

GALATIANS AND YOU

Studies in the Epistle of Paul
to the Galatians

by

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Chapter Ten

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

"Bear Ye One Another's Burdens" (6:1-5)

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." What a world of difference would be made in the life of the average church if these words of counsel were really put into effect! Too little consideration is shown the weaker Christian who stumbles. It is much easier to blame than to help.

When a brother falls, those who are spiritual are to put him on his feet again. Those who are living in close fellowship with JESUS will be more eager to restore than to condemn. They are more given to undergirding with prayer than to overloading with reproach and scorn. It is to be feared that in some churches, at least, there is more preying on those who have fallen by the wayside than praying for them.

"Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Our ministrations to the erring brother are to be rendered in a spirit of gentleness and humility if they are to prove effective. A pharisaical attitude toward the one who has yielded to temptation may jeopardize his spiritual recovery. Carelessness of treatment often results in lasting injury. Many well-meaning but tactless Christians would profit by a course in spiritual first aid under the direction of the HOLY SPIRIT. Prayerfulness makes for carefulness. A modest estimate of one's own attainments is a real asset in nursing back to health and strength those who have been worsted in the battles with sin. Due recognition of our own shortcomings tends toward a better understanding of the one we are trying to help in a moral and spiritual way.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." If you are so bent upon carrying heavy loads, why not get under the burden of love instead of the intolerable weight of legalism which the Judaizers are trying to saddle upon you? Such in substance is the apostle's exhortation to his readers. Replace the fetters of law with the bondage of love. Let the love of rite give way to the right of love.

How ready are we to give one another a lift as we travel together over the hills and valleys of life? Let us be on the alert for such opportunities. Forbid that our own troubles should make us

indifferent to the trials besetting our brothers and sisters in CHRIST. (Memorize Galatians 6:2, 7-9, 14).

"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." The egotist is constantly overdrawing his mental, moral and spiritual checking account. He is given to overestimating his reserves. It may even be that he is loaded down with much worthless stock.

Few of us appreciate our indebtedness to others for whatever success we may be fortunate enough to achieve. We fail to take into account the contributions of heredity, environment, home, school, friends and many other factors. With this in view, the boastful man reminds us of the fable of the mouse and the elephant. A mouse and an elephant, so runs the fable, walking along together came to a bridge. The bridge shook and trembled under the heavy tread of the elephant. When they reached the other side, the mouse turned to the elephant and said, "We sure did shake that thing, didn't we?"

There are Christians who have far too exalted an opinion of themselves because they have but the remotest conception of what GOD and men have a right to expect of them as professed followers of the LORD JESUS. Our obligations are not governed by our limitations. When we view our assets in the light of the responsibilities the LORD lies upon us, then we humbly cry to Him for replenishment of our woefully depleted and inadequate stores of strength and wisdom. **"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"** (James 1:5).

A prerequisite to being able to do all things through CHRIST (Philippians 4:13) is to see that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Like zeros preceding the numeral one, every time we put our worthless selves first and CHRIST last, we progressively diminish our output for Him; but when, on the other hand, we give Him the place of supremacy, then we find an increase of production for our LORD with every additional realization of our own insufficiency - like the zeros that follow rather than precede the numeral one.

"But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." Candid self-examination will put us in the place where GOD can and will minister to us richly of His bounty. And yet, as we have already suggested, too few of us are willing to analyze our holdings from the standpoint of what GOD has a perfect right to ask of us in the way of service. We dread the spiritual red ink of divine correction. We prefer a fool's paradise of fancied attainments to a revelation of our serious defects and shortcomings. Furthermore, let us ever bear in mind that our true cause for rejoicing lies, not in what we do for GOD, but in what GOD does for and through us. What we are able to give to GOD is necessarily dependent upon what we are willing to let GOD give to us.

"For every man shall bear his own burden." This verse is not, as some may be inclined to think, a contradiction of Paul has just written in verse two. The fact that Christians are to share one another's burdens does not warrant the individual believer in getting out from under the duties that devolve upon him personally as a follower of the MASTER; nor does it afford him ground for laying the blame for his own sins of omission and commission upon the shoulders of other Christians. Alas for those who never give others a higher grade than D, nor themselves a lower grade than A in the school of life.

What we have just said in the forgoing paragraph is not however, to be understood as justifying churlish spurning of proffered helps from fellow believers when we are sore pressed and are in need of a helping hand. Such churlishness betokens proud self-sufficiency rather than true lowliness of spirit.

Be Faithful in Your Stewardship (6:6-10)

"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." Contrary to surface impressions, this text has no reference to students' being able to contribute richly to their instructor's store of knowledge and wisdom. No, but rather do these words of the apostle bear down hard upon the duty of the Christian to give adequate material support to ministers and other spiritual leaders. We need not enlarge upon the familiar but lamentable fact that many church members fail miserably in the discharge of their financial obligations to the church. What we put into the offering plate is, after all, a very good indication of what the church really means to us. It is sheer mockery to express appreciation of blessings received from the church and at the same time to contribute little or nothing to the expenses of the church and the support of the pastor.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Although commonly given a much wider reference, these words have to do, in their context, with the principle of stewardship in material things. The fact that the giving of one's self to the LORD must precede any acceptable giving of one's means to Him is not to be construed as implying that consecration of our temporal possessions will not follow the dedication of our lives to Him. Living for the LORD means giving to the LORD. CHRIST becomes increasingly precious to us when the gifts we make to Him represent sacrifice on our part.

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). And where our hearts go our treasure will follow. Torrents of money for pleasure, dribbles of pennies for JESUS - what a sad commentary on the present state of apostasy resting like a blight upon so much of the professing Church! Are we, individually, giving to the LORD as we ought? Praying without giving is like trying to sew with an unthreaded needle. Of what worth are prayers for the spread of the Gospel that are not backed by gifts to that cause? He who spends much money upon the flesh and little upon the LORD is stuffing his body and starving his spirit. In money matters, as well as in other respects, we must sow in the SPIRIT, if we expect to reap a golden harvest of spiritual enrichment.

"And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." The word "weary" as used in this verse refers to weakening of will, and "faint" in relaxing of powers. We need more stick-to-itiveness in Christian living and in our service for JESUS. We miss many a reward because we give up too soon. Rugged trails of devotion lead to sunlit peaks of achievement. GOD will give us all needed strength for the climb, if we but let Him. As we have had occasion to observe in another connection, the grace of continuance issues from the continuance of grace. We may get weary in the Lord's service; but if we get weary of it, something is radically wrong with our souls. In passing, it might be remarked that too many Christians get weary of the Lord's service because they do not work hard enough at it to get

weary in it.

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Note the positive emphasis in this exhortation. It is not how little harm but how much good we may do that is set before us as an objective. Figuratively speaking, our concern should be, not how many plants we may refrain from uprooting, but how many seeds of kindness we are able to scatter along the way as we journey through life. We are to do good, not simply to feel good. The latter is no substitute for the former. Emotion is not devotion. Intentions are not achievements. According to K.S. Wuest, furthermore, the "good" referred to here is that which is the work of the SPIRIT through the saints; this clearly implies that only as we live in the LORD can our lives bear fruit in that kind of service which will remain throughout eternity.

But while we are to do good to all men, we are in a very special way obligated to confer blessing upon the hearts and lives of those who are the children of GOD, fellow believers with us in the LORD JESUS CHRIST. How earnestly do we seek to measure up to such opportunity and responsibility? The life of the church at large will be strengthened and sweetened by the fruit of the SPIRIT brought forth in our lives.

Glory in the Cross of CHRIST, Not in the Works of Law (6:11-17)

"Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand." From this it would seem that the apostle had departed from his usual practice of dictating his epistles and had written this entire letter with his own hand. Some believe that the apostle wrote this in "large letters" to allude to his impaired eyesight from which, according to many New Testament scholars, he had suffered ever since his blinding vision of the LORD JESUS at the time of his conversion.

"As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ." These Judaizers, Paul claims, were actuated in their zeal for fastening the fetters of legalism upon the Galatians by a dread of suffering at the hand of their Jewish brethren if they took a stand for the Gospel of grace. By contending for the necessity of circumcision, they escaped being molested. And how frequently in our day opposition to the doctrine of justification on the part of those who pose as great religionists can be traced to a desire to curry the favor of the world! To ensure a smooth trip in many waters, one need only propagate a gospel of works that flatters rather than flattens human pride. Only he who has been truly conquered by the Cross is able and will to suffer for the Cross. It might help us to take a firmer stand under fire for our faith if we could realize how often zeal in persecution of the truth is prompted by fear of persecution for the truth. Alas, when freedom from temporal danger means a forfeiting of spiritual safety in JESUS!

"For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh." These zealous Judaizers had evidently forgotten that the LORD called for obedience rather than sacrifice. A rite can never take the place of the right.

But greed for domination as well as fear of persecution motivated these proponents of a works-

righteousness. They who reject the freedom of grace for themselves are all too prone to move heaven and earth to bring others under the bondage of works. They launch attacks of withering scorn against those who take a stand for the Gospel of free grace that they themselves lack the courage to take. Let them beware, for laughter at the Cross converts it from a vehicle of mercy into an instrument of judgment.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Here we have one of the greatest personal testimonies to be found on the pages of the New Testament. The very wording of this statement by the apostle suggests that there are many things other than the Cross of CHRIST in which men commonly glory, and in which, from a purely human standpoint, he himself might be expected to glory. May all of us learn to glory, not in the toys of earth, but in the Cross of CHRIST; not in the allurements of the world, but in the atonement of the LORD; not even in what we do for CHRIST, but in what He does for us.

Well may each one of us ask prayerfully in the presence of GOD, "Do I glory in the Cross of CHRIST?" We do not glory in the Cross for which we are not willing to suffer, if need be; nor can we truly suffer for the Cross in which we do not glory. We must know what the Cross has done for us personally to glory in it intelligently. Conquest by the Cross is prerequisite to conquest in it. So far as its power in our lives is concerned, we cease to own the Cross we fear to own. One of the consequences of fearing to take a stand for the Cross will be to lose the joy of the Cross. May we never lose sight of the fact that our victory in the LORD has come by way of the tragedy of the Cross. Calvary is the great spiritual watershed of all time. Rejection of the Cross spells eternal tragedy; acceptance of the Cross means eternal victory. Calvary makes all the difference between tragedy and victory.

On which side of Calvary are you standing, reader? In the night of tragedy through rejection of the atonement there effected, or in the light of victory through acceptance of the saving merits of JESUS' blood?

There is need for fuller instruction in the meaning of the Cross, that it may become a greater force in the lives of Christians. A strengthened grasp of the Cross will issue in a stiffened stand for the Cross. The world will lose its hold on us when we get a real hold on the Cross. The more we find of the treasures of the LORD, the less will we be drawn to the pleasures of the world, until we can say with the apostle that we have been crucified to the world, and the world to us.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Neither bondage to form, nor freedom from form, can save us, but only mercy in CHRIST. This is an elementary truth of which all too many people seem to be in total ignorance. Some depend upon their observance of ritual and regular church attendance to get them into heaven, while still others rely on their nonconformity to tradition and convention to give them credit with the LORD. And there is many a man who thinks that he needs only turn over a new leaf to be assured of life beyond the grave. Reformation by the power of will is no substitute, however, for transformation by the power of grace divine. What GOD does for us in CHRIST is as priceless as what we can do for ourselves is worthless.

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the

Israel of God." We are to live in and for Him who died for us. In fact, what we let CHRIST do in us is the best demonstration of what He did for us on the Cross of Calvary. We must send our roots deep into the soil of truth and grace to find a wealth of peace in CHRIST. And we who know the peace of the SAVIOUR will want to keep the rule of the Gospel. It is sheer presumption to expect to have the peace of the LORD, if we refuse to do the will of the LORD. We must abide in the climate of grace if we hope to enjoy the blessings of CHRIST. Spiritually, where we make our residence shows where we find our real happiness.

"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Paul rejoiced in his suffering for JESUS and regarded the wounds he suffered as landmarks of CHRIST's ownership of him. And how many such marks there were upon the body of the heroic apostle who had faced such dangers and gone through such hardships for the sake of the LORD who was his all in all! In the church of today, it is to be feared, there are too many battle-scared soldiers and too few battle-scarred soldiers of the Cross. Too few are prepared to stand for the MASTER at all cost. Something is seriously wrong if we are ashamed to own Him who owns us. The Lord's ownership precludes the world's ownership of us.

BENEDICTION

"Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." And so this Epistle comes to a close in a gracious benediction. Like a quiet and lovely sunset at the end of a tempestuous day. What more can any soul want in time or eternity than the wondrous grace which GOD made manifest and available in JESUS CHRIST, our LORD and SAVIOUR forevermore?

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