

GALATIANS: CHARTER OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (study 7)

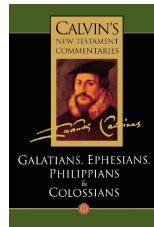
LIBERTY'S RIGHT USE APPLICATION & ADMONITION

*Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ ...
And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall
reap if we do not grow weary.* GAL.6:2,9

IDEAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE MEANING OF LIFE (6:1-10)

6:1-5 How might we – and the whole church – improve in applying Paul's counsel?

[6:1] Ambition is a serious and alarming evil. But hardly less injury is frequently done by unseasonable and excessive severity, which, under the plausible name of zeal, springs in many instances from pride, and from dislike and contempt of the brethren. Most men seize on the faults of brethren as an occasion of insulting them, and of using reproachful and cruel language. Were the pleasure they take in upbraiding equalled by their desire to produce



What harvest did the Galatians reap?

How can we expect to reap the *fruit* of the Spirit if we do not sow in the *field* of the Spirit? The old adage is true: 'Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.' ... Some Christians sow to the flesh every day and wonder why they do not reap holiness. Holiness is a *harvest*; whether we reap it or not depends almost entirely on what and where we sow. [Stott 170]

The fragmentary notices of its subsequent career reflect some light on the temper and disposition of the Galatian Church in St Paul's day. To Catholic writers of a later date indeed the failings of its infancy seemed to be so faithfully reproduced in its mature age, that they invested the Apostle's rebuke with a prophetic import. Asia Minor was the nursery of heresy, and of all the Asiatic Churches it was nowhere so rife as in Galatia. The Galatian capital was the stronghold of the Montanist revival, which lingered on for more than two centuries, splitting into diverse sects, each distinguished by some fantastic gesture or minute ritual observance. Here too were to be found Ophites, Manichaeans, sectarians of all kinds. Hence during the great controversies of the fourth century issued two successive bishops, who disturbed the peace of the Church, swerving or seeming to swerve from Catholic truth in opposite directions, the one on the side of Sabellian, the other of Arian error. A Christian father of this period [Gregory Nazianzus] denounces 'the folly of the Galatians, who abound in many impious denominations.' [Lightfoot 32-33]

amendment, they would act in a different manner. Reproof, and often sharp and severe reproof, must be administered to offenders. But while we must not shrink from a faithful testimony against sin, neither must we omit to mix oil with the vinegar ... no man is prepared for chastising a brother till he has succeeded in acquiring a gentle spirit. [Calvin 170-71]

[6:1] Gentleness is a characteristic of true spirituality. By their conduct towards wrong-doers their claim to the title of [*pneumatikoi*, the spiritual] would be tested. [Lightfoot 216]

[6:2] Galatians, which in attacking "Jewish" legalism proclaims the true freedom based on Christ, consequently contains more exhortation, admonition, and summons to obey the "law of Christ" ... than any other letter, and to quite a remarkable degree – a third of the whole letter. [G. Bornkamm Paul 83]

[6:2] The 'law of Christ' which would be thus fulfilled is that referred to in 1 Cor.9:14 'that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel'. [Bruce 261]

6:6,7 How might we apply the principle of sowing and reaping in our treatment of the teachers Christ has given the church? (Heb.13:5-7)

[6:6] How disgraceful is it to defraud of their temporal support those by whom our souls are fed! – to refuse an earthly recompense to those whom we receive heavenly benefits! But it is, and always has been, the disposition of the world, freely to bestow on the ministers of Satan every luxury, and hardly to supply godly pastors with necessary food. Though it does not become us to indulge too much in complaint, or to be too tenacious of our rights, yet Paul found himself called upon to exhort the Galatians to perform this part of their duty. He was the more ready to do so, because he had no private interest in the matter, but consulted the universal benefit of the Church, without any regard to

**Sowing and reaping
in relation
to Christ's gift of
teachers**

The shame and the glory of the cross

... the nobler object of Paul's present boasting was, by all ordinary standards of his day, the most ignoble of all objects – a matter of unrelieved shame, not of boasting. It is difficult, after sixteen centuries and more during which the cross has been a sacred symbol, to realize the unspeakable horror and loathing which the very mention of the cross provoked in Paul's day. The word *crux* was unmentionable in polite Roman society (Cicero, *Pro Rabirio* 16); even when one was being condemned to death by crucifixion the sentence used an archaic formula which served as a sort of euphemism: *arbori infelice suspendito*, 'hand him on the unlucky tree' (Cicero, *ibid.* 13). In the eastern provinces of the empire the Greek word [*stauros*] must have inspired comparable dread and disgust to its Latin equivalent. One could have understood it if the early Christians, knowing that the crucifixion of Jesus was an undeniable fact, had admitted it reluctantly when they were compelled to do so. But Paul, Roman citizen by birth and religious Jew by upbringing, not only dismisses as the merest refuse ... those things in which he had once taken a proper pride but embraces as the most worth-while goal in life the knowledge of the crucified Christ and boasts in his cross – a shocking paradox indeed. [Bruce 271]

his own advantage. He was that the ministers of the word were neglected, because the word itself was despised; for if the word be truly esteemed, its ministers will always receive kind and honourable treatment. It is one of the tricks of Satan to defraud godly ministers of support, that the Church may be deprived of such ministers. [Calvin 176]

[6:6] If Paul followed with his Galatian converts the policy which he adopted in Thessalonica (1Thes.2:9), Corinth (1Cor.9:15-18) and Ephesus (Acts 20:33-35), he could give them this instruction all the more freely because he refrained from claiming his own support from them. His unwillingness to accept material support from his converts may have as its background the rabbinic injunction not to derive worldly profit from the Torah ... but he made it his personal policy both by way of example to his converts not to live at the expense of others (2 Thes.3:6-13) and,

where necessary, to stop the mouths of those who would have liked to ascribe mercenary motives to him (2 Cor.11:7-12). Besides, he had a naturally independent spirit in this regard: it embarrasses him even to express gratitude for a gift of money from Philippi, while he deeply appreciates the loving thought which prompted it (Phil.4:10-20). [Bruce 263]

Paul on the necessity of supporting the teaching ministry

6:7,8 Now Paul uses the same principle to place boundaries around our 'freedom' -- namely universal law

[v8] The good works which we perform by the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, are the fruits of that adoption which is an act of free grace. [Calvin 179]

6:9,10 Here, then, is the Christian answer to 'what is the meaning of life?' (Micah 6:6-8)

Do WE HAVE BRANDMARKS TO BOAST OF? (6:11-18)

6:11 What is the significance of this seemingly incongruous sentence?

[6:11] From the time when letters began to be forged in his name (2 Thess.2:2, 3:17), it seems to have been his practice to close with a few words in his own handwriting as a precaution against such forgeries. [Lightfoot 220]

[6:11] Elsewhere Paul penned the final greetings (cf. 1 Cor.16:21; Col.4:18; 2 Thes.3:17f.); here he took the pen in order to write the concluding comments, and to write them in large letters for emphasis, as likely or not. Some of these comments recapitulate the main emphases of the letter. [Bruce 268]

6:12,13 Contrast 2 grounds for boasting – circumcision and the cross! (vv.3,4)

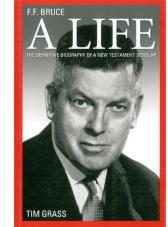
[6:12] Whereas Paul was concerned about the Spirit's inward work in his converts, so that Christ should be 'formed' in them (cf. 4:19), the Judaizers' concern was for an external mark, a mark produced in the 'flesh' of those whom they could win over to their side. [Bruce 268]

6:14-16 Walking by what rule ONLY can we obtain peace and mercy?

[v.16] We, who have been brought to God by this crucified Christ, are the true spiritual Israel, and the seed of Judah, and of Jacob, and of Isaac, and of Abraham, whose faith was attested, and who was blessed by God, and called the father of many nations, while he was in circumcision. **Justin Martyr** (mid 2nd century)

[v16] ... he gives the appellation of *the Israel of God* to those whom he formerly denominated the children of Abraham by faith, (Gal. 3:29) and thus includes all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were united into one church. [Calvin 186]

[6:16] F. Mussner (*Galaterbrief*, 417 n.59) probably indicates the true sense when he identifies the Israel of God here with the [*pas Israel*, all Israel] of Rom.11:26. For all his demoting of the law and the customs, Paul held good hope of the ultimate blessing of Israel. They were not all keeping in line with 'this rule' yet, but the fact that some Israelites were doing so was in his eyes a pledge that this remnant would increase until, with the ingathering of the full tale [*pleroma*, fullness] of Gentiles, 'all Israel will be saved'. The invocation of blessing on the Israel of God has probably and eschatological perspective. [Bruce 275]



6:17 What do the 'brandmarks of Jesus' signify? (Rev.7:4, 9:4, 13:16,17, 14:1)

[6:17] It has been pointed out that the term [*stigmata*] was used of the tattoo-marks by which devotees of various religious cults were identified as worshippers of this or that divinity – a practice forbidden in Israel by Lv.19:28, although in Is.44:5 a faithful Jew will write 'Yahweh's' on his hand to indicate whose servant he is. [Bruce 276]

6:18 Is Paul's final benediction significant? (1 Cor.16:21-24; 2 Cor.13:14)

[6:18] In the Greek the first word and the last word of Galatians 6, apart from the final 'Amen', is the word 'brethren'. [Stott 162]

[6:18] A whole argument lies hidden under this one word. [J.A. Bengel *Gnomon of the New Testament*]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

F.F. Bruce *Commentary on Galatians* (NIGTC, 1982)
John Calvin *Galatians and Ephesians* (1548; tr. Pringle 1854)
Martin Luther *Lectures on Galatians* (1535, tr. Pelikan)
J.B. Lightfoot *St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (7ed. 1881)
John MacArthur, Jr. *Liberated for Life* (1976)
J. Gresham Machen *Notes on Galatians*
John Stott *The Message of Galatians* (BST, 1968)