



Week Six:
GRACE THAT SUSTAINS
Bible Study

MAY 27 - JUNE 2, 2019

KEY VERSE

Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. — Galatians 6:9 (CEB)

BIBLE STUDY

Galatians Chapter 6

GATHERING PRAYER

Consider using one of the Opening Prayers, the Prayer for Illumination, and/or the Statement of Faith from the Week 6 Worship Helps for this series.

OVERVIEW

In *Galatians 6*, Paul continues to describe characteristics of life lived in Spirit filled community. He then draws the letter to a close with a passionate reiteration of the key points.

As he discusses life lived in Spirit filled community, his descriptions are general and might seem contradictory at first glance, such as that we should “bear one another’s burdens” as well as “all must carry their own load” (*vs. 2-5*). Paul offers a general description rather than a list of specific rules because, as he has emphasized throughout his letter, everything has changed with the inbreaking of God’s new creation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Before, we received lists of rules that served as a standard for the life of faith. But now, as children of God, we have the Holy Spirit to help guide us with the specifics each day as we live out these general characteristics of Spirit-led community.

This is a significant contrast to the long lists that the Jewish missionaries were instructing the Galatians to follow. Paul’s description may also seem short or vague to us today as we spend much time debating and listing the moral standards that we expect Christians to live by, most having to do with what Paul calls the ‘flesh.’ The New Interpreter’s Bible commentary reflects on what this means for the church: “Wherever the church grounds its identity in fleshly practices—and particularly wherever commitment to an orthodox “party line” concerning such practices becomes an exclusionary criterion for membership in the community—we can expect to reap corruption. Indeed, we will see brothers and sisters in the church biting and devouring one another” (Hays, “Galatians,” Vol. XI, p.339).

Instead of a long list, Paul highlights a few critical aspects of Christian community that are indicators that we are fulfilling the law of Christ, which is the law of love. Above all we will imitate the character of Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us. Therefore, if we are living in him, under the guidance of his Spirit, we will live in loving service of one another. Boasting, division, and harsh judgement have no place in the life of the Spirit. Grace is at the heart of the Christian identity and sustains us as we live the life of the Spirit.

Paul writes his final word, the postscript, which begins in *verse 11*, in large script himself rather than dictating to a scribe, so that we know to pay attention to his summary statement.

In this summary statement, Paul defines the difference between him and the Jewish missionaries. They are only worried about making a 'good showing in the flesh,' about their reputation and accomplishments. They will boast about what they have done in directing the Galatians to be circumcised and to observe Jewish festivals and laws.

Paul's desire and mission is that he would only boast in the cross of Christ, that he would not live with the limited either/or perspective of the world, but instead that he would live with the perspective of God's new creation in Christ which he declares "is everything" (*vs. 15*) and leads to "peace and mercy for all" (*vs. 16*). His desire for the Galatians and each of us is that we would have this same perspective and know this same peace and mercy. Hays shares, "...as we focus our attention on the cross, we learn that we render true honor to the crucified Lord only by becoming conformed to him so that we become servants to one another in love (*5:13*). Truly to boast in the cross is to put our own lives on the line in acts of service that declare in deed as well as in word that the cross is the revelation of God's love" ("*Galatians*," *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. XI, pg. 348).

Paul concludes his letter to the Galatians with a word of grace, reminding us that living in grace, the loving favor of God, and sharing that grace with all by the power of the Holy Spirit, is the essence of the gospel. It is the good news that sustains us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Galatians 6:1* gives direction on how to respond to someone who is caught in a sin. In the church today we may emphasize different nuances as we talk about sin. Some describe sin as breaking a rule or norm while others talk more about the harm that is done by the sin. How do you define sin? How can the "Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm, Do Good, Stay In Love with God" (Bishop Reuben Job) help us to share a common understanding of sin and to guide our response to sin?
2. How does restoring someone gently when they have sinned show grace and help to sustain us in faith and in community? Do you find restoring someone gently with grace easy or difficult? Why is that? How well is this kind of gracious restoration practiced in your church community and other relationships? Who is included in it easily and who is excluded or only included with difficulty? How might you expand who is included?
3. In *Galatians 6:2*, Paul encourages us to both bear each other's burdens and do our part. Which one of these do you find easier? Why are they both important? What does a healthy balance with good boundaries look like? How can these practices embody a grace that sustains?
4. When do you find it easy to do good? What are the things that cause you to be weary of doing good? How can you be aware of and respond to them in a way that they don't cause you to give up on the good God is calling you to be a part of?
5. Who has shared the gift of encouragement in doing good with you? How can you encourage others in that same way? Think of one person or situation where God is calling you to be an encourager and make a commitment to live out that calling in specific ways.
6. How do criticism, judgment, and selfishness infiltrate communities and distract us from our purpose? What does it take to create a culture which values gentleness, self-examination, and caring for the good of all? How can we be representatives of this way of being both within the 'family of believers' and in the world?

7. Why do we often care more about making a good impression outwardly than being transformed by grace inwardly?

8. What would it feel like in your life to say, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (vs. 14)? How would your perspective and choices in life change?

9. With what you have learned about grace in this study, take a moment to restate *Galatians 6:15* in your own words. After sharing, discuss what it means to live as ‘new creation.’

SENDING FORTH

Close with prayer.

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