins at home. What's to characterize a local church?

Goodness towards one another. An attitude of wanting to love and show kindness and help to each other. But that expands out to our community, to our families, to whoever is in front of us.

[25 : 13] Led by the Spirit, Paul says, don't become weary in doing good, persevere in doing good. So he acknowledges that that a life of goodness, a life for others, can be tiring sometimes.

And it can be discouraging sometimes. We help people and we get no thanks in return. We extend kindness to someone and they'll take it and then they leave us.

Goodness requires sacrifice, doesn't it? Sometimes it requires us to use our money to help others. It always requires time and energy on our part.

There's an emotional investment there in the life of someone else. And it's a general attitude where we're out for the good of others, where we're not just thinking about ourselves.

So, how are Christians called to keep this kind of goodness going? Why not just stop and look after number one? Well, in this section, we're reminded first that the rewards are incredible.

[26 : 30] Remember what he said, the one who sows to please the Spirit from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Now, there's a wonderful motivation to be in the presence of Jesus in a world of perfect joy and love and peace.

No more pain, no more hurt, no more sorrow, no more, forever. There's a motivation to keep pursuing good. But also, in verse 9, it also says, let's not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we'll reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Here, there's the idea of reaping a harvest in the present that our goodness can make a difference. Do you know, I was thinking about some of our mission partners this week, some of the examples of their goodness.

So, we had a visit last year, I think it was last year, from Marsily Campbell. Goodness for her in Uganda is rescuing street children, giving them education and healthcare and sharing the gospel and giving them stability.

Patrick Jock, who came to visit us last year from South Sudan. Goodness for him and his church is caring for refugees who are fleeing from war, looking to set up micro-businesses to help people get back up on their feet.

[27 : 49] Manuel and Patti Reanio, we know that goodness for them looks like supporting pastors and their families and the stresses of church life or looking to share the gospel with disadvantaged youth in Medellin.

Some examples of goodness, but there are many more and more that are perhaps more everyday, but still significant. That our kindness, our goodness, might change someone's life.

It might make work or school just that little bit happier for somebody who's struggling to fit in or feeling under pressure. We can provide comfort and relief for those who need it.

We can offer friendship to the lonely. We can give support to a family that's stretched and stressed out. And as Christians, the greatest good that we can offer someone is the love of God and to know Jesus and perhaps our goodness will be by our words and our example to lead people to repentance, to lead people to trust in Jesus.

I'm reading a book at the moment by John Dixon, the guy who produced our Life of Jesus course that we've been doing on Thursdays. He became a Christian because of the example of his scripture teacher while he was a teenager in high school in Australia that she spent over a year welcoming kids into her home to feed them and to read the Bible with them even when some of them were regarded as good for nothings.

[29 : 29] And that kind of life and witness led him to trust Jesus. So our goodness, here's an encouragement to goodness because we can reap a harvest in the present.

And the other way that we keep going is that motivation of the gospel is remembering the goodness of God to us. To recognize every good thing we have comes from God and to recognize that God gave his own son Jesus to rescue us and to save us and that he continues to give us his love and his power now.

So we come to the conclusion of Galatians, a letter which in a sense is like a symphony of grace. You know in those classical pieces where there's that recurring motif that keeps coming through and sometimes it's heard in different moods and there's different movements, there's minor and major keys but the motif in Galatians is grace from beginning to end.

So whether we're young Christians, whether you've been Christian for a long time, whether you're new to Christianity, you're wondering what it's all about. This is the theme that grace alone, by faith in Jesus alone, what he did for us on the cross is what saves us, not our good deeds.

God's grace to us in Jesus is what sets us free, it's what makes us children of God and it's God's grace that gives us the power and the motivation to show goodness and love to others.

[31 : 07] Let me close with the words of verse 18. In the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.