



Time to Reflect

- What opportunities has God given you to carry the burdens of another person? What helped you through this experience?
- How can we become more Spirit-led and focused on the will of God?

Last week we considered the theme of gospel character and our attention was drawn to the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. We saw how Paul encouraged the Galatians to walk by the Spirit. This week, as we reach the end of Galatians, our attention is drawn to Christian living and we will reflect on several important teachings that Paul wanted to leave with the Galatians. They were intended to help the Galatians live out their faith and they are also useful for each of us.

“These final words of Paul’s may at first sight seem like a series of disconnected statements, but Paul is actually doing two things as he signs off. Verses 6-10 are his final warning; and verses 11-18 are his final invitation. His warning and his invitation are essentially the same message, the message that underlies every line of this letter: live by the gospel.”

(Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You*, p173)

Specifics

- Our passage highlights the importance of pastoral care between Christians. We are called to look out for each other and Paul specifically mentions the need to help others who are “...caught in a sin” (v1).
- It is worth noting that this does not give licence for Christians to become judgemental and pointed. This teaching refers to addressing the challenge and destruction of recurring sin. When a sinful pattern has taken hold of a person, we are to do what we can to help that person.
- Timothy Keller helpfully reflects, “Christians need to be neither quick to criticize not afraid to confront.¹” We are to move gently and under the leading of the Holy Spirit. As we do so, Paul also warns that we need to take personal care so that we don’t fall into temptation (v1).
- Paul then builds upon this initial teaching by challenging the Galatians to “Carry each others burdens...” (v2). This sounds straightforward but there is much contained in this statement.
- This is a call to willingly journey alongside other people when they are experiencing difficulties in life. Note that there are no conditions applied to this call. Rather, it is actually referred to as fulfilling the law of Christ (v2).
- Keller offers some practical guidance as he writes, “You cannot help with a burden unless you come very close to the burdened person, standing virtually in their shoes, and putting your own strength under the burden so its weight is distributed on both of you, lightening the load of the other. So in the same way, a Christian must listen and understand, and physically, emotionally, spiritually, take up some of the burden with the other person.²”

¹ Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), p166.

² Ibid, p168.

- (v3) reminds us of the importance of being humble as we live out our Christian faith. By including this teaching, Paul was also responding (one final time) to the actions and attitudes of the Judaizers.
- In Christian living, we also need to be secure in our faith and our calling. Note how Paul discouraged comparisons with other people (v4).
- Keller suggests, “We will not compare ourselves with someone who has done less than us (and feel conceited pride) or someone who has done more (and feel conceited despair or envy). God has given them a different load to carry and to serve Him with. Our task is to carry our individual load, not someone else’s, in a way that pleases God.”³
- (v6-10) contain Paul’s final warning and this section begins with Paul highlighting the importance of discipleship and mentoring. It is important that we grow in faith and that we have mature Christians who can challenge and encourage us as we seek to grow. Such people will also pray for us and consistently point us back to God and His Word.
- The instruction “Do not be deceived” (v7) is, in many ways, a summary of the entire letter to the Galatians. Paul was passionate about seeing the Galatians return to their first love – the depth of love that they had in God as opposed to religious legalism.
- Acts of kindness and good works are referenced in (v9-10) but we should note that Paul regards these to be marks of true Christianity as opposed to the means of salvation.
- In (v8) he challenged the Galatians to be Spirit-led and focused. It has been said that the Christians who achieved most in this world are those who reflect most on the world to come (eternity).
- The remaining verses in Galatians (v11-18) contain Paul’s final invitation. This is an appeal for the Galatians to keep trusting the gospel for salvation and a challenge to them to live it out day-by-day.
- This is also the challenge that we face each and every day as we strive to be the people God longs for us to be. Paul realised that gospel living would not always be easy – hence his reference to persecution in (v12).
- Yet Paul directed the Galatians back to Calvary and the Cross of Christ (v14). As people of faith, we must regularly return to the Cross and be reminded of the depth and breadth of God’s love for us. We are to live with a Cross-focus.
- Keller reminds us, “...if you understand the gospel, you ‘boast’ exclusively and only in the cross...The gospel leads us to boast in the cross of Jesus. That means our identity in Jesus is confident and secure – we do ‘boast’! – yet humbly, based on a profound sense of our flaws and neediness.”⁴
- When we respond to the gospel we are changed. Paul referred to this as “...the new creation” (v15). This is a God-given transformation from our old self and towards the new self that God desires. This is, very often, a journey that God leads us on and it calls us to embrace gospel living.
- This can only ever be achieved by the grace of God and Paul was aware of this. Note how he finished his letter by reminding the Galatians of God’s grace (v18).
- We begin our Christian journey by grace and we continue by grace. We strive to align ourselves to the will of God, grow closer to Him, and deeper in our knowledge and love of Him.

³ Keller, *Galatians For You*, p170.

⁴ Ibid, p182.