

GALATIANS 5:26-6:18

A House Divided Cannot Stand: The Call for Christian Community

Memory Verse

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially those who are of the household of faith."

Galatians 6:9-10

Real-life Problems

Living in Community

"Community" is perhaps an overused word in Christian circles, but it is a vital part of our life on earth. Unfortunately, living in community is challenging, and we constantly face divisions, jealousies, and arguments.

The Good News

As Christians, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, adopted as children of God. Though none of us is perfect, God calls us into community so that we can love and support one another in this life just as He first loved us. Christian community can be challenging, but God gives it as a precious gift, and He invites us to walk together in step with the Spirit.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Have you ever gotten in a fight with your friends? Why? How was it resolved?

Idea #2: Have you ever planted any seeds or plants? What kind of seed did you plant? What kind of plant grew (or didn't grow!)?

Idea #3: What is something you've done that you're proud of?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Galatians?

The apostle Paul wrote Galatians. In the early church, an apostle was someone sent with divine authority, and Paul received his message directly from Jesus (Gal 1:12, 15–23).

2) Who was the original audience?

Paul wrote "to the churches in Galatia" (v. 2), indicating a number of churches scattered throughout the region of Galatia in central Turkey. Many members of Paul's original audience were Gentile converts to Christianity.

3) Why was the letter to the Galatians written?

Paul wrote to correct and encourage the churches, which had been divided by theological and racial issues because of false teachers.

What's going on?

REMIND

Last week, Paul reminded us that we are set free from the Jewish law, which cannot serve as a means for our salvation. At the other end of the spectrum, Paul clarifies that just like legalism, complete rebellion cannot save us either. Instead, Paul invites us to walk in step with the Spirit that fills us, crucifying the desires of the flesh and seeking God.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

Paul transitions from our individual walk of faith into how we interact with others. Harkening back to earlier chapters, Paul reminds us that there is no discrimination or prejudice in God's family. Our spiritual walk shapes how we interact with believers and nonbelievers alike, and more than anything, we are called to support and love one another. Finally, Paul closes the letter with one last warning about the false teachers and a reminder of God's grace.

- 1) The Spirit leads us in community and fellowship with other believers (Gal 5:26–6:6)
- 2) The Spirit leads us to do good unto others (vv. 7–10)
- 3) Final warning against false teachers (vv. 11–18)

Read

Read **Galatians 5:26–6:18** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) What three things does Paul warn against in Galatians 5:26?

He warns about being conceited, provoking one another, and envying others. All three are examples of harmful behavior toward others.

2) How does Paul address the Galatians in Galatians 6:1?

He calls them "brothers." Earlier in Galatians, he used phrases like "You foolish Galatians," but here he builds them up as brothers (and sisters) in Christ. In verses 1-2, we see that siblings are to bear one another's burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ (love your neighbor as yourself).

3) How do we fulfill the law of Christ (v. 2)?

When we bear one another's burdens, supporting, encouraging, and walking with one another through difficult times, we fulfill the law of Christ.

4) What does Paul encourage the Galatians to do in verse 6?

The Galatians are encouraged to share "all good things" with their teachers. Most commentators agree that Paul is largely referring to the physical and financial needs of church teachers. Basically, Paul asks congregations to financially support their ministers, and also to share other knowledge, skills, etc.

5) What should we not grow weary of? What reason does Paul give? (vv. 9-10)

We should not grow tired of "doing good," both to brothers in Christ and those outside the church. Paul reminds us that we reap what we sow, and we are to sow good seeds of the Spirit rather than selfish desires.

6) How does Paul describe the false teachers in verses 12-13? Can they keep the law?

The false teachers—the circumcision party—try to "make a good showing in the flesh." In other words, they make a big show of their moral behavior, but Paul reminds us that no one can keep the law perfectly, not even the Judaizers.

Moreover, he accuses the Judaizers of trying to avoid persecution; they had twisted the message of the gospel because it was less offensive to the world. As Jews, they had legal protection under Roman law, but Christians did not.

Finally, the false teachers just wanted to boast that they had converts; they didn't actually care about the lives of the Galatians.

7) What does Paul boast in? What gives him the right to do so? What matters more than circumcision or uncircumcision (vv. 14-15)?

Paul boasts in nothing but the cross of Christ. He can boast because he recognizes that he has nothing else to boast about; by believing in the cross, Paul too has been crucified to the world, and he recognizes that nothing matters except that he is a new creation.

B. SO WHAT?

1) What is the difference between being conceited, provoking, and envying (5:26)? Why are these distinctions important?

When we walk in the Spirit (the theme of chapter 5), we can be tempted to become proud and conceited in our efforts. Conceit is rooted in our own insecurity, and it affects how we view others. This can lead us to treat others in one of two ways: first, we can provoke others. When we provoke others, it's because we think we're better than them, and we act proudly and judgmentally. On the other hand, we can envy others, thinking that they are better than we are. Either way, both approaches are unhealthy ways of relating to others.

2) How do siblings in Christ treat one another? How do the statements in verses 3-5 enable us to "bear one another's burdens"? Does verse 5 contradict verse 2?

In Galatians 6:1-2, we see that brothers and sisters in Christ restore one another with gentleness when someone is led astray by sin. This doesn't mean calling out every tiny sin, but speaking truth in love when we see patterns of sinful behavior in one another. Brothers and sisters also help carry one another's burdens, supporting and encouraging each other through hard times.

To do this, however, each of us must first be humbled and aware of our own standing before God. In other words, we must have a gospel-centered understanding of ourselves, knowing that we are justified by Christ and not ourselves before we can support each other.

At first glance, it might look like Paul contradicts himself, telling us to carry one another's burdens (v. 2) while also saying "bear your own load" (v. 5). However, commentators like David Guzik note that the two are not mutually exclusive; we can love and support one another, and also be responsible for our own actions. Moreover, Paul uses two different words for "burden" (v. 2) and "load" (v. 5). The Greek word for burden indicates something heavier than one man could carry, while the word for load refers to the lighter load of a backpack.

3) How are we to treat fellow believers? Those outside our community of faith? What does it look like to do good to others?

Paul is clear that we are to do good to everyone, whether they are believers or not. That said, he does emphasize that we must treat fellow Christians with love and respect to maintain unity in the body of Christ. Though "doing good" may seem like an overgeneralization, Paul is reminding them of Galatians 5:14, when he summed up the whole law as "love your neighbor as yourself." If Christians were truly ambassadors of good, walking in step with the Spirit as individuals and as a church, the whole world would take notice. As the old hymn says, "They will know we are Christians by our love."

4) What does it mean to reap what you sow? What are the two types of seeds we can sow? What will we reap when we sow in the flesh? In the Spirit? How does this serve as a warning and an encouragement to us?

Sowing is the act of planting seeds in the earth, and reaping is gathering the harvest. You cannot reap without first sowing, and Paul is clear that in everything we do, we are either sowing seeds of the flesh, or seeds of the Spirit. Likewise, we will reap the due reward of the seed we have sown; the flesh breeds corruption, while the Spirit blossoms into everlasting life. Reaping what we sow does not just affect us personally, but Paul reminds us that our sowing directly impacts those around us too. Paul is not trying to scare us back into moralism, but rather, he is reminding us that if we are filled with the Spirit, we must act like it. Faith must show itself through loving works, meaning we must sow seeds of the Spirit with others. It is important to note that Paul is NOT

arguing that if we sow spiritual seeds, then we will be blessed in this life. Spiritual seeds grow into everlasting life, not earthly blessings.

Reap What You Sow

In the ancient world, farming metaphors were easy for any audience to understand. While most of us today are not farmers, we still have a basic understanding about how plants grow. Whether we learn it from a garden, a school project, or a textbook, we know that plants don't just come from nowhere; you have to plant a seed first!

Planting a seed (sowing) must happen before a plant can grow and bear flowers or fruit (reaping). Likewise, in our personal lives and in our relationships with other people, we are called to sow spiritual seeds rather than seeds of the flesh. When we think back to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, Paul offers practical characteristics of a Spirit-filled life.

How can you sow seeds of the Spirit instead of seeds of the flesh?

5) Why can't the circumcision party follow the law? What is their goal for the Galatians (vv. 12-13)? Why does Paul say that they were fleeing persecution?

No matter how hard they try, the legalists in the circumcision party cannot follow the law. As Paul reminded us in Galatians 3:10-11, no one (except Jesus) has ever lived a perfect life (or even a perfect day, for that matter), and therefore everyone under the law is condemned by the law. Instead, they make a public show of their moralism, even though they are just as sinful as everyone else (v. 12). They want the Galatians to follow them out of their own selfish interests. Though it's easy to miss, Paul offers another motivation behind the false teachers: they don't want to be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Why would they be persecuted? As Paul wrote in Galatians 5:11, the gospel is "offensive"! To the hyperreligious, the gospel tells them that they are more sinful than they think, and that their efforts are futile. Accepting grace is a direct attack on their self-righteousness. On the other hand, for the rebellious (or the hedonists), the gospel is equally offensive, convicting them of their sin and separation from God. Either way, the gospel is offensive, so false teachers tried to change the message so that they would not be persecuted for their radical beliefs.

6) Why can Paul boast in Christ? What does it mean that he has been crucified to the world?

Paul can boast in Christ because he has been humbled, knowing that Christ has done all the work and he has added nothing to his salvation. He doesn't boast in the flesh—his good deeds, teaching, church-planting, or prolific writings. Instead, he humbly boasts in Christ alone. Second, by submitting himself to Christ, Paul has also been crucified to the world, and vice versa. Echoing Galatians 5:24 ("those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"), Paul declares that the desires of the flesh and the world have no power over him. No longer living for the world, Paul solely desires Christ.

7) What do circumcision and uncircumcision stand for in verse 15? By the grace of God, what has Paul become?

By the grace of God, Paul is a "new creation," an adopted son of God (see also Galatians 4:4-5). The desires of the flesh have been put to death within him, and he has new life in Christ. As a result, things like circumcision and uncircumcision—in other words, using the law as a means of justification and righteousness—are worthless. As a new creation, he is freed to walk in the Spirit and obey out of love, not fear.

8) What "rule" of living does Paul encourage us to walk by? What does it mean to "bear the marks of Jesus"? (vv. 14-17)

As Paul has argued throughout the second half of Galatians, the gospel is not just an explanation of how we are justified by Christ. The gospel is a way of life, a "rule" to live by (v. 16). Christ lived and died on the cross for our sins so that we could be justified before God and live in an eternal right relationship with Him. Here on earth, living by the gospel means walking by the Spirit and doing good unto others. If we keep our focus on the gospel rather than the law or our own desires, we will find "peace and mercy" in this life and the next.

Though commentators aren't certain what the "marks of Christ" mean, it might refer to Paul's authority as an apostle, or possibly even to the literal scars he bears from persecution as a follower of Christ.

C. NOW WHAT?**1) How can you (as an individual and as a group) bear one another's burdens? What is a burden you're carrying that you need help with?**

Support can come physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Encourage students to open up and share with the group or in pairs how they can be praying for, supporting, and encouraging one another.

2) Where are you sowing seeds of the flesh? Seeds of the Spirit? What does it look like to do good to others? Do you get tired of or discouraged in treating others how you want to be treated?**3) What do verses 14-15 mean to you? Do you feel like boasting in the cross of Christ? Do you believe you are a new creation?****Main takeaway**

The Christian life leads us into community with other believers, and we are called to love, support, and encourage one another. Likewise, beyond our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to sow seeds of the Spirit among nonbelievers too. Though we might find false teachers in our own midst, Paul reminds us that nothing can change God's grace for us, poured out on the cross so that we can become new creations in Christ.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

As Christians, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Though none of us is perfect, God calls us into community so that we can love and support one another in this life just as He first loved us. Christian community can be challenging, but God gives it as a precious gift, and He invites us to walk together in step with the Spirit.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father God, thank You for bringing us together in community with other believers. We pray that by Your Spirit You would lead us individually and as a group, that "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ would be with our spirits," leading us to sow spiritual seeds rather than our own selfish desires. Deepen our faith and love for You and for those around us, and thank You for the cross, for pouring out Your grace to make us new creations in Christ. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Think of one or two people you're close to and you trust. What is a way they can help you carry your burdens? How can you help carry theirs?
- 2) Where are you sowing seeds of the flesh? How can you crucify these desires and sow seeds of the Spirit?
- 3) What does it mean that you have been crucified to the world? What does it mean to you that you are a new creation in Christ?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) As a family, how can you support, encourage, and carry one another's burdens? Take time to share what you're going through, and to pray for one another.
- 2) What does it look like for you to sow seeds of the flesh? How can your family support you in sowing seeds of the Spirit?
- 3) As a family, how can you do good to others? What are some practical things you can do? Do you ever grow tired of doing good?