

Galatians 6 v1-11

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[0 : 00] I do sit down and turn to Galatians chapter 5, or Galatians chapter 6.! The crowd grew until it was packed on the platform, and when the train arrived, the doors opened, and it was one of those moments where you feel the whole train breathe.

There was a wall of people. No one could get in, or at least no one thought no one could get in. And no one could off. People stood staring at each other. I needed to go to a meeting, and I thought, in for a penny, in for a pound, and so I stepped in.

Someone said, there's no room. I replied saying, there is. And I stood there, squeezed myself in, moved my head like that, and the doors just about shut.

And I travelled like that for half an hour. No one looking at each other. No one saying a word. You know what it's like, don't you? The beauty of London Transport, and no one making eye contact, and no one speaking to anyone, everyone pretending, the inner monologue that goes on, this is totally fine, this is normal, I'm not uncomfortable at all, there's nothing disturbing about this episode.

And that's how we live, isn't it? How we live in London. Even when the tube is empty, and we get onto the carriage, no one says, when they sit down, welcome to the Elizabeth Lang, it's great to see you.

[1 : 54] That's how we live, isn't it? Some of us know our neighbours, most of us don't know our neighbours. None of us know all our neighbours. And there are people in London out there, and they walk past us, and we kind of sort of nod.

We don't know their name, they don't know our name. And we live coexisting together, without knowing one another. And my fear is, that is how many London churches exist.

It's not as uncomfortable as the tube and rush hour. But the relationships are very much surface-like. There's a nodding at one another, there's a knowing each other, without really knowing each other. And I want to say to you, that isn't really church.

Church life is difficult. Church life in Galatia was difficult. Look at chapter 5 and verse 15. Chapter 5 and verse 15.

Paul says to the IPC in Galatia, If you bite and devour one another, can you imagine a church meeting like that? Watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

[3 : 02] Look at chapter 5 and verse 26. Let us not become conceited. Provoking one another. Envy one another.

That is obviously the problem, isn't it? Obviously, one of the issues in Galatia, of course there were false teachers, there were huge doctrinal problems.

But one of the things was that the church in Galatia just weren't getting on. And so, this theme of one another dominates the rest of Galatians.

Look at chapter 6 and verse 2. Bear one another's burdens. What's the first word?

The first word of chapter 6. And the last word of chapter 6. Brothers. Brothers. And so, what Paul is saying to the Galatians is, We are family.

[4:05] And so, the command of chapter 5 verse 25. Just look at that command. Christians make a lot of that command. Keep in step with the Spirit. Let me tell you this. You cannot do that outside of the family.

And Paul is saying, If you want to keep in step with the Spirit, You do that by living that out in the family of God. Three things this morning.

I want us to see the stewardship of our relationships. The stewardship of our relationships. That's the first thing. In Galatians chapter 6 and verses 1 to 5.

Paul is writing to make us understand that in the fellowship, In the partnership of the local church, We are intimately joined to one another by the blood of Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of God.

And he is wanting you and I to understand that we cannot, We must not, we should not act like a bunch of emotionally repressed Londoners on the underground.

[5:08] Everybody focused only on themselves and their destination. Ignoring those who they've been placed into intimate contact with. And so he's calling each of us to rethink the stewardship of our relationships within the membership of the local church.

How do we relate to one another? And it's not very comfortable, is it? So look what he says in verse 1. Brothers, brothers and sisters, If anyone is caught in any transgression, any rebellion, You who are spiritual should restore them.

In a spirit of gentleness. Now that is not our usual kind of mode of operation, is it? Let's be honest. Our preferred response when we see someone else's sin, What do we do?

Well, we talk about it with someone else. Did you see what they said? I don't know whether you noticed what they did. Can you believe it?

That's often our instinct. But Paul calls us, doesn't he, to a very different pattern here. That if we see somebody ensnared, trapped by a transgression, What should we do?

[6:24] Should we shun them? Perhaps. Should we denounce them to other people? Should we gossip about them behind their back? Should we go and tell the minister and get him to do something about it?

What should we do? Paul says, The spiritual people in the congregation know exactly what to do. They will not pass the back. They will not grumble. They will not complain. And they will not gossip.

What do they do? They work with the fallen Christian. And they make every effort to restore him or her. And the word that Paul uses here, It's translated in the ESV as restore.

And it's used in Mark's gospel and Matthew's gospel to describe fishermen mending their nets. That's what they're doing. They're restoring their nets. And so the duty of a faithful Christian to a brother or sister within the membership of the church is to do everything we can to mend, to restore.

To take the sin broken nets of their Christian life and help them tie it back together again. So that they would be useful in the service of Jesus Christ.

[7:38] And then he tells us how we are to do it. Do you remember what we're to do? We are to do it in a spirit of gentleness. And of course that makes total sense, isn't it? Because how did Jesus deal with your sin?

And how does Jesus deal with my sin? And we're going to see it tonight. Come tonight and hear Reuben preach on the woman at the well.

How does Jesus deal with her? She's had five husbands. The man she's with is now not her husband. And what does he say? Well, he treats her, doesn't he, with so much respect and so much gentleness. How is he with you?

How has Jesus been with you this week? Is he denunciatory? Is he harsh with you? Is he dismissive of you? No, and what is he like? He says, come to me, all you are weary and heavy laden.

For I am gentle and lowly. And the Lord Jesus, what is he like? He's quick to forgive. He abounds in steadfast love and mercy.

[8 : 35] He's ready to restore you and to renew you when you turn to him. He never quits on you, does he? The Lord Jesus never says, enough of you, get away from me. He works to restore his people and to bring us back.

And so why then are we often like the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18? Do you remember him? Do you remember in Matthew 18, the unforgiving servant, he'd had his debts cancelled.

He'd had this great sum cancelled. And yet there was another servant, wasn't there, who owed him just a little bit of money. And he demands from that person in anger and violence, you pay everything, you owe me.

And we've been taught by our Saviour to pray, Father, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who've sinned against us. And so remember the gospel on which you daily depend for mercy.

And in a spirit of gospel gentleness, show mercy. That's Paul's point in Galatians 6. Don't excuse the sin.

[9 : 45] Don't ignore it. Seek to restore them in a spirit of gentleness. And Paul is so wise, isn't he? There's a wise warning that follows right on the heels of that exhortation.

Do you see his warning? Not only are we to gently restore those who are caught in transgressions, but we are to take special care that while we do it, as we lead some to repentance, that we ourselves don't fall into that same sin.

And that is a master class in pastoral wisdom. Paul knows my heart, and he knows your heart very well, and he knows how easily we can focus on the sin of other people with legitimate love and concern, and yet we can let our own guard down.

Care for them, Paul says. Yes, of course, but keep a close watch on yourself while you do it. Misdirection in the military. It's a common tactic, isn't it? It's basic. You keep them expecting a full frontal assault so they're completely unprepared and for a surprise attack from behind.

And that's what Paul is warning us against. Sin is a terrible and subtle foe. And so, yes, be concerned for your brother or sister when they fall into sin, but as you do that, as you're focused over here, beware of a sneak attack from the rear and that you yourself don't fall into that sin.

[11 : 21] Don't let your guard down, lest you yourself are ensnared by the same temptation. And then he tells us in verse 2 that all of that is really just a part of fulfilling the law of Christ.

That we are to bear one another's burdens. That's what this is about. That is our basic commitment as church family, as members of this church.

You are not just called to show up and receive the ministry, to be a consumer. You are called to show up and engage in ministry, to bear one another's burdens, fulfills the law of Christ.

And Christ taught us that love fulfills the law. If you love me, he says, keep my commandments. And this is my commandment, that you love one another.

Verses 3 to 5, Paul turns back to the way that we think about ourselves. And do you see how wisely he alternates between a call to care for one another and pay attention to your own walk with the Lord.

[12:35] And so he comes back now and he exhorts our own hearts. There's a fundamental link. There is a fundamental link between our ability to serve one another and to restore one another and to care for one another and to bear one another's burdens and our ability to rightly assess ourselves.

Paul is saying humility and ministry go together. Humility and serving one another go hand in hand. Pride and spiritual indifference towards the needs of others also go together.

Don't they like cause and effect? We will never steward our relationships with one another until we're able to steward ourselves. So verse 3, if anyone thinks he's something, when he's nothing, he deceives himself.

But let each one test his own work and let his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. Paul is not suggesting here that you are now free to make a habit of boasting about yourself.

He's just said, chapter 5, verse 26, just look there again, and let us not become conceited. Let's not become full of ourselves, provoking one another and envying one another. He's not talking about being proud of yourself. Verse 3 is not a permission for you to big yourself up for self-aggrandizement.

[14:04] What he's saying is you need a sober, honest assessment of yourself. And instead of taking credit for things which really have got nothing to do with you, because verse 5, each will have to bear his own load.

There's a future tense there. So Paul is saying, each will, won't he, in the future, have to bear his own load. And that future tense is really important.

It clues us into what Paul is talking about here. He isn't taking back what he just said in verse 2, or bearing one another's burdens. And then now two verses later, he suddenly changes his mind and says, no, I want you to bear your own burden.

That's not what he's saying. Rather, he is saying, there is a day coming when each of us will be held responsible for what we've done.

And he's talking about judgment day. And when that day dawns, he says, you will have to bear your own load. And you will have to answer for your own deeds. And so as you steward yourself and your relationships within the local church, remember that you do that under the gaze of God.

[15:23] A God before whom one day you will have to give an account. The stewardship of our relationships. Secondly, the stewardship of our resources.

The stewardship of our resources. So when we talk about stewardship here, you need to hear more than just a call to dig deep and give big.

We need to hear the reminder, that reminder to mutual care and that faithful stewarding of ourselves and our relationships for the good of others all within the membership of the church.

So look at the second place at verses 6 to 8. And here he addresses our resources and our money. It gets very, very practical. And so he's talking about broadly, mutual care and one another ministry in general.

And Paul now highlights one thing in particular. Verse 6, Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. And so he's saying, isn't he, provide for the maintenance and the growth of the ministry of the word through generous support.

[16:33] Through those who devote their lives to its proclamation. It's really straightforward, isn't it? I don't think there's another understanding of that verse. I think it's really clear. But then do you notice how he reinforces the point and he appeals to a spiritual principle.

Here's where I want to major. Look at verse 7 and 8. Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Now remember, Paul is still talking about finances at this point. And you will remember the church in Galatia to whom he's writing. And they've got a whole group of false teachers have come.

And they've led them into legalism and bondage. And they've led them away from the gospel of grace. And so Paul is anxious here, isn't he? He is saying, you Galatians, do what you practically may to fix that.

[17:41] Secure for yourselves orthodox teachers and instructors and ministers who will guide you back into safe paths. Do not give money to false teachers.

Do not give money to those who will bring you into bondage. And so he tells them to think carefully how you give and who you give to and not just how much you give.

He says, if you sow to the flesh, you will from the flesh reap corruption. That is to say this, if you invest in poor leaders and bad theology and weak instruction because it's easy on the year and it's comfortable and it doesn't unsettle your priorities or challenge your lifestyle, if you sow to that, if you give to that, your investment will go the way of all flesh and it will reap corruption.

And the word corruption means decay, deterioration, disillusion. So can you see what is Paul doing here?

He is saying, invest in what is going to last. You are sowing in your giving for eternity.

[19:03] And that is what you're doing when you prioritize radical sacrificial generosity in your giving.

When you give to the faithful ministry of the local church, you are sowing for eternity. That's what you just did. As the bag went round, as your standing order dropped in the bank account, what were you doing?

You were doing something absolutely remarkable. You are sowing for eternity. And so Paul wants you today to step back and to ask yourself a few questions about the way we use our money.

And so he asks you the question, like he asks me, how much of my expenditure is sowing to the flesh? How much of what I invest my money in and spend my money on will survive into the new creation?

how much of what I give in a thousand years in eternity will I look back and say, do you know what? I am so, so pleased that I gave to the work of the gospel so that these people could be in glory.

[20:18] I am so, so pleased that I did that. How much of what I've invested will last forever? Am I investing in eternity? So in the spirit.

Paul says, so depending upon him to sustain you and to keep you and to bless what you give and what you give for the extension of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The stewardship of our resources. And thirdly, the stewardship of our reach. So there's a call, isn't there, for us to steward our relationships as church members.

That we are to invest in relationships for the good of the body. And we are to steward our resources so that we will use the money that God has given us that we would sow to the spirit that our giving would go on to bless people in eternity.

And then in verses 9 and 10 there is the steward of the reach. If I can put it like that. Of our reach. Look at verses 9 and 10. And let us not grow weary of doing good.

[21:28] 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 to those who are of the household of faith.

And so can you see what our duty is? Our duty is, start with verse 9, unwearied doing good. That's our duty. And where does Paul point you to?

Paul points you to, doesn't he, the last day of judgment to help motivate us so that we will not give in to the temptation of being weary.

It's actually the third illusion, isn't it, in these verses to that last day. And look with me, you look at verse 5, each will have to bear his own load. Each will have to stand under the weight of how he's lived on the final day.

And then he hints again about it in verse 8 when he talks about sowing to the flesh and reaping corruption or sowing to the spirit and reaping eternal life. And now he does it a third time and he reminds us we will reap if we do not give up.

[22 : 38] Now some of us are really uncomfortable with this. And we're really uncomfortable with it.

But the New Testament consistently holds out the promise of rewards in heaven as a motivation for unwearied hard work on earth.

Keep going, the New Testament says again and again, because you will receive your reward. The rewards far surpassed, don't they, the work, the value of any work that we are to perform.

This is not meritorious works righteousness. This is not earning our salvation. The whole of the book of Galatians has taught you that is impossible. It's not quid pro quo.

It is not one good turn deserves another. Far from it. But Paul, the apostle, sees no tension at all between a gospel of radical free grace, that is the heartbeat of the letter of Galatians, radical free grace and the promise of eternal rewards for unwearied works of obedience and service.

[23 : 49] So remember that our best work, if God was to judge it on merits alone, even our best work would damn us forever. Because my best work is riddled with self and sin.

And yet God, in his amazing, wonderful grace, works in us to do good works. And then he promises to reward us for his good works.

He promises to reward us for his own grace, what his own grace has produced in us. So when we cross the finish line on the last day, when we stand before the risen Jesus Christ and the final judgment and we see clearly in that moment how empty all our vain boasting in our own accomplishments really is, we will then be utterly overcome with wonder, love and praise when the Lord Jesus rewards us for our imperfect best efforts in his service.

we'll see them as they are. They're weak things, slight things, broken things, riddled with self and sin, how much more we could have done, how unworthy of anything but God's disdain.

And yet Jesus will say to us, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord. And so, weary Christian this morning, weary believer, Jesus asks us, have you grown tired of your service in my cause?

[25 : 30] And remember, remember the harvest of glory that is to come that will reward all your efforts, all of them, however small, however slight, however weak they may be.

A cup of cold water given in my name. A cup of cold water given in my name. Will be rewarded, Jesus says.

None of them will be ignored. None of them will be overlooked. None of them will go unrewarded. And so, therefore, press on. Keep going in your service to the Saviour.

And so, how wide is the scope of this? how wide is the scope? Well, should we be good just to the people we like? Should we show kindness and goodness just to the people who are like us?

What does Paul say? It's the same question in many ways that the rich young ruler asked Jesus in Luke 10, 29, who's my neighbour? Who should we be committed to this ministry and service?

[26:33] Look how Paul answers, verse 10, it's a magnificent verse. As we have opportunity, we are to do good to everyone. I love that phrase, as opportunity allows.

You cannot take the burdens of the problems of this area on your shoulders. You cannot do it and I can't. It's just too much, isn't it? We're overwhelmed, aren't we? Utterly overwhelmed. But Paul says, as you have opportunity, so you will have opportunity, do good.

He's saying to you and I, go looking for opportunities to serve as many as you may. Do good to everyone, but especially, there's the priority, to the household of faith. And so our mission is as wide as the world, we're to be good neighbours, we're to be good friends to people, to all people.

And we have to do good to all, especially to the household of faith. And the especially is important, isn't it? And so the first claim on your time and on your resources and on your labours beyond your immediate family is the household of faith, the church.

The language is here to remind you, isn't it? We are family. And family comes first. And so does the family of faith come first for you or is it an afterthought?

[28:00] To be fitted into the margins of your time when you've got nothing else to do and you've done your pleasures and your entertainments, they've taken the lion's share. And is that reflected in your relationships and in the way that you use your resources?

Do good to all, especially to the household of faith. And so can you see it? It's a magnificent passage, isn't it? We are called to steward our relationships as church members. We are to be engaged with one another, bearing with one another, putting up with one another, restoring one another as we stumble and all the while keeping a watchful, careful watch on our own hearts.

And we are to steward our resources to give generously to the support and advance of the ministry of the gospel. And so it's not numbers that are our focus but people gripped by the truth of God and brought to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But to accomplish that, to advance in that, Paul calls us to sow to eternity, to invest generously in ministry that will endure.

And finally, we're called to the steward, the reach of the church, not to keep it close, not to keep it to ourselves, not to keep it to people we like or to people who are like us but to do good to everyone, especially to those of the household of faith.

[29:31] And so Paul says, don't grow weary. Why does he say that? Why does he say don't grow weary? Well, because the temptation in the Christian life is what?

To grow weary. When you're doing good, it's tiring work. And so he says to us as a church family, keep sowing. Be generous.

Keep being generous. As a word to those of us who are in leadership in this church, isn't it? We here in Ealing, the building that you sit in, we have been the recipients of astonishing generosity, of incredible kindness.

And we have an opportunity as a church family as we've grown under God to sow. We have an opportunity under God to be generous, to train, to give, to resource others.

And as we do that, both as a church family and as individuals, hear this, God is not mocked. Isn't it your testimony? Isn't it my testimony that as you have given yourself to the Lord's work, as you have given resources to the Lord's work, God is not mocked.

[30:52] What you have sown, you reap more abundantly. And so may God help us. May God help us to be good stewards to the praise and the glory of his grace.

Let's pray together.