

June 12, 2016

Another Gospel

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all." Galatians 1:6-7

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ...Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else; for each should carry his own load...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. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time 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."
Galatians 6:1-10

As is true in nearly all his letter, the Apostle Paul closes this letter to the churches of Galatia with a short list of specific commandments based on the teachings he has already established. In this case the Apostle wants to focus on our attitudes and actions toward the sin in the lives of those around us. We are called, as those who follow Jesus, to become helpers.

So, the Apostle begins by reminding us that our primary task in regards to those we know are struggling in sin is to seek their restoration and redemption. Nowhere in Scripture are we given the task of judging and condemning those who are trapped in sin. We are, in fact, warned more than once against such attitudes. Instead, we are called to reach out to those who are struggling in sin with, all gentleness.

Becoming a helper is, of course, a dangerous proposition. It is easy when we try to help those in sin to see ourselves as more righteous than we really are. Paul would write, *"If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."* When I am trying to help someone overcome their sin I can easily think I am more righteous than they are when in fact I am also a sinner. Constantly reminding ourselves that we are never more than sinners saved by grace is an essential attitude for effective helpers.

The second threat to those who seek to help sinners is the danger of being pulled into the same sins. The dangers involved in trying to help others are never an excuse to give up trying to be helpful, but we need to understand that reaching out to those in sin and trying to help them can connect us with those same sinful choices. While we would seek to influence them for good they may easily be influencing us for evil.

The third threat to those of us who would become helpers is our natural tendency to take on personal responsibility for the choices that those in sin make. Thus the Apostle will write, *"A man reaps what he sows."* Even as we reach out to those who struggle with sin, we must understand and accept that their choices still belong to them. We can encourage change, but we cannot dictate change. Letting those who would continue to sin make those choices is sometimes the hardest reality for those who would be helpers to accept.

Finally, Paul will encourage us to not grow weary in doing good. And make no mistake, trying to be a helper; a servant, is a tiring and often discouraging task. Over and over again those of us who try to be helpers will want to quit, want to walk away, and want to give up. But we cannot do

that. One of the qualities of those who are led by the Spirit is the capacity to be faithful to the end.

And so, Paul would have us understand that we are often called to reach out to those who are struggling with sin. We cannot turn a blind eye on their struggle; nor can we judge and condemn them. Our task is to seek their restoration and redemption. But, even as we reach out to the sinners in our world, we must guard ourselves against dangers of such service, weariness and discouragement being the most dangerous.

CARRY
ONE ANOTHER'S
BURDENS;
IN THIS WAY
YOU WILL FULFILL
THE LAW
OF CHRIST.
GALATIANS 6:2