

The Gospel in Galatians

The Gospel and the Church

Lesson #13 for December 24, 2011

Scriptures: Galatians 6:1-10; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Romans 15:1; John 13:34,35; Luke 22:3.

1. This lesson is about the church and how it deals with sinners. Is your church more like a hospital for sinners? Or, is it more like a club for saints? Have you helped another Christian to bear his or her burdens recently? How should the church respond to sinners either outside or inside its ranks? Shouldn't the church welcome sinners?
2. As you look around in your church, do church members frequently put others before themselves? Are we practicing the golden rule? (Matthew 7:12) These are tough questions. Jesus was not talking about Wall Street's "golden rule": "He who has the gold makes the rules!" There were other law codes before the days of Moses. They included rules like: "If you don't want someone to do something to you, don't do it to him." Hasn't every mother said that to her children? How was Jesus' instruction different? And what about the platinum rule: "Do unto others what they would like to have done to them."
3. Like other human beings, Christians make mistakes. How should we deal with church members who make mistakes? How does the church relate to sinners who are outside of its membership but who might be considering joining?
4. Read Galatians 6:1. Does helping others who have fallen into sin make us more prone to sin ourselves? Surely, we should recognize the general principle that Christians should constantly watch against temptation. How do we warn others about their sins without seeming judgmental? (Read Galatians 6:3)
5. Is there a difference between a mistake and a sin? The words describing church members who inadvertently commit sin are revealing. The Greek word suggests that they are "overtaken" or "surprised" to find themselves once again sinning. Sins are a trap! (Proverbs 5:22) Is it ever appropriate to lie? When you are feeling terrible in the morning, do you still respond, "I'm fine"? If someone looks really bad, do you tell him/her so?
6. What does the Bible teach us about unintentional sins and intentional sins? Read Numbers 15:22-29. There are very clear instructions about unintentional sins. But, what does the Bible say about intentional sins? Read Numbers 15:30,31. Immediately after that, Moses described the case of someone who intentionally broke the Sabbath. (Numbers 15:32-36) He was stoned to death outside the camp. Paul also talked about dealing with defiant sins. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) What about David's sins? Does repentance change a sin from being intentional to unintentional?
7. It seems that God's plan was for intentional sins to be taken very, very seriously. How many of our sins are unintentional? The word in Galatians 6:1 translated as *fault* or *sin* comes from the Greek word *paraptoma* and does not describe a deliberate sin but rather an unintentional mistake. What about habitual sins? Are they ever unintentional?
8. So, how should the church respond to lapses in righteousness when it is a church member who is caught in unintentional sins? It is the work of the church—like the work of a hospital—to restore such a person. The Greek word *katartizo* which is used in this passage is the word also used for mending nets or even for setting broken bones.
9. In our day, how often do we follow the advice Jesus Himself gave in Matthew 18:15-17? Do we reach out to our fellow church members, putting our arms around them when they sin,

restoring them? Or, do we talk about them behind their backs or even despise them in our hearts? How did God deal with Nadab and Abihu? (Leviticus 10:1-11) Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? (Numbers 16) Uzzah? (2 Samuel 6:1-8) Ananias and Sapphira? (Acts 5) What about Peter's sin? (Mark 14:27-31,66-72)

10. Have you ever found yourself condemning another church member—even secretly in your thoughts—when you discover they have committed some sin? How often have you found yourself guilty of that same sin a short time later? Is this why we have a common expression in the English language, “It takes one to know one”? Compare Matthew 7:1-5.
11. Who is the worst sinner? Is it the one who commits an unintentional sin? Or, the one who, filled with spiritual pride, condemns that person in his heart? Does this sound like the Pharisees in the New Testament? Do we as church members actually consistently practice the golden rule? (Matthew 7:12) Why is spiritual pride such a serious problem for Christians? Why did Jesus choose certain women as His followers? (Luke 8:1-3) Were they all saints? Remember that each of those who has died will be judged fairly by God.
12. Why do you suppose that Paul in Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:8,10 said that if we love our neighbors as ourselves, we have fulfilled all law? Is that really true? If we really did that, would we eliminate all gender, racial, tribal, and class distinctions?
13. In Galatians 6:1, Paul did an interesting thing. The Greek verb in the first portion of the verse is in the second person plural. But, when Paul talked about looking after our own selves, he turned to the second person singular, meaning that each Christian is to take this personally.
14. We do not know if Paul had a specific sin or incident in the church at Galatia in mind when he gave this instruction. It may be just a general form of instruction. But, there are plenty of examples, even in the lives of Bible heroes, of being caught in serious sins.
15. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged for her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle. Was that an unintentional sin? When Nathan the prophet came to confront David concerning this sin, how did David respond? How would you have responded? (2 Samuel 12; Psalms 51; 32)
16. Peter swore to Jesus that he would follow Him even to death if necessary. A few hours later, he realized that he had denied his Lord three times! (Matthew 26:34)
17. Unfortunately, we were all born with sinful natures. It is so easy to be filled with spiritual pride and conceit when we think that others have fallen into sin and we are still standing. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us to beware when we think we are standing lest we fall.
18. It has been almost 2000 years since Christ came the first time. Why hasn't He come back? Why hasn't the gospel been preached to all the world for a witness to all nations? (Matthew 24:14) Don't we have more evidence than any previous generation?
19. Instead of using sinful humans, wouldn't it have been better for God to use angels who could even appear on this earth as human beings to spread the gospel? Wouldn't they have represented God and told the truth more clearly than we erring, sinful, human beings have done? God could even have asked beings from the other worlds to come and finish the gospel on His behalf. No doubt, there are other ways God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, could have done it Himself.
20. But, God has chosen to involve us for several reasons. First of all, in order to speak the truth to someone else, we need to study it and learn it well enough so we can explain it clearly. This is a great opportunity for us to grow. Furthermore, our fellow human beings can see that we are humans like they are, and this should encourage them that they too are able to live a Christian life. Finally, God has given us the glorious opportunity of sharing in His work. We

should consider this opportunity a precious one. What could be better than working with God to accomplish the most important task left to be done here on planet earth? What would happen if every church member took this as his top priority?

21. We are approaching the end of another year. As we do that each year, it gives us an opportunity to consider what we have accomplished spiritually during the last 12 months. It also gives us an opportunity to set goals for the coming year. How many church members can give a good explanation—with the texts to support them—of our doctrines? What kind of preparation do we need? Will God pour the latter rain on us so we can misrepresent Him?
22. Read Galatians 6:2-5. In what ways are we supposed to bear one another's burdens? Shouldn't it seem natural that the spiritually strong should help the spiritually weak? And surely, we are not supposed to compare ourselves with others. We should leave the judging to God.
23. The Greek word *baros* in Galatians 6:2 originally meant a very heavy weight or load that someone had to carry for a long distance. Later, this word came to have a broader meaning, describing any type of trouble or difficulty, even the burden of a long day's work on a hot day.
24. There are several important principles we should have in mind when we consider this injunction from Paul. First of all, no Christian is exempt from burdens. We all have them. They might even involve a physical ailment, a mental disorder, or crises at work or in the family, a lack of employment, or, perhaps, demonic oppression.
25. Secondly, clearly, God does not intend for us to bear all our burdens alone. So many of us are proudly self-sufficient. We are not even willing to accept the help which is offered to us. This is a form of spiritual pride. And it should be avoided.
26. God asks us to help bear the burdens of other Christians because that is a great way to develop camaraderie and to make God's comfort manifest to others. God intentionally works through us. (2 Corinthians 7:6)
27. Have you ever been in difficulty or had a burden you were afraid you could not bear but were afraid to ask anyone for help? Pride, shame, lack of trust, even a sense of self-sufficiency are sins that could bar us from the kingdom of heaven.
28. How should church discipline be handled? Clearly, if we are to follow the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 18 and the instruction of Paul in Galatians 6, we should make every effort to restore those who have fallen. There should be no vindictive punishment involved.
29. Consider the case of the woman taken in adultery as described in John 8. The church should be a hospital for sinners and not just a club for saints. We may feel zealous for the church's reputation, and we may think that ridding ourselves of an erring member will protect that reputation. Such a course of action may be necessary in the case of public and recalcitrant sinners, but it is certainly the final step and should never be done as a first step.
30. Remember that the best hospitals tend to have the sickest patients. The church and church members should forcefully battle sin and not sinners. Or, do we think that the church should only admit to its membership people who are in the best possible standing in society so our church has a good reputation?
31. What is "the law of Christ" which Paul spoke about in Galatians 6:2? (Compare John 13:34,35) This expression is unique in the New Testament. Various attempts have been made to explain the meaning of this expression. Some would even suggest that the law of Christ has been given to replace the Ten Commandments which is called the law of Moses. Others have suggested that it is a general principle describing the way in which Christians are to help bear the burdens of others. Of course, this is an excellent idea; but, in context,

the similarity with Galatians 5:14 suggests that we should fulfill the moral law—the Ten Commandments—by exercising love. (Romans 13:8,10)

32. How do we explain the apparent contradiction between Galatians 6:2 and 6:5? The Greek word in Galatians 6:2—*baros*—refers to a very heavy load that needs to be carried for some distance. By contrast, the Greek word *phortion* in Galatians 6:5, refers to a ship's cargo, a soldier's backpack, or even a child in the womb. Some burdens can be set aside or jointly carried. Some cannot. It is not possible for a pregnant woman to share the burden of carrying her child. Some burdens can only be shared with the Lord. But, He is always there to help us.
33. In light of how Jesus dealt with sinners, what approach should the church take? If we followed the example of Christ, would we ever go wrong?
34. Read Galatians 6:6-10. In Galatians 6:7, there is another unique Greek word used. The word translated *mocked* in the *King James Version* is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. It means "to turn up one's nose in contempt." It is found in several places in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (*LXX*) and usually refers to the despising of God's prophets. (2 Chronicles 36:16; Jeremiah 20:7)
35. In the Christian life, what does it mean to reap what you sow? Do we always consider the fact that we will reap what we sow when we commit sin? We do not have the option of choosing our consequences! Look at some biblical characters who illustrate this point. Compare Ananias (Acts 5:1-5); Judas (Luke 22:1-3); and Daniel (Daniel 1:8). While we do not have the privilege of choosing the consequences of our bad choices, we must always remember that God still loves us and still forgives us.
36. In Galatians 6:10, Paul essentially said that while Christians should be reaching out with Christian love to everyone in the world, this should especially be true toward other members in the family of faith.
37. In our modern world, there is a great deal of effort and time put into investing financially to prepare for our futures. Are we doing as much investing in the gospel? The lives of sinners are far more important than any bank account or 401(k). Unfortunately, the church's efforts to reach out to sinners tend to be haphazard and not well-organized. How can we improve this record? What can we do as individuals to reach out to those who are in need?
38. How can we reach out to business associates, neighbors, and even strangers when the opportunity presents itself? Unfortunately, we often find that we are so busy carrying out our personal business and even the business of the church that there is little time to do the things which are really important.
39. God gives us freedom. That freedom can be exercised or abused. Daily, we can take steps in the right direction, becoming more and more like Jesus, reaching out to others around us, and helping to spread the gospel, and thus, finish the work that Jesus left us to do. Or, we can be caught up in the many, many busy activities of our world and allow our work, our entertainment, even our families to occupy us so completely that there is little opportunity to speak on God's behalf.
40. How are we doing? If every church member was like you, would the gospel be finished sooner? Or, never? Think about it!

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