**AM I MY BROTHER’S KEEPER?**

**GALATIANS 6:1-10**

Do you remember the story from Genesis when Cain killed his brother Abel? When the Lord first confronted Cain He asked him a question: “Where is Abel your brother?” Cain’s cold, flippant response to God was, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) Well, like it or not, we Christians ARE our brother’s and our sister’s keepers. I want you to keep that in mind as we get into Galatians Chapter 6.

As we’ve studied Galatians we’ve seen that a big problem among the believers in this region was the influence of false teachers, false doctrine. And Paul has addressed this issue thoroughly. There’s no doubt where Paul stands. But false teachers were not the only problem they had. As with most churches there were divisions in the body. There are all sorts of people in the church and they are at different places in their life spiritually. There are those who, as Paul taught in Ch 5, live by the Spirit. These tend to be spiritually mature individuals. Then, of course, there were the legalists and those who followed them who were trying to force the other believers to follow the Mosaic Law. And then there were those who were frankly confused and maybe a bit discouraged in their Christian life. Paul can see the division and discord and separation in the Galatian churches and so he addresses this issue.

So what about us, our church, our class? Does this lesson even apply to us? *Discuss briefly*. As we read this passage this morning I challenge all of us to examine ourselves and see if there is anything we can do to help promote unity in this class, to help others in their spiritual pilgrimage.

Context - Paul has just made the point to let the Holy Spirit have control and to guide our lives, to “live by the Spirit”…READ Galatians 5:26

If a believer is in step with the Holy Spirit’s leading, is truly living by the spirit then they will “not become conceited.” They will not be filled with spiritual pride. They won’t provoke one another or envy others. After all, these are traits of a person who is living in the flesh. NO, instead we as believers led by the Spirit are to… and he goes into Chapter 6 and describes what we Christians should do, gives us a glimpse of what real Christianity looks like.

Romans 15: “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” (Rom 15:1-2) First Thessalonians 5: “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” (1 Thess 5:14)

This is important ground to establish as we push onward into Ch 6.

READ Galatians 6:1

Paul speaks here of a Christian brother who has fallen into sin. In context of what we’ve been talking about the “anyone” who has been “caught in a transgression” is a brother in Christ. This un-named individual was walking along on his Christian pilgrimage when he stumbled and fell. I’m going to go out on a limb here and say that this could happen to any one of us at any time. So be very careful! Do not ever become so spiritually proud or complacent to think that it could never happen to you. Look at the phrase Paul puts at the end of this verse: “lest you too be tempted.”

Both Matthew Chapter 18 and 1 Corinthians Chapter 5 talk about church discipline. I’m not going to go into a whole lot of detail here. The bottom line is that we, the church, are instructed to deal with open blatant sin in our ranks. The Bible is also clear that we as the people of God, as those saved by God’s grace, are to be compassionate and forgiving. In this verse Paul exhorts us to restore a fallen brother. This guy has done something wrong. He's been caught, but he’s confessed his sin, and has a repentant heart. What is needed now? Restoration. To “restore” means to repair something, to bring it back to its former condition. The idea Paul is presenting here is for the church body to heal the wounded, to bring them back to a position of full effectiveness for the Lord. We are to tend to their spiritual wounds with gentleness, with love and understanding.

Can I be honest? In my own personal experience this is not what I see being done in the church.

*[Comment about the testimonies – times of great growth and healing followed times of despair and defeat. Three couples in our class who don’t come any more. We still need to reach out to them and be praying for them and let God work in their lives.]*

READ Galatians 6:2

The word “bear” means to carry, to hold up. “One another’s burdens” – what are those? Just look at your prayer list. Losing loved ones, broken relationships, infidelity, tough life decisions that need to be made, physical needs, the list goes on. Sometimes all that is needed is a listening ear and an encouraging word. And sometimes they might need more than that.

If we do this, Paul says, we "fulfill the law of Christ.” What’s that? Jesus stated in John 13:34: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” How do we do that? How do we love one another? By the self-less act of bearing one another's burdens. By helping each other out during the troubled times in life, times of hurts, disappointments and problems. We don’t have to go thru the tough times by ourselves. The Lord has promised us, “I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU” (Hebrews 13:5). We Christians often get the privilege of being God's chosen instruments of ministry, the conduits of God’s blessing to others.

READ Galatians 6:3

We must have a healthy and accurate view of ourselves. We need to avoid having either an inferiority complex or a prideful self-concept. *[seminary experience identifying our dark side - narcicism]*

Just a word of advice: don’t ever compare yourself to someone else. You can always find somebody out there who is just a little bit less or more spiritual than you; a little less or more talented than you; a little less or more attractive than you; a little less or more intelligent than you. Our only standard is not ourselves on a good day, but the Lord Jesus Christ every day. First John 2:6 says, “whoever says he abides in Him (speaking of Jesus) ought to walk in the same way in which He (Jesus) walked.” Any other standard that you use other than the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing more than self-deception.

Do you realize that both feelings of inferiority and pride (both ends of the spectrum) can lead a person to hide their struggles and, as a result, to suffer alone under the burden of them? The person with a low self-esteem says, “Nobody cares about me, so why should I tell them?” The prideful individual says, “If they find out about this, they might think less of me.” Both are spiritually unhealthy.

READ Galatians 6:4-5

Someday we will all stand before Jesus and give account of ourselves. These verses speak about the judgment seat of Christ, when believers will give an account of what they did with the resources God gave them. Then they will receive their rewards. Revelation 22:12 says, “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing My recompense with Me, to repay each one for what he has done.”

We will all have to stand a test. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” First Corinthians 3 says that our works are wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver, precious stones and that the wood, hay, stubble is going to be burned up. So I believe this is what Paul is referencing here in these verses. Every one of us is going to have to examine our own work, and have reason to glory in the Lord. In other words, there IS coming a day of reckoning. So we need to be mindful of that as we are living out our life.

The load that Paul is talking about in v 5 is NOT the same thing as the burdens he mentioned in v 1-2. Here, the load is what WE are expected to carry. It’s our part. It’s our share of the work that God has given us to do. We each have a responsibility. If we fail to carry our weight and pass it off on others, we will stand accountable for that someday before God.

Once we’ve picked up our brother and restored him, helped him to bear his burden in Christian love, then we as a church body have a responsibility to teach him the truth (from God’s word) so he can mature.

So back to my opening thought --Yes, we ARE our brothers' keepers. Lest we develop feelings of inferiority or pride we need to see ourselves the way God sees us. We need to have a healthy and accurate self-image. I should see myself as valuable enough in God's economy that He would send His only Son to die for me. Yes! On the other hand, I’m not to be filled with pride thinking that I am more than I really am. We can do nothing to achieve the righteousness of God. That’s been a theme thru this entire book. My righteousness comes only thru what Jesus accomplished on the cross *[Paul boasting in the cross of Christ].* As Christians we all have a responsibility to be about doing what God wants us to do. What IS God’s will for us? He wants us to be saved, to grow spiritually, to live holy lives and to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of others. One day we’ll all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of ourselves. So we need to do our part. We need to be faithful stewards.

As we come to verse 6 Paul addresses those of us who are being taught. That’s all of us. We know that our teachers and preachers have a responsibility to study and put together the lesson and then to come and present it. But did you realize that we who sit in the chair or pew and listen to them also have a responsibility? Look at v 6…

READ Galatians 6:6

Those of you out there listening to a lesson have a responsibility to share with your teacher, me, “all good things.” What we have here is a picture of discipleship in action. Look, let me speak freely, I invest my time every week preparing a lesson with my motivation being to help promote spiritual growth in each one of you. How will I know whether or not my efforts are worthwhile? By the feedback I receive from you, all of you. This feedback could be non-verbal but I believe this verse is dealing with verbal communication. You who are the recipients of a Bible study lesson should feel the freedom to share with me, your teacher. You could share your opinions or insights into the lesson being taught. Healthy, constructive dialogue. This serves as a source of encouragement for me and for the entire group. It allows me to see that my efforts are not in vain. It also allows me an opportunity to get to know you and your specific needs. It helps me to prepare material that will be more beneficial for the class as a whole. And it helps me, and all of us, to know how we can pray for you.

Well, it's clear from Paul's teaching in Galatians that we all have a part to play in the ministry of the Gospel through the local church. We are all to sow seeds. Which brings us to the principle of the harvest... v 7-10

There are three basic principles I want us to see.

Principle #1 - WE REAP WHAT WE SOW. READ Galatians 6:7-8

This goes back in to what Paul taught in Chapter 5. Paul warns that if someone continues to practice the works of the flesh they’re going to reap corruption. Obviously this applies to those who completely reject God but it also applies to believers who live in the flesh. The Bible tells us that when we sin and are unrepentant God disciplines us. Hebrews 12:6 says, “For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.” I don't know about you but I don’t want God’s chastisement. It’s not a pleasant experience! But sometimes we need it to keep us on the right path.

Every action has results. We cannot expect to harvest a crop of holiness if we plant seeds of carnality. Even divine forgiveness does not do away with the consequences of our sin. Remember King David in our Second Samuel study.

Most people in the world do not follow God. They are deceived by Satan. They think that they can behave any way they want and get away with it. They do not fear the consequences that they WILL reap. False teachers can also deceive. We know that’s what happened to the Galatian believers, the very thing that prompted Paul to write this letter. And false teachers are very busy even today working to deceive us. That's why it is so crucial for the church to teach the word of God. Second Timothy 3:13 says, “Evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

There are two fields in which we as believers can sow. We can either sow in the field of the flesh or in the field of the Spirit. Do you remember last week’s lesson, Ch 5? If we sow to the flesh we choose to gratify the cravings of sin and self rather than to gratify the desire of the Spirit. The result is sin, a meaningless, empty life with nothing but weeds…no fruit, no joy, and no peace. Instead we should sow in the field of the Spirit. As Paul put it in Ch 5, “walk by the Spirit.”

Principle #2 - WE REAP IN A DIFFERENT SEASON THAN WE PLANTED.

READ Galatians 6:9

This parallels closely Solomon's teaching in Ecclesiastes 3:1-2: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.” Be patient. Wait for God's perfect timing. Don't lose heart. Don't give up. Stay the course!

Let me give you some verses to encourage you this morning. Second Thessalonians 3:13: “As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.” First Corinthians 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” Hebrews 12:1: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

Hang in there! What you do really DOES make a difference whether you can see it or not. Keep on, press on, and don’t be discouraged. Be faithful. Believe me when I tell you God is faithful and the rewards will come. You know, whenever I become discouraged in ministry I am reminded of the words of Paul as he came to end of his life, a life filled with persecution and affliction and often discouragement. Despite all of that it was still a very productive life. He left with these parting words of hope in 2 Timothy 4:7-8: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

Principle #3 - MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OPPORTUNITIES.

READ Galatians 6:10

Paul tells us to do good to whom? To everyone, especially those in the church, your fellow believers. Do good to the unfair, unkind, unlikable, unlovable, undeserving, irrational, ungrateful and even the unsaved. First Peter 2:15 says, “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.” In Titus 2:7, Paul says “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity.”

We reap what we sow. We reap in a different season than we planted. We must make the most of our opportunities.

Paul closes out this letter, v 11-18, by taking the quill in his own hand, away from the person who has been writing while Paul dictated. Paul does this to validate that this letter is really from him, like a modern day signature, and to add some emphasis to his message. Paul warns the Galatians one last time to beware of those who emphasize externals rather than the condition of one’s heart. Paul boasts not in himself or his accomplishments but only in the cross of Jesus Christ. And thus ends our study of Galatians. Next week we’ll get into James.