

A New Creation  
Rev. Michael Blackwood  
United Church of Broomfield  
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Galatians 6:1-16 CEB

1Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won't be tempted too. 2Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3If anyone thinks they are important when they aren't, they're fooling themselves. 4Each person should test their own work and be happy with doing a good job and not compare themselves with others. 5Each person will have to carry their own load.

6Those who are taught the word should share all good things with their teacher. 7Make no mistake, God is not mocked. 8A person will harvest what they plant. Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. 9Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. 10So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.

11Look at the large letters I'm making with my own handwriting! 12Whoever wants to look good by human standards will try to get you to be circumcised, but only so they won't be harassed for the cross of Christ. 13Those who are circumcised don't observe the Law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised, so they can boast about your physical body.

14But as for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through him, and I have been crucified to the world. 15Being circumcised or not being circumcised doesn't mean anything. What matters is a new creation. 16May peace and mercy be on whoever follows this rule and on God's Israel.

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CONTEXT REVIEW: At the time that Paul was writing to the church in Galatia there were as many non-Jews (Gentiles) following Jesus as there were Jews. Many Jews however still felt that in order for the new Gentile converts to be a part of Jesus' teachings, they needed to adhere to laws that they'd been following all along (the laws of the Torah, especially circumcision). Some of the Jewish Christians had gone to the church in Galatia and were stirring the pot, telling the new converts this. It was causing division in the congregation. This was upsetting to Paul because he'd already addressed these issues with the Gentiles telling them that they did NOT have to follow those rules. His frustration at hearing of what's going on in Galatia led him to write this letter.

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We continue from last week's reading where Paul was talking to the Galatians about freedom versus slavery. Paul has been talking about not only the reasons, but the benefits for serving and loving one another. Today, he continues his instructions, providing examples or directives on what it might mean for a community to walk in the spirit.

- In verses 1 and 2, he begins with cultivating the practice of mutual correction of one another. Be there for each other and help each other when you falter. It sounds simple, but we know that our human nature makes it complicated. Being corrected or critiqued, regardless of whether you're the critique-ER or the critique-EE, takes finesse.
  - "When someone is caught doing something wrong" – those words immediately put us on guard. It is misconstrued too often as, "I'm a good Christian who wants to help my brother or sister who has faltered, so I must point out their mistake, interrogate them about their sin, playing good cop/bad cop, in order for them to see the error of their ways and be shamed into never doing it again."
    - That's where we allow ourselves to get a little too high and mighty and self-righteous. We conveniently forget that we're not so innocent. We've committed plenty of sins of our own.
  - Conversely, for "the sinner," it sets up a shameful and humiliating encounter. One that no one wants to enter. I've apparently "sinned" and I don't know it. Or have I sinned? It invites a dialogue on sin that is challenging and few are ready to undertake. As the sin-EE, I may say, "I don't think I've sinned. Who are you to judge my action as sinful?"
    - These conversations rarely go well because they infrequently happen when all parties begin in a loving relationship to begin with.
    - And if we're all in good with each other, are we comfortable enough to "call each other out" for our transgressions? That takes work; love, patience, humility, gentleness – hmm...sounds like fruits of the spirit.

I believe Paul recognized and/or anticipated some of these inter-personal challenges...

- We are all a family **in the spirit** (no exclusions).
  - those who identify as "of the spirit" willingly choose to act for mending community, recovering of order and peace. Paul is reminding us as to **how** to graciously and lovingly support our brothers and sisters in their stumblings. The Judah-izers in the Galatian church were trying to push their truth on the Gentiles, sowing rivalry and conflict. Paul was fighting against divisive words and actions.
- This is not a competition of piety. It has nothing to do with one doing better than another, or one sinning less than another, or a prize for helping others the most. We must first focus on our hearts, making sure that we are right with God before thinking that we'll be of any benefit to others. In 2 Corinthians Paul offers similar direction saying to the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves to see whether you're living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?"
  - It is about sowing our trust in the Holy Spirit.

- In this church family, we are to remember that we can't sit on the sidelines and observe. We're a part of this life whether we like it or not. In verses 3-5, Paul reminds the Galatians (and us) that **ALL** of us are in fact one family in Christ and as such we are included and involved. We are to take this responsibility for one another seriously and do so with gentleness.
- Examples abound in the OT and the NT alike:
  - Lev 19:17. 17You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall [reprimand] your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.
  - HOW DID JESUS UNDERSTAND THIS SEEMINGLY HARSH TASK?
    - Matt 18:15-18. (Jesus said) 15 "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. 16 But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. 17 But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. 18 I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.
    - Luke 17:3-4 (Jesus said) 3 Watch yourselves! If your brother or sister sins, warn them to stop. If they change their hearts and lives, forgive them. 4 Even if someone sins against you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times and says, 'I am changing my ways,' you must forgive that person."
    - 2 Cor 2:5-8.
    - James 5:19-20
- "Paul tells us that we are all personally accountable to God, and [also] that we are called to form communities in which we help one another through mutual corrective admonition."<sup>1</sup>

Relationships of interdependence are hard. When you think about it, it sometimes can be hard enough to take care of one's self and now I have to worry about others as well? That's what a relationship is; if you get to share the joyous and happy moments, you also must share in the sad and hard moments as well. It is relationship.

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Verse 8, "you reap what you sow" is probably the most well-known verse from this scripture. When you think of that statement, it's often used as a slogan for those hoping for the comeuppance of others. It is little more than a philosophical hope for revenge.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hays, New Interpreters Bible, v. 11, pg. 335.

This is not what Paul is describing. This is where we've misunderstood the law versus the Gospel. Last week we addressed freedom vs. slavery. Today it's cultivating ourselves and each other into new humans through transformation.

Jesus teaches us about God's abundant mercy, grace and forgiveness for all of humanity. Where do those characteristics fit into "you reap what you sow?" That's what Paul is reminding the Judah-izers, as well as the Gentiles. Where in those divisive words and actions are grace, mercy and compassion? That's where our focus should be. When we change the scripture verse "you reap what you sow" from a negative connotation of revenge to thoughts of gospel transformation, that when we're understanding Paul's teachings of the Good News correctly.

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In Paul's time, the divisive topic du jour in the church was circumcision. One group felt that the only way to learn God's will was to follow Torah laws with strict rigidity, without exception. The other approach was more progressive. The division happened because sins of the flesh (selfish motives) took precedence over the fruits of the spirit. Remember, Jesus never said that getting circumcised or following the Torah strictly were wrong and no longer acceptable – he said that with the Good News, there were new freedoms. If you choose to be circumcised – fine! You're welcome here. If you choose NOT to be circumcised – fine! You're welcome here, too. Jesus taught it and Paul preached it – when selfish motives win out over loving God and your neighbor, there are no winners.

Just like the church in Galatia, which was clearly and openly divided, so is our country today. We can't deny it. Paul told the Galatians to be patient and gentle with the goal of restoration and reconciliation. That's sounds like perfectly appropriate and timely advice for the divisiveness currently occurring in our country.

"...recent political campaigns in [our country] that drove a wedge into the center of our common life, conflicts over the status, role and believability of women , fear in the face of growing numbers of neighbors of other faiths (or no faith at all), and times of further pulling apart around issues that are vital to our future and indeed to our survival as a democratic republic that is open, welcoming, generous and compassionate, have found their way into our own beloved churches and communities. Never have Paul's word rung more true or more urgently: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ'"<sup>2</sup> We forget that Christ has already broken down all of the barriers that divide us. We are all one in Christ: Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists, liberals, conservatives, Democrats and Republicans. In Christ Jesus there are no walls, no barriers, no divisions.

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<sup>2</sup> John M. Buchanan. Connections, Year C, Vol. 3, Pg. 136

In verses 9 and 10 Paul said, "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all...."

In the midst of the division that we see in the world around us, let us not grow weary of doing good. Let us remember that Jesus was radical. He upset the politicians and the powers that be by demanding inclusivity of all and abundant compassion. Be unpopular like Jesus. Do that kind of good, in spite of the anger and vitriol present in the world. We will be measured ultimately by how well we have loved, helped, healed and welcomed. Never tire of doing what is right. Not what is right for your country or your political party, but for your faith in Jesus Christ.

In verse 15, Paul sums it all up. He says that the new creation is everything. The new creation is a believer whose life is known by the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, gentleness, etc., rather than mutilated flesh. The new creation is a multi-ethnic family of the messiah, full of faith in Jesus, loving God and others in the power of the spirit.

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