LET US NOT BECOME WEARY IN DOING GOOD

Galatians 6:1–10

Key Verse: 6:9

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Last week we learned that it’s the Holy Spirit who enables us to live in the grace of Christ, and that, basically, living in his grace is living a life of love. We need the Holy Spirit’s help every day to crucify our flesh so that we can truly change and grow in Christ’s loving character. In today’s passage Paul shows us what a life by the Spirit, a life of love, actually looks like. And to motivate us, he uses agricultural language to show us that our actions and deeds are like seeds. Certain seeds always produce certain results. What kind of life seeds are we sowing? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

Read verse 1. This is the first illustration of what walking by the Spirit looks like. We should expect that our Christian brothers and sisters can easily slip back into their old life and old habits. When they do, we shouldn’t be intolerant or impatient; we should have patient hearts, hearts willing to restore them. Legalistic people are just the opposite. They’re quick to judge and condemn and cast out. But those who live by the Spirit have the gentle character of Jesus. They’re also not indifferent. They really want the fallen person to be restored. But restoring someone is so hard. After committing sin, people are especially full of guilt and feel hopeless. Sometimes they’re unwilling to admit their sin. They need personal care, and someone who can speak the truth in love. In our own strength we can’t restore a fallen person. But with the Spirit’s help, we can. The Spirit not only helps us keep out of sin, but also helps us to help others. Paul concludes, “But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” It’s sobering. Anybody can be influenced by the power of sin. When we live by the Spirit, we’re not self-confident in helping others, but self-aware, and truly humble.

Read verse 2. Here, the “burdens” can be the burdens of sin; but they can also be all kinds of burdens, such as chronic weaknesses, failings, problems or illnesses (Ro15:1). Sometimes, our Christian brothers and sisters are burdened because someone they loved has fallen into sin. We’re called to carry each other’s burdens, meaning to care about what others care about, to empathize with what they’re going through, to share their agony. Jesus is the best example of someone who carried others’ burdens. In spreading the good news of the kingdom, he became surrounded by diseased and sin-sick people. Some had leprosy, some were paralyzed, some were suffering terribly, some had physical sicknesses, some were tormented by demons. Often, loved ones brought them. What did Jesus do? Hide? No. He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Mt8:17; cf. Isa53:4). He was willing to be with damaged people, to heal them. As we live by the Spirit, we grow in this image of Jesus, willing to carry each other’s burdens. Paul says that when we do so, we “fulfill the law of Christ.” What is the law of Christ? It’s the law of loving our neighbor as we love ourselves (5:14; cf. Jas2:8). As Christians we have many things to do. We need to keep meeting together, we need to keep praying, we need to keep studying the Bible, we need to keep reaching out to the lost, and, we need to keep the laws of the land, such as the tax laws and traffic laws. But above all, we need to keep the law of Christ, carrying each other’s burdens.

Then Paul seems to change the subject, but actually, he’s mentioning the main thing that hinders us from carrying each other’s burdens. Read verse 3. Frankly, we think it’s beneath us to be carrying others’ burdens. We would think that being conceited would never be a problem for Christians, but it is. Often, we’re not even aware of the conceit in our hearts. But practically, when we put our own interests first, when we value ourselves more than others, it means we’re harboring selfish ambition or vain conceit (Php2:3,4). In that state, we’re not humble enough to care for our struggling brothers and sisters. What’s worse, we’ve deceived ourselves into thinking we’re good.

How can we get out of such a self-deluded condition? Read verses 4,5. Basically, this means to live before God, to measure ourselves by his standards and compare ourselves to him. When we compare ourselves to others, we like to find ways that we’re better, and then comfort ourselves with that. But we all need to be soberly comparing ourselves with who God is, and then we can have a right view of ourselves. When we compare ourselves with God, we come to see how sinful we are. Ultimately, we need to stand before God and know that we’re accountable to him. And to keep the Galatians from misinterpreting his words, “each one should carry his own load” (5), Paul goes on. Read verse 6. Paul is encouraging us to thankfully and joyfully support those who devote themselves to teaching us the word of God. It’s the right thing to do (cf. Mt10:10; Ro15:27; 1Co9:9–11; 1Ti5:17,18). It’s part of “carrying each other’s burdens.”

Then Paul comes back to tell us a sobering truth. Read verse 7. Why does he say, “God cannot be mocked”? It’s because in our pride we think we can do whatever we want, and God won’t see or know or do anything to us (Ob3). Such a mentality is at the core of abusing the grace of Jesus. We think we’re smarter than God. We think we can deceive God by outward appearances, good words and superficial activities, when in fact, we’re intentionally doing what’s wrong. When we keep sinning, without any struggle to repent, thinking grace will make it all okay, we may not be *literally* mocking God, but in spirit, we *are* mocking God.

The sobering truth is that, whether we’re Christians or not, we all reap what we sow. The Bible repeatedly warns us that God does not show favoritism (2:6; cf. Eph6:9; Col3:25; 1Pe1:17). It repeatedly says that God will hold each of us accountable for our deeds (Ro2:6–10; 14:12; cf. Job34:11; Ps62:12; Isa3:10,11; Jer17:10; 32:19; Mt16:27; 1Co3:8; 4:5; 2Co5:10; Rev2:23; 20:12; 22:12). In other words, what we sow in life, we will also reap. For example, if we’re lazy, we’re likely going to end up poor; but if we’re diligent, we’re likely going to be financially independent. It especially applies to spiritual life, including giving. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

But here Paul takes it in a more “black and white” direction. Read verse 8. We can either sow “to please our flesh,” or sow “to please the Spirit.” Sowing to please our flesh means indulging in sinful pleasure selfishly. It also means enjoying whatever our sinful nature dictates, such as gossip, mocking and despising others, or elevating myself above others. Whether we realize it or not, every deed in our lives is like a seed. And each seed will grow and bear some kind of fruit. Good seed will bear good fruit, and bad seed will bear bad fruit. For example, if we enjoy mocking others and being selfish, eventually we’ll find that we have no true friends. On the other hand, if we strive to show acts of kindness and to be unselfish, eventually we’ll find that we have many genuine friends.

What does it mean to sow to please the Spirit? It means to do the things the Spirit desires. To understand this, we should look back to Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (5:22,23a). We should be asking the Holy Spirit to help us actually be treating people in these ways. Here in chapter 6 Paul sums up sowing to please the Spirit as doing “good” (9,10). The Spirit is pleased when we’re doing what’s good. In fact, this is what it means to live in the grace of Christ. His grace changes our hearts to be eager to do what’s good (Tit2:14). We should be “persistent in doing good” (Ro2:7), strive to “overcome evil with good” (Ro12:21), and strive to please our neighbors for their good, to build them up (Ro15:2). We should be seeking the good of many others, that they may be saved (1Co10:24,33). We should be working for the common good in our Christian community (1Co12:7). We should be spurring one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb10:24). We should be sharing good things with our Bible teachers (Gal6:6). We should be doing the good works God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph2:10). We could never earn salvation by doing good, but the Bible repeatedly says that our Christian lives should be characterized by good deeds (1Ti2:10; 5:10,25; 6:18; 2Ti2:21; 3:17; Tit1:8; 2:3,7; 3:1,8,14).

What especially pleases the Spirit is sowing the seed of the word of God. It’s because through the word of God, people come to personally believe in Jesus (Ro10:14,17). But sowing the seed of the word of God is hard. It feels like being a farmer with really lousy land. Jesus said most people’s hearts are hard like a path, or like rocky ground, or like thorny places; so few people have good heart soil (Mk4:14­–19). All our patient labor may seem futile. But Jesus also said using our lives to sow the seed of God’s word will eventually bear abundant fruit (Mk4:20). Psalm 126:5,6 reads, “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.” To sow the seed of the word involves tears and weeping. But it eventually ends with songs of joy, when we see the sheaves—the fruit of the harvest, which represents not big money, but changed lives.

Read verse 9. Here, “weary” means not physical tiredness, but to lose enthusiasm, be discouraged, or lose heart. When people are not much interested in Bible study, when they treat us badly after we did nothing but good for them, it’s easy to lose enthusiasm, get discouraged and have no more heart. We can lose heart when those who should be encouraging us actually discourage us. But whatever the reason, losing heart does not please the Spirit. At the most discouraging moments, we should not give up, but persevere in doing good. Often it’s at those times that there’s a breakthrough. How can we not grow weary and not give up? Hebrews 12:1–3 reads, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” When our hearts are wounded and discouraged, we should fix our eyes on Jesus; then we can be healed and renewed, and can give our hearts once again to doing what’s good.

Paul says here that we especially need to remember the hope of the harvest. Read verse 9 again. Here, “the proper time” means the right time for us. God knows when that time is. To keep doing good, we need to trust God. Read verse 10. We should be doing good to all people, but especially to our Christian brothers and sisters.

Today we learned that each of us will reap what we sow. Our deeds are like seeds. So what kind of seeds are we sowing? May God renew our hearts to carry each other’s burdens and sow seeds that please the Spirit. May God especially inspire us invest our lives in sowing the seed of his word, believing in the spiritual harvest.