

Week of June 11 - 17

Doing Good to All (Galatians 6:1-10)

In the final chapter of Galatians, Paul explains that freedom in Christ involves responsibilities. Those who are godly are to gently and humbly restore those who are overcome by some sin and to share one another's troubles and problems, thereby obeying God's command. At the same time, every Christian ought to examine himself and seek to bear his own faults and burdens since no one is perfect. Further responsibilities involve supporting those who teach, and not growing weary of doing good to all, especially those who are Christian brothers. As motivation to do good, Paul reminds them of the principles of "sowing" and "reaping." You sow what you reap, either evil, if he sows to please his wrong desires or eternal life if he sows the good things of the Spirit, which the Holy Spirit gives him.

Not Circumcision, but a New Creation (Galatians 6:11-18)

Paul's last words in his letter include an insight into the motivation behind those trying to convince you to be circumcised. While these people may seek to get glory by submitting to circumcision, Paul will only glory in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul repeats that circumcision is of no value and makes no difference and that in Christ Jesus becoming a new and different people is what matters. With a plea for no one to trouble him since he bears the marks of the Lord Jesus in his body, Paul closes this letter with a prayer of peace, mercy, and grace to those who walk according to his teaching, and those everywhere who are God's own. Paul lived utterly independent of human opinion and refused to be troubled by any man.

The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-12)

This chapter is a critical event in the life of the early church, confirming that what Jesus accomplished on the cross was the creation of one new body, the church, in which both Jews and Gentiles were to have the same access to God through faith in Jesus Christ and not the Law of Moses.

Some men from Judea came to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas were. They taught that believers had to adhere to the ancient custom of circumcision and to keep the Law to be saved. Paul and Barnabas argued and discussed this with them at length. The decision was made to send them to Jerusalem to talk with the apostles and elders there. Along the way, Paul and Barnabas stopped to visit the believers and tell them that the Gentiles, too, were being converted. There was much joy.

At Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas first reported to the whole church. When the Pharisees who had become believers said that circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses were necessary, the apostles and elders met to discuss the issue further. After much discussion, Peter spoke of how God chose him to be the first to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, how God acknowledged them by giving the Gentiles the Holy Spirit, and how God made no distinction, purifying their hearts through faith. Peter then questioned why they should put a yoke on the Gentiles that even they were unable to bear. Instead, by the grace of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles could be saved in the same manner. Barnabas and Paul again reported the miracles and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

The Decision of the Council (Acts 15:13-34)

Finally, James, the Lord's brother, referenced Amos' prophecy in support of what Peter said. He then recommended they shouldn't trouble the Gentiles by burdening them with the Jewish Laws,

but that a letter be written asking the Gentiles to abstain from things offered to idols, blood, things strangled, and sexual immorality. The apostles and elders, along with the whole church, agreed to send the letter and to have Judas and Silas accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to confirm its authenticity. The letter was delivered and joyously received by the Gentile Christians in Antioch. Judas and Silas preached to the Gentiles, strengthening them before Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem, taking greetings and appreciation to those who had sent them.

Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:35-41)

After some time teaching and preaching in Antioch, Paul wanted to visit the cities they had traveled to on his first missionary journey to see how the new converts were doing. Barnabas agreed but wanted to take John Mark with them. Paul insisted they should not take John because he had deserted them in Pamphylia. Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Unable to reconcile, Barnabas took John and sailed to Cyprus. In contrast, Paul took Silas, and with commendation from the brethren in Antioch, left for Syria and Cilicia to encourage the churches there.

The Selection of Timothy (Galatians 16:1-5)

Now we find Paul on his second missionary journey that began with Paul and Silas passing through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening churches along the way. In Derbe and Lystra, Paul enlisted a young disciple named Timothy, who would become a life-long fellow-worker in the kingdom. His mother was a believing Jew, but his father was Greek, so with many Jews in the area, Paul had Timothy circumcised. As Paul's and his companions traveled through Phrygia and Galatia, they delivered the decrees from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. They strengthened the churches, which grew daily in faith and numbers.

Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia (Galatians 16:6-10)

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they went to Troas, where Paul had a vision that night of a man over in Macedonia, Greece, pleading with him for help. Concluding that the Lord was calling them to preach the Gospel there, Paul and those with him left Troas accompanied by the author of Acts himself (Dr. Luke), as noted by the first person pronoun plural "we."

The Conversion of Lydia (Galatians 16:11-15)

From Troas to Samothrace and then Neapolis, they finally arrived in Philippi. A major city of Macedonia and Roman colony, Philippi, was where Paul's first ministry in Europe began. On the Sabbath, Paul and his companions went down to the river where some women were praying. As Paul spoke, a religious businesswoman named Lydia of Thyatira listened. The Lord opened her heart to accept everything Paul was saying, which resulted in Lydia and her household being baptized. She then persuaded Paul and his companions to stay at her home.

The Selection of Timothy (Galatians 16:16-40)

Paul and his company were soon followed by a slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination that made money for her owners through fortune-telling. For days she cried out, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." While what she was saying was true, it annoyed Paul (probably because it was not of her own free will), and he cast the Spirit out of her in the name of Jesus. This angered the girl's masters, who had Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned. At midnight while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns in jail, an earthquake shook the prison, and the doors flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off. Assuming that all the prisoners had fled, the jailer was about to kill himself when Paul

stopped him. When the jailor asked what he must do to be saved, Paul and Silas told him to believe in the Lord Jesus and then proceeded to teach him and his family the Word of the Lord. That same night, the entire family was baptized. In the morning, the magistrates sent word to release Paul and Silas, but Paul demanded a personal release as they were Roman citizens who were beaten and imprisoned without a trial. Scared, the magistrates came and pleaded with Paul and Silas to leave the city, which they did after a short visit to Lydia's house to encourage the Christians there.

Paul at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)

Paul, Silas, and Timothy continued on the second missionary journey. As they left Philippi, they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, arriving at Thessalonica. Paul found the Jewish synagogue there and for three Sabbaths in a row "reasoned with them from the Scriptures." He taught them that Jesus had suffered and died, and then was raised from the dead, and proclaimed to them that Jesus was the Christ. Some Jews and a large number of Greeks believed and joined them. The Jews who did not believe became envious of the success of the Gospel message. They set out to create a mob and enraged them against Paul and Silas, but they couldn't find them. So, they took Jason and some of the new believers to the rulers of the city, claiming they had harbored Paul and his companions who were "acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus." The crowd and the city rulers were incited. They tried to depict Paul and Silas as revolutionaries against Caesar. After Jason and the others posted bail, the people of the city and the judges released them.

Paul at Berea (Acts 17:10-15)

The new converts sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea (about 50 miles away). They went to the Jewish synagogue there and found the people to be receptive to the Gospel. They were willing to study the Scriptures to determine the Truth. Many believed. When word got back to Thessalonica, Jews traveled Berea to stir up the city against them. The Christians sent Paul away to Athens, but Silas and Timothy remained at Berea. Paul requested that they come quickly and join him in Athens.

Paul at Athens (Acts 17:16-34)

When he arrived in Athens, Paul's "spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols." Again, he went to the synagogue daily to reason with the Jew and Gentile worshipers. He also reasoned with others in the marketplace each day. This created an opportunity to speak with the philosophers (Epicureans, Stoics, and others) about Jesus and his resurrection. They ridiculed him, calling him a dreamer. Others thought he was talking about some foreign gods. But they invited him to speak in the forum at Mar's Hill. This was the place of the supposed experts of philosophy and religion in Athens.

Paul spoke to them by finding common ground from which he could talk about the Gospel. He keyed into the inscription: "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Paul told them this was the true God they had been worshiping and didn't know it. Paul also referred to a saying of their own poets, "For we are also His offspring." He pointed out that since we were the offspring of God, God could not be made of gold or silver or stone by human artists. Paul then taught them about repentance and judgment. He said Christ would be the judge and that Christ was raised from the dead. Some mocked Paul at this saying. Others wanted to hear more about this later. Some believed and joined him.

Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:1-18)

Paul then left Athens and went to Corinth. He found Aquila and Priscilla there and stayed and worked with them since they were also tentmakers. Aquila and Priscilla had been expelled from Rome because Claudius Caesar had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. During this time, Paul taught in the synagogue and "persuaded both Jews and Greeks." Silas and Timothy then joined Paul at Corinth, coming from Macedonia. Paul taught the Jews that "Jesus is the Christ." They opposed him. Paul told them, "Your blood be on your own heads; I am clean. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles." Paul then went to Justus' house, which was next to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and his household believed. Many Corinthians believed and were baptized. Then the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, encouraging him to be bold and to continue to speak for the Lord would be with him. Paul continued teaching there another year and a half. The Jews then took Paul before the proconsul of Achaia, Gallio, charging that he "persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." Gallio refused to hear them out since their grievance was about a bunch of questions of semantics and personalities and silly Jewish laws. He drove them out of his courtroom.

(I and II Thessalonians may have been written during this time. We will study these books beginning next week.)