

GLORY IN THE CROSS

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Let's Begin

In the little classic by Charles Sheldon entitled "In His Steps," the bishop attempted to assist an alcoholic overcome his addiction to alcohol. The bishop found Burns (the alcoholic) in a drunken stupor lying on the city sidewalk and attempted to help him. He took Burns home with him promising Burns he would help him find work the next day. True to his promise, the bishop helped Burns secure employment as a janitor at a local business.

Unfortunately, the business where Burns got a job was next door to a saloon. The scent of freshly brewed beer and liquor immediately taxed Burns' resolve so badly, he headed through the swinging doors to satisfy his thirst. About that time, the bishop grabbed Burns by the arm. However, Burns was like a madman, slinging his fists so wildly, he managed to land a blow to the bishop's face, leaving a deep cut on his chin.

Not saying a word, the bishop picked Burns from the ground, took him to church, and locked him in the prayer-room. Burns came out a new man, a saved man. Sheldon then writes, "And the bishop went his way older from that experience, bearing on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Truly he was learning something of what it means to walk in His steps."

The "marks of the Lord Jesus", are what the Apostle Paul believed the result to be as one glories in the cross of Jesus Christ (v. 17). Contrary to the Judaizers who gloried in the law, resulting in no persecution (vv. 12-13), Paul concluded believers who walked in the Spirit would not only be persecuted, but also would bear the marks of doing so.

As we study Paul's final words to the Galatians, let's follow the outline below:

I. The Ministry of the Church (vv. 1-10)

II. The Message of the Cross (vv. 11-18)

I. The Ministry of the Church (vv. 1-10)

Paul has pulled no punches with the Galatians. His language is obviously stronger in this letter than perhaps any other letter to the church. He has his reasons. The Judaizers relentlessly taught a false Gospel of works, leading young, impressionable believers back into legalistic bondage of Old Testament law. They insisted on adding circumcision to grace alone by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. For Paul, to add or subtract any element whatsoever to simple repentant faith in the Lord Jesus constituted full-blown heresy. It is this heresy he definitively corrected in his Galatian letter.

As a result of the false teaching, many members apparently became disillusioned with the church and dropped out of sight. False teaching cannot feed the soul. Only the truth of God nourishes our faith, keeping us faithful by strengthening our commitment to Christ. Paul deals with those overtaken in sin and encourages the church to administer proper discipline to them. He writes, "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" (v. 1).

One of the most neglected ministries of the church is discipline—*Biblically and lovingly reconciling wayward church members*. For Paul, there are two significant factors involved in the church's ministry of reconciliation.



The first factor in reconciliation is recognizing the *spiritual possibility of the Christian's ruin*. It is not a hypothetical issue which Paul addresses. Some people who have given themselves to Christ and were active in the body-life of the church are now living wayward lives. It happened in the first century, and it happens today. Granted there are many who drop off the church's radar screen who had a "false start"; that is, the profession they made was not authentic. Hence, they were never saved in the first place (cp. 1 John 2:19).

On the other hand, some who have genuinely trusted Christ for salvation have detoured from Christ's way. An old term hardly used today to describe believers who have stumbled and fallen is "backslider." Paul's description is more precise—"overtaken in a fault." How is this possible since the Holy Spirit indwells every genuine believer?

Reflection Connection

Reflect on your journey of faith through the years. Is there a time period when you seemed to "fall away" from the life of the church? If so, what influenced you most during that particular period? What was the most significant contributor in your re-entry into the life of the church? If possible, be prepared to share some of your story with the entire group.

First, it is possible any believer may be "overtaken," because all are prone to *human weakness*. Recall, Paul says, "if a man" be overtaken in fault. Just because one becomes a believer does not mean all weaknesses vanish. Even more, the devil will exhaust himself by working tirelessly on every weakness one possesses. Temptations become, if possible, more pronounced now that a person has given himself or herself to Christ.

In addition, it is possible any believer may be "overtaken" because all are prone to *human waywardness*. The term "overtaken" carries the idea of taking someone by surprise. Given this sense, Paul is referring to a Christian falling victim to an overpowering, sudden temptation. The term "fault" literally means "to fall beside." It refers to falling from walking in the right path (cp. 5:25). Indeed, sometimes Christians get involved in sin before they realize what they are doing. Sin is not planned; instead a sudden, tempting impulse hits, and sin is the result. Whether it is the devil's active work, or the Christian's passive neglect of soul-duties like prayer, Bible study, worship, and witnessing that remains the culprit, the consequence is the same—*spiritual waywardness*.

The second factor in reconciliation is recognizing the *special responsibility of the church's role*. Paul emphatically states, "ye which are spiritual, restore..." The church's ministry includes restoring wayward brothers and sisters to God's family. Understand, however: it is a mistake to tacitly assume one is what Paul refers to as "spiritual." Indeed, in order to qualify for the "spiritual," one must meet the qualification necessary: *crucifying the flesh and walking in the Spirit* (5:24-25). Hence, some dare not attempt to exercise church discipline.

Far too often when Christians attempt to deal with waywardness, a judgmental approach is used. However, church discipline toward believers fallen by the wayside is not about judging sin; sin is judged temporally by Scripture and eternally by God. Instead, church discipline is about reconciliation and restoration. In short, the church seeks healing for the church body. Hence, the *right approach* to ministry seeks *restoration*.

Even more, the *right attitude* of ministry renders *humility*. The Apostle indicates restoration should be with, "the spirit of meekness." Restoration is neither arrogant nor self-righteous. Instead, gentleness characterizes believers who seek to win wayward believers back to God's flock. In doing so, the church "saves a soul from death"—death of influence, death of testimony, death of usefulness in Kingdom work (James 5:19-20).



Nevertheless, it still remains significant to ponder precisely why the church must render humility. After all, the wayward believer is living in sin, is he not? Paul's reply answers, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden" (vv. 2-5).

According to the Apostle, our burdens are to be *shared* (vv. 2-3). All around us are pockets of pain. If someone does not take the initiative, our brother or sister may very well drown in the sea of suffering into which they have fallen. Hence, we are to, "bear one another's burdens". The Christian life is not to be lived in isolation.

Moreover, our burdens are to be *shouldered* (vv. 4-5). The Greek word for burden in verse 2 is different from the Greek word for burden in verse 5 (*baros* and *phortion* respectively). *Baros* virtually always refers to what is both heavy and burdensome. On the other hand, *phortion* refers simply to something which is to be borne without reference to its weight.

Hence, Paul is not contradicting what he has just stated above. He is merely recognizing some burdens must be shared, and some burdens exist for which no one may be held responsible but us. For instance, if your car breaks down, a brother may take your children to school, but sharing that burden with you does not obligate him to become your children's father. Some burdens and responsibilities we must share alone.

As believers, we are never alone, however. Our burdens—burdens no other human being may share—nonetheless may be *shed*. How, you ask? The Lord Jesus invites us to shed our heaviest, most difficult burdens with Him (Matt. 11:28; cp. Psa. 55:22).

Finally, the *right action* in ministry produces *rich harvest*. Paul's harvest language could not be more appropriate in explaining Kingdom laws of successful ministry, including the ministry of reconciliation. He writes, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 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. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (vv. 7-10).

The Apostle is clear: *we reap what we sow*. And this law prevails whether we are discussing farming or ministry. Far too often this simple principle is ignored. Some sow indulgence, but expect to reap health. Others sow strife and expect peace. Still others plant sin, but expect righteousness. However, to sow indulgence and expect health makes as much sense as to sow cabbage and expect corn!

According to the Apostle, our burdens are to be shared.



Paul was clear about another basic law of harvest: we *reap more than we sow*. For example, he says if we sow to the flesh, we will reap “corruption” (v. 8), a spreading, so to speak, of the seed of flesh. On the other hand, if we sow to the Spirit, we reap “eternal life.” Just from one corn seed planted comes the expectation of multiplied results, sowing and reaping in our lives is just the same.

God will not fail in His promise.

A final law of harvest Paul reveals: *we reap later than we sow* (v. 9). The results inevitably come, “in due season.” No farmer expects instant results from sowing seeds. However, every farmer expects results “in due season”, else he plants in vain. When the church is doing ministry with the *right approach* (restoration), the *right attitude* (humility), and the *right actions* (sowing), God will not fail in His promise. Therefore, the Apostle exhorts, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

II. The Message of the Cross (vv. 11-18)

The Galatian believers had a ministry to accomplish. And, the ministry was poised squarely upon the message of the Gospel concerning which they were in danger of corrupting. It stands without surprise that Paul ends his communication with the churches with one last focus on the message of the cross.

First, Paul explains clearly the *meaning* of the cross. He writes, “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. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. 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” (vv. 12-14).

The cross is not just a slab of wood; instead the cross is cosmic in meaning; that is, the cross is a message of salvation to anyone who will believe (vv. 12-13). To drive this point home, Paul gives a final warning to the Judaizers. Whereas the Judaizers insisted the only way to be saved was through the law, Paul insisted the only way of salvation was by grace alone through faith alone. Paul’s message was simple when he first arrived in Galatia—*salvation is by way of the cross*. *The Gospel he received from heaven itself is the Gospel the Galatians at first believed*. The Gospel they believed and upon which they stood was a Gospel entirely by grace.

Contrarily, the Judaizers preached another way entirely to be saved: *the way of circumcision*. More generally speaking, this way is *the way of human works*. However, it is also a way hatched in hell and only worthy to return to hell (cp. 1:8-9). Paul makes the options clear. The Galatians must decide. So must we. If a person depends on his or her good character in order to be saved, there is but a single outcome—eternal separation from God. If, however, one trusts fully in Jesus Christ for salvation, an entirely different outcome awaits—eternal life with God in heaven.

Not only does the message of the cross mean *salvation* to the one who trusts in Christ, it also means *separation* to the one who trusts in Christ (v. 14; cp.

Reflection Connection

Do you think some professing Christians with whom you are familiar appear to depend more on good works to save them than grace to save them? If so, pray about the possible doors of opportunity God might provide for you to explore the question with them.



2:20). The world Paul knew before he met Christ held no more power over his life. To come to Jesus means to leave this world system. Recall, according to Paul's Gospel, when one comes to Christ, a two-way death takes place. In the first death, the world is, "crucified unto me." In other words, worldly pursuits no longer lay dominate claim to your mind and heart. Worldly attraction died at the cross! In the second of the two-way death, the believer is crucified "unto the world." So far as the world goes, I deserve ridicule, persecution, and tribulation. As a person of worth to them, I am dead.

Second, Paul explains the *miracle* of the cross (vv. 15-16). The Gospel works miracles in the lives of all who believe in Christ. For example, Paul speaks of the miracle of *new life* created in his mother's womb (v. 15a). He further speaks about God's grace "calling" him, referring to his conversion to Christ and commission as Apostle (vv. 15b-16). In addition, Paul reminds the Galatians of the miracle of a *new lifestyle* (v. 16). No longer would his vocation as tent-maker be his trade. Instead, he now was called to serve Christ with every fiber of his existence. Following Christ always leads to the Spirit's active work in the believer's life, molding and miraculously changing him or her.

Third, Paul explains the *marks* of the cross (vv. 17-18). The message of the cross is forever connected to the marks of the cross. Contrary to the Judaizers' experience, Paul insists he bears in his body "the marks of the Lord Jesus" (v. 17). The Greek term for "marks" was used in several contexts in the first century. For example, a soldier bore the name of the general under whom he served, whose name was branded on his skin. The brand was the general's "mark." Or, a slave might be "marked" by his owner's brand.

For Paul, the marks of the Lord Jesus—marks of the cross—were two-fold. On the one hand, one marked by Christ's cross *suffered* for Jesus. In fact, there is a literal aspect to Paul's meaning. He physically suffered imprisonment, beatings, stoning, shipwreck, famine, and poverty for the sake of the Gospel (cp. 2 Cor. 11:23-28). Suffering was a mark the Judaizers avoided at all costs.

On the other hand, one marked by Christ's cross *surrendered* to Jesus. Paul's physical scars were but symbols of the marks on Paul's soul. He died that Christ could live in Him. And, while we may not have physical scars on our bodies which offer visibility to the marks on our soul, if surrender to Christ is not branded on a person's heart, that person has never received or understood the message of the Gospel.

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul encouraged the Galatians to avoid weariness in their "well doing" by specifically asserting that, "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (v. 9). The Greek term translated "faint not" is *eklyô*, which literally means "to relax," "to loose," "to release." Hence, it carries with it the idea to give up or become discouraged. Paul's exhortation is clear: believers can never "relax" or become discouraged in doing the ministry of Jesus. While rewards for faithfulness may not be immediate, rewards nonetheless will come "in due season," in God's timing.

Wrap Up

Galatians is a challenging book. One message is clear: no person may depend upon anything in life to secure a right relationship with God other than faith in Jesus Christ. Every person should think deeply and seriously about this question, "Do I fully and completely trust Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior?" If you cannot, with full assurance, answer the question with a resounding "Yes," then do not delay: ask Christ to save you now. Turn from your sin and your own good works, and place your simple faith in Him.

