

Pentecost
July 3, 2016

"The Pure Gospel Leads Us to Care about Each Other"

GALATIANS 6:1-10

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. 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.

There is an old Jewish legend that before the temple in Jerusalem was built, two brothers lived and farmed on that site right next to each other. One was married and had a large family and the other was single. When harvest time came both were blessed with a bountiful harvest of grain. The unmarried brother realized he was blessed with more than he needed, so arose in the middle of the night and took some grain in a basket from his granary and put it into his brother's granary. Similarly the married brother was concerned that his single brother wouldn't have children to care for him in his old age, so he took some grain in his basket and secretly at night put the grain into his brother's granary. This went on for several nights until both brothers bumped into each other in the middle of the night. In the dark of the night the glow of brotherly love lit up the heavens. They realized what they had been doing and embraced each other warmly. According to the legend God saw this beautiful display of brotherly love and selected the site of their embrace as the place where the temple was to be built.

We love stories that speak about kindness and love especially when there seems to be so much evil in the world today. Just lately Stephen Hawkins bemoaned the fact that the world in which we live has seemed to get more greedy and more selfish and more self-centered in the last ten years.

But the all important question of life is this? Does God reward acts of human kindness by doing something special for them such as building the temple on the place where they farmed and helped each other? Does God reward people who show kindness by giving them a special place in heaven? Our dear friend Vicky who sang at our wedding. She was told by her mother when she was a young girl that she would go to heaven with her shoes on because of the way she sang for people in nursing homes and hospitals. Then she said, "I came to understand how I am saved not by what I do but what Christ Jesus my Savior has done for me."

For the past six weeks we have been preaching from the Paul's letter to the Galatians. The dear Christians in Galatia were being told it was not enough to have Christ Jesus as their Savior from sin. They were told they needed to add Old Testament laws to what Christ has done to be pure and holy in God's sight and truly free from sin. When you know what Jesus has done for you, it leads you to care about others, not to earn God's favor but because God's favor and love and mercy was earned for you.

Let's turn our attention to the words we just read. I want to go through them verse by verse to show how the message of the pure gospel leads us to care deeply for each other. **"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."** In our Bible Camp this past week we learned that Jesus cares for us forever and ever and ever. When you know how much Jesus cares for you, then you will have genuine concern and care for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes it happens that our brothers and sisters get trapped into sin. They may be doing things wrong and against God that they don't even realize they are doing.

The other night, after the first day of Bible camp, Susan and I both fell asleep watching the evening news. There was knocking on the door about 10:45 at night. It was our neighbor kindly letting us know we had forgotten to close the garage door. Neighbors and friends help each other with acts of kindness. I simply cannot ignore my brother or sister in Christ who is caught up in some sin. They needed to be restored. The word for "restore" is used to describe how the disciples were restoring or mending their nets on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called. We restore them gently because we realize the same sins that tempted them and led them astray could also happen in our lives as well.

Because you know you are saved entirely by what Jesus has done for you at the cross you genuinely care about other people and the burdens they are bearing. **"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load."** We just sang a hymn with the words, "Our mutual burdens share." Because of the load Jesus carried for us, we are eager to walk in his footsteps and help other people with their loads in life. If I think only of myself, I will miss golden opportunities to help other people with their burdens. It says here we should "test our actions" and not compare ourselves to others. It is so easy to become critical of other people when they don't seem to have their act together and when they are struggling. When we test ourselves and carry our own burdens we realize we have similar weaknesses in our lives that need the help of our fellow Christians. What a privilege it is to be tuned into other people and their needs, and to pray for them. What a privilege it is to have other Christians and family members praying for us when we are going through our rough patches and hard times in life.

There was once a woodpecker pounding away at a tree as the sky was growing dark for a storm. Suddenly there was a loud crack as a lightning bolt hit the tree and split it down the middle. The dazed woodpecker fell to the ground and when he came to his senses he look up at the tree that had been split by the lightning and said, "My am I good." Truthfulness and honesty will reveal that I am not as good as I think I am. Yet Paul encourages us to take pride in ourselves. They only thing I can truly be proud of in my life is what Christ

has done for me and who I have become by his grace without deserving anything at all.

Just as a little side note, Paul reminds these people who are free in Christ because of the pure gospel to take care of those people who bring them God's Word. "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the instructor." I cannot tell you enough what a privilege it was for me to teach a large number of children about Jesus in our Bible Camp this past week. What a privilege it was to bring them the pure gospel message so they can sing "living, loving, dying, rising Jesus did it all for me." We wouldn't be able to do this world with the support and help of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Because you are free in Christ, you want to live in the Spirit and not give into the temptations of the flesh, especially this problem of sinful pride that totally ignores other people and their needs. **""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."** I can remember how my father would carefully think through what kind of seed he wanted to plant in his corn field. That special seed corn was quite expensive. No good farmer would ever think of planting weed seeds in the field. In the garden of your life you want to plant good seed out of love for what Jesus has done for you. If we just try to please our sinful nature it will result in a harvest that leads to destruction. If we plant what the Holy Spirit wants, this is something very beautiful. It is through the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness we have in Christ that we will reap eternal life. It is not about me. I live for Christ because of what he did for me. I do good works not to be saved, but because I have been saved. That is the pure gospel. Pride has no place in your life. Think of others more than you think of yourself. That's where the freedom you have in Christ leads you.

Finally the Apostle Paul encourages Christians of every age to make the most of their time on this earth by investing it in helping other people, all people, but especially those who are brothers and sisters in the faith. "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." Do you ever get tired of doing good? Do you ever get tired of trying to help people who are hurting themselves as they begin walking down a path further and further away from the Lord? Sure you do. You don't see results. Your best efforts to help are rebuffed and resisted. Take comfort then in these words, "For at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." If the Lord wanted angels to do this work of helping other Christians then he should have chosen the angels. Instead, he asks you and me to perform this task. He even promises that in the end there will be a harvest as people are brought into the kingdom of God and spared from the wrath to come.

How many children did you have in your Star Bible Camp? We are often asked that question. We are thankful for the 75 children the Lord brought to us. But numbers are not the what is most important. What is most important is the opportunity given to teach children about Jesus as their Shepherd who cares about them, provides for them, leads them, forgives them and gives them eternal life. The Lord gave us the opportunity to plant the seed of his Word in their lives. Someday we will see the results of this work, just as you will someday see the results of the work you do out of love for Christ.

Let's go back to that old Jewish legend about the two brothers. God did not choose the site for the temple because of the acts of kindness he saw in these two brothers. God chose that site, along with how the temple was to be built and the sacrifices at to point to

Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In my personal Bible reading I am going through the book of Exodus. God gave them very detailed plans on how to build the tabernacle, and how to build the altar and how to sacrifice the animals. He wants the whole world to see how carefully he planned to rescue and save us through what Jesus has done for us. That's the pure message of the gospel. That pure message leads us to genuinely care for all people but especially those who are of the family of believers. In our Bible Camp we sang, "Living, loving, dying, rising, Jesus did it all for me." Join me in singing these words. It is a fitting conclusion to our series on Galatians and the pure gospel. Amen.