

How It Works Out (Galatians 6)

Paul has worked through the problem that had been besetting the Galatian churches and, if they have followed his clear directions, they should now be able to see their way out of their 'religious' approach to faith in Christ.

Not allowing themselves to be dragged back into following man-made rules and regulations, not even trying to please God by attempting to keep the Jewish Law. For the Jews among them, not basing their trust on the fact of their natural lineage from Abraham and, for Jews and Gentiles alike, realising that they have all been made sons and heirs to God's promises through the fact that their lives have been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Learning to live from the inside, not from the outside, from the 'law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'¹ and not from any set of external expectations, whether imposed by someone else, by themselves, or even by God himself!

Just a passing thought: It is interesting, and perhaps a little disturbing, to realise that this problem had affected (and **infected**) a number of churches, not just one. As we have already seen, the idea that new Christian believers needed to embrace the Jewish religion had been put around among the Galatian believers in very much the same way as had been done in Syrian Antioch in **Acts 15**. That particular problem had been addressed, and the Galatian churches had even been told the result, but **still** the false teaching went around and took root. If it had not done so, Paul would have had no reason to write this letter!

This speaks volumes about our natural human tendency to try to work things out by our own efforts, both in the case of those who were propagating the false teaching and for those who were apparently all too ready to embrace it. The fact was that, originally, they had all been given the truth of the good news of God's **grace** through the death and resurrection of Jesus. But now the false teachers tried to drag Christians into Judaism and, it seems, there were many who were all too ready to be 'bewitched' into self-effort. However long we may have been believers, it is all too easy for us to begin to think that in some way we can earn some standing with God by our own efforts and achievements. The message of this letter remains very relevant today.

Now into **chapter 6**, Paul begins to sum up and move into some practical advice, drawing on what he has already written.

Galatians 6:1-5 A practical problem! Someone has gone off the 'straight and narrow'! The word literally means to 'fall to the side'. That could be deliberate or accidental but, either way, we all have a responsibility to 'restore' (literally, to 'thoroughly complete') that person 'in a spirit of gentleness', to bring them back to a fully working relationship with the Lord, **and** to be wary of going the same way ourselves. All too easy to be critical and condemning, but Paul reminds us of our own weaknesses by prescribing 'gentleness' and our need to be careful for ourselves.

"Bear one another's burdens" (**6:2**) again speaks of coming alongside to help, sharing the load when a brother or sister has problems, not just when they have gone off the rails. Loving each other in the same way that we love ourselves (**5:14**) – and he writes about **fulfilling** the 'law of Christ', not striving to obey it!

6:3-5 may seem a little disconnected, but they follow on from restoring someone who has slipped and from helping to carry each other's burdens. 'Don't kid yourself', says Paul.

¹ **Romans 8:2**

‘Do you think you are really someone special? In that case, are you fulfilling the law of Christ and loving your fellow-believers by correcting gently and helping with their problems? Check yourself out! You can’t boast about what someone else has done as if you had done it yourself.’

Galatians 6:6-10 Giving and Getting! I am pretty sure that **v.6** is mainly an encouragement for those in the churches who are being taught to share practical resources with those who are doing the teaching, in other words to contribute to their day-to-day needs, but I also think it relates to sharing good things that come up in the course of the teaching process. In today’s language, positive feedback! Certainly I get really blessed by the things that people have found for themselves and share back into the study group.

One of the results of this sort of feedback and sharing is that we **all** get blessed! As Paul writes in **v.7-8**, what we ‘sow’ comes back to us. He applies it again to practical support in **2 Corinthians 9:6**, but here he is also talking about our own lives. If we concentrate and invest in our selfish benefit, what we get back is (literally) decay and rot. By contrast, by focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit, the ‘harvest’ is one of ongoing spiritual life. Not just life after death, but NOW!

It’s easy to get disheartened when trying to help others, isn’t it? ‘Don’t give up!’, says Paul, ‘The harvest will come, so go on taking the opportunity to help everyone – and especially your brothers and sisters in Christ!’ (**6:9-10**)

Galatians 6:11-16 Paul probably dictated most of the letter this far, but he ends in his own handwriting. (Is his handwriting so large because of a sight problem? (Look back at **Galatians 4:13-15**)) But he doesn’t just wind down his letter; he uses the last few sentences to re-emphasise the main messages of what he has written:–

6:12-13 See the motivation of those who are trying to persuade you to embrace Judaism by being circumcised. They are trying to avoid persecution from fellow-Jews, AND they don’t even keep the Jewish Law themselves; they just want to be able to boast that they have drawn you into Judaism.

6:14-16 ‘No boasting for me!’ says Paul, *“except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which (or ‘through whom’) the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* ‘My old life is over, the world system has no more claim on me and I have no more claim on the world system. Circumcised or not circumcised? It’s irrelevant! The only thing that makes any difference is whether you are a new creation (or ‘creature’) in Christ.’ (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)

‘Did you want rules to follow? Then follow that one! The result will be peace and mercy on you, as on all God’s chosen people!’

6:17 Paul’s physical body bears the scars of persecution (see **2 Corinthians 11:21-30**). These clearly set him apart as belonging to Jesus, branded or tattooed like cattle!

6:18 And he finishes as he began this letter, with the desire that all his readers will experience the reality of the grace of the Lord Jesus with their spirit.

Dave Taylor May 2023

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You will find more in this short series about Paul, his background and ministry in Galatia, in ‘Paul – A Man Prepared’, ‘Paul in Galatia’, ‘The Message and the Messenger (Galatians 1 & 2)’, ‘Following Rules Doesn’t Work (Galatians 3)’, ‘The Freedom of Sonship (Galatians 4)’ and ‘Freedom in Practice (Galatians 5)’ all from www.justonecandle.uk