

Walk The Line

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[0 : 00] Can we turn back to Galatians chapter 6? And I want to pray after we've studied it together, maybe I think sometimes a little bit more about praying, in light of what we've looked at from the Bible.

And it's the end of the series, you may or may not be glad about that. But we're going to take the whole of Galatians chapter 6.

If you'll remember, it's a book, a letter written to a church, that's struggling to live as Christians. They've been set free, like a prisoner that's been set free.

If you've seen the Shawshank Redemption, you know what I mean, a prisoner who's been in prison for a long time, and then he's eventually set free. And he doesn't know how to live in freedom.

And actually he almost wants to go back into prison, and he's so institutionalised, and he can't cope with freedom. Sometimes as Christians we're like that. We struggle with what it means to live by grace and freedom.

[1 : 06] And we just want rules and regulations to just... So we don't need to think, just have lots of rules and regulations, and legalistic things, so that I don't need to think, and that's how I'll live my life.

But the gospel is at stake, and we need to live, knowing that we're loved by Jesus Christ, and what that means, and the implications of that. And so Paul has been writing to the church about that, because there's a group who have come into the church, and have tried to take away the freedom that they have as Christians, and get them to do certain things particular, to get involved in Old Testament, Jewish ritual of circumcision, and they must have that done to them, and they must obey the laws of Moses in order to be Christians, and so on, so you know all that, because you remember.

And we just come to the concluding remarks now that Paul's making, as he wraps up his letter. And sometimes the best bits of letters are at the end. I see all the young people here, they don't know what letters are, because the young people don't write letters anymore.

They just text and go on to Facebook, and they... But in the old days when we used to write letters, some of the best bits of the letters were near the end. I don't know why, but that's true in the Bible as well. Some of the best bits of the letters are at the end.

And this is a really great bit of this letter to the Galatians. And Paul kind of uses two pictures to speak about both their privilege and their responsibility, our privilege and our responsibility as Christians.

[2 : 42] One's kind of implied more than made clear, but the second one is very explicit. And the kind of illustration he uses that's kind of implied is that children are always going to be like their parents.

Children are like their parents. Now, it doesn't mean that it's not a kind of fatalistic thing, and I'm not really just meaning physically, although physically that's...

We do reflect the characteristics and the looks to a greater or lesser degree of our parents. That is an immutable law of the universe.

We do look like and act like to a greater or lesser degree our parents. Some of you look very horrified at that, but it's true. And let me tell you, the older that you are, the more like your parents you will become.

So if you want to know what you're going to be like when you're 60, then just think about what your parents are like at the moment. And the second law that he speaks about is that we reap what we sow.

[3 : 57] It's a mutable law of the universe that we reap what we sow. And he speaks about both these things in this chapter. And they both kind of reflect different aspects of what it is to be a Christian.

So the first one is that we children are like their parents. And what I'm speaking about here is that the privilege of being like Jesus, because Jesus is our Savior and God, as God, we see and recognize Him as our heavenly Father.

And we are to reflect Him. And I'm taking that from the previous chapter, which kind of spills into this one. Because remember this was written as a letter, it wasn't written with chapters. The fruit of the Spirit, and it gives their characteristics of the Spirit of God that we should have, just like characteristics of our parents that we might have as children.

And he says, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-care. You know we've seen them before. So he's basically saying that is, these are some of the characteristics to a greater or lesser degree that you will display as a Christian, because this is what God is doing in your life.

He is your Father, and He is working in you, and this is how you will look. And so can we go back for a second just to ground that in Galatians 3 verse 2, where Paul says, you know, are you so foolish?

[5 : 35] After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your go by human effort? Remember he speaks about the importance of being gifted salvation. It's the gift of God, we're indwelt by the Spirit.

It's John 3, not 16, but when he talks about the need to be born again, and born anew of the Spirit, and every Christian is born anew, and it's by God's grace, God's Spirit.

And if we go back, then can we also go forward to chapter 6 verse 15, where he says, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, what means is a new creation. Okay, so Paul there is just speaking about the fact that Christians are new creations, we are spiritual, we've been born of the Spirit of God, and therefore we begin to look like our Saviour, because we bear the marks of being indwelt by the Spirit.

And if you look up Philippians 1 verse 6, it talks about God who has begun a good work, Philippians 1 and verse 6, it says, being confident of this, that he who began a good work, remember I talked about thanking God that he lifted us from a mighty clay in the Sam, he who has begun a good work will carry on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

So he saved us, it's his work, we are his children, we begin to look like him, because he is working in us, and that's all miraculous. He's moulding us, he's changing us, he's redeeming us, and it's all rooted in, what's it all rooted in? Something that happened over 2,000 years ago on the cross.

[7 : 20] And again we pick up what Paul says in verse 14, may I never boast, may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. So your life is a Christian and my life is Christians, is grounded in what Jesus has achieved for us on the cross and what God is doing in us.

He's gifted us salvation, he's our heavenly Father, and we begin, as we are in duels with this, to look like him. It's certain, it's sure, everyone who is a Christian will begin to look like their God.

We will become more like Christ. Why does that matter? Why am I emphasizing that point? If you're a Christian this evening, and as Christians this evening, we're going to bear certain characteristics similarly, because we have the same spiritual father.

Why does it matter that we are becoming like Christ? Because as we're becoming like Christ, we're actually becoming more, we're discovering our true self.

You know, people say, I think people argue against this talk about bearing the same fruit and looking the same, and having the same characteristics, and say, wow, you're just a bunch of clones. You all just look like the same, and you talk the same, and you say the thing.

[8 : 43] That's not at all what it is. We're not clones, but as we are saved, we're saved as individuals. Yes, we bear characteristics, but each of these characteristics will look different.

They'll look different in me, and they will look in you, and they'll look in your person sitting next to you. We'll all have different angles, different aspects, and we'll reflect these characteristics differently.

But altogether, as we are in Christ, it's then we discover what it is to be our true selves. So it actually means that, far from being clones, we're actually becoming more individual the more we bear the marks of Christ in our lives.

Because out of Christ, we're damaged and we're broken, and in fact, we probably look pretty much like everybody else who's damaged and broken in this world because of sin. But in Christ, we begin to blossom through what He is doing by His Spirit and bearing His characteristics, blossoming into how He has made us to be as individuals.

And we understand our purpose and our beauty in Him and all His gifts of healing and love and direction and meaning in our lives.

[10 : 08] So in Christ, when He is working in this, it actually means that we're discovering our true individual self to be very modern in using that kind of language. It's a voyage of self-discovery.

But also, it leads to eternal life, and He speaks about that in verse 8, where He says that, you know, whatever it is, and we'll go on to talk about reaping what we sow, we reap eternal life.

So as Christ works in us, as we are Christians, saved by Christ, redeemed by what He has done, who have given ourselves over to Him, who allow His Spirit in our lives, then we reckon, it's not just for nothing.

We will reap eternal life. We have a great future through what Jesus is doing in our lives. We're avoiding a destruction that is going to be beyond imagination.

So at this point, when I talk about the first kind of implicit image that He uses, which is that children look like their father, or children look like their parents, and it's just, it's nothing we do.

[11 : 21] You know, it's just natural. It's genetic. So for the Christian, it's genetic spiritually that we begin to look like Christ, that we begin to bear these spiritual characteristics.

And it just happens, because God does it. He's begun the good work and He'll finish it. So what am I saying here? What am I trying, laboring very heavily to say?

If you're a Christian and I'm a Christian, then it should lead us to a heart search. Am I beginning to look like Jesus Christ as a Christian?

I say I'm a Christian. I go to church. And well, I think I believe I'm a Christian. But am I beginning to look like my father? Is there evidence that He has come into my heart?

Or is it just I kind of, I've decided to live in a kind of Christian kind of way, but there's nothing really changing in my heart, and my desires, and my characteristics, and my motives, are just the same as they've always been.

[12 : 31] The question is, well, am I a Christian? Am I? Is there evidence that the Holy Spirit is working, that God has taken me, that I am His child, and that I am beginning to bear some of this fruit, this fruit of the Spirit, which He gifts, His love and joy and peace and patience and kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control?

Can I claim them and say, yeah, I can see however weak they are, can I see them and say, yes? Well, that's a great assurance that I'm like my father, I'm like my heavenly father.

Assurance that we belong, that we're part of His family. I think that's significant, I think that's important for us to recognize that God is doing something in us.

Do we recognize that God is changing you? And is He changing me? And is He working? And are some of the bad things that may be happening in our lives, can you lay them at the fruit of the throne of God and say, well, please take these things and use them to change me so that I bear some of your fruit and look and begin to understand that you are molding me and changing me and transforming me.

Because then I'm beginning to understand what it really is to be me, my true self, and I'm also beginning to understand that I'm on a path that leads to eternal life. So that's the first implicit kind of image that He uses that children are like their parents.

[14 : 00] But in a much more explicit way, He speaks about the second kind of immutable law of the universe, that we reap what we sow. And in verse 7, He says, I do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked.

A man reaps what he sows, the one who sows to please a sinful nature from that sinful nature will reap destruction, the one who sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life.

Don't be deceived. So tonight we come to church and I'm saying to you, please don't be deceived. Don't be deceived to say that it doesn't matter how you live. Well, God's doing all the work in me anyway. He started the good work. He'll finish it.

Don't be deceived. We're clones and we're not robots and we don't sit back and just wait for heaven to come and say, well, it's going to happen. Come what may.

K-sirah, sirah. He says, God says that we will reap what we sow.

[15 : 05] And we have a responsibility as His children to live in a certain way. And the responsibility, I would argue, to stay close to Jesus Christ.

Don't be deceived. Don't be hoodwinked to say you don't need to stay close. You don't need to believe. You don't need to live in a certain way. You don't need to take responsibility. Just live anyway.

I'm sure God will forgive me in the end anyhow because I've given or I've made a confession or a profession. He's using a very ordinary picture to remind us that we are responsible.

What we sow, we will reap. And He wants us to live as children of God, to live to sow in a way that pleases the Spirit.

If you love someone, you want to please them. I think that's another law of the world. We want to please people we love. And He says, live your life in such a way that pleases the Spirit who's indwelling you.

[16 : 10] To use the image that I used when we did the previous study by walking the line. You know, he talks there about keeping in step with the Spirit.

Walking the line with the Spirit. That's who He wants us to live. And He practically shows in this chapter some ways in which we can walk the line with the Spirit. And please Him.

And He does so by reminding us what we're in the business of as children who look like our Father. Children who look like God. He says we're in the business, and I'm going to just say three things here.

Restoration, holy living, and doing good. These are three things that He wants us to live like. That's who He wants us to walk the line as Christians.

Now all of us will look different as we restore and as we are holy and as we do good. We'll not be the same. We'll not look like clones. We'll be really individual as we do it. Because God's made us uniquely individual.

[17 : 12] But He still wants these characteristics in our lives. He wants us to be in the business of restoration. Verses one and two, brothers, sisters, family. If someone is caught in a sin, you or spiritual should restore them gently.

But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. You carry each other's burdens and this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. What's the law of Christ?

The 11th commandment? Love your neighbour as yourself. We looked at it recently. Restoration, we're in the business of restoration. We should restore people gently.

There's so much in this, can't possibly go into it. I hope maybe you'll discuss it together at the Bible study. It's so much is underlying this truth. But it stands against the world in which we live, particularly today, which says mind your own business.

Do your own thing. Don't interfere in anyone else's life or business. And don't get involved. Don't get involved with other people. And in the church we think that the same as well, very often.

[18 : 18] But this stands very strongly against that. You know there was an article recently in one of the local papers about a couple of young, fairly young people who had been sitting in the bus and someone attacked them with a knife or at least threatened them with a knife to the guy who wanted their mobile phones and their money and stuff.

And he was very abusive and noisy and shouting and everything else. And the article was about what had happened during the day on a bus but the emphasis was that these two young people were horrified that nobody came to help them.

Nobody in the bus turned round. Nobody cared. For whatever reason nobody went to their aid. And the bus was pretty full. Don't get involved.

It's not my problem. Someone else is involved. I don't want to get into trouble or I don't want to be endangered myself. Who are you know in a church context?

I'm not going to start dealing with someone else's Christian life and who might have judged what they're doing? And I'm just not going to get involved. We have a response to it but we're in the business of restoring each other and there's so much that goes behind that you know to carry each other's burdens, to lighten the load, to get involved.

[19 : 39] The word here, restoration really comes from mending what's broken. If you love people and you see in the light of Scripture and the light of what it is to be a Christian that they're living in a sinful way, clearly, distanced from their Saviour, then they're broken.

And we want to restore, that is mend them. We don't want to wag the finger at them. We don't want to take them aside and slap them over the ear. We want to take them and restore them because we love them.

Because they're our brothers and sisters. And we do so in such a way that is self-aware. What does it say? You know, but watch yourself because you might be tempted and remember who you are and remember what you've come from and remember your own weaknesses and therefore come alongside your brother and sister in the congregation that you know and love and you understand and there's honesty and openness between you and a prayerful concern and restore them when they're struggling.

Restore them when they're having a difficult experience in their Christian lives and they're drifting away from their faith. Restore them when they're not interested in Christian fellowship anymore and when they've closed their Bibles and you know they're not praying and you know they're going out and getting drunk.

Restore them because you love them, because you're involved in it and because they will trust you and will not close the book when you speak with them because you're doing so humbly and watching yourself and aware of your own weakness.

[21 : 17] It flies in the face of the whole idea of the church as a filling station where you just come in for an hour and you kind of get your fill of Christian teaching and maybe company and then you leave off for the rest of the week and do your own thing.

Not the idea of getting a spiritual boost and then just going out and living your own life knowing and not speaking to or not being involved in the community of which it is. This doesn't make sense to a bunch of strangers, this truth.

Restore him gently. It has all the hallmarks of a loving, protective and caring community and that's what we're in the business of being and doing.

And that is costly. But that is good because we are kept from drifting away from Christ and from being like Christ and from that self-fulfillment of being in Christ.

So restoration within the business of... We're also in the business in terms of reaping what we sow and living in such a way that pleases the Spirit.

[22 : 36] Holy Living. Verse 8 speaks about that. The one who sows to please the sinful nature from that nature of reap destruction, the one who sows to please the Spirit and the Spirit who will reap eternal life.

And that's really just Holy Living that he's speaking about there. It's going back to the fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5, 22 onwards. These definable Christian characteristics of holiness from within, from inside comes out in our lives.

Holy Living. These characteristics which were are molded to our unique personalities and how we live will be reflected the more we go on.

You know, there's a famous old kind of... Is it a parat proverb? So a thought reap an act, so an act reap a habit, so a habit reap a character, so a character reap a destiny.

And we have that, you know, ongoing truth that how you live, how you choose to live, who you're choosing to please, affects your life and affects my life.

[23 : 55] So how are we living? Who are we pleasing? How are we using our time? It's a challenge to being mindless.

You know, we are accused, I think Christians are accused a lot of time of not being thinking, you know, of blindly accepting the Bible or whatever and having blind faith.

But I think very often it's those who aren't believers who are mindless because we just mindlessly accept a kind of dull monotonous life and we don't consider how we're living and what harvest we're sowing from it.

I want us to be rebels as Christians. I want us to be thinking. I don't want us just to accept all the social morris of the day and just say, well, that's how we live and it doesn't matter and I'm sure it will be okay in the end anyway.

I want us to think about our lives and remember that what we are sowing will bear a harvest either of righteousness or destruction, really solemn truths, really important things.

[25 : 05] Think beyond tomorrow, will you, for a moment and think to another 50 years time where you're going to end up, what you're going to be like. Learn from the Bible, learn from older Christians.

You know, I hope the older Christians in the congregation will go to the house groups in Wednesday and will share a bit of their experience of what they wish they hadn't sown. I don't want you guys as young people to make the same mistakes that I made as a young person.

I want you to avoid the mistakes because I'm reaping a harvest of some of my mistakes now. I'm not saying God isn't redeeming them. I'm not saying I'm not forgiven for them.

But I wish that as a younger Christian I lived more seeking to bear His fruit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit because it would have changed how I am now.

And foundations matter. It's all very well saying, well, I'm sure we'll be fine and holy when we're 93. But, you know, what we are in 93 will probably be how we've been when we're 13 and 23.

[26 : 10] Because that is what God says about our responsibility. And you know it's dangerous truth. And I know it's taken us near the edge of sovereignty and responsibility and it's taken us near the edge of grace.

But this is a passage about grace. And yet it speaks so much about how we live. So, Restoration, Holy Living, and then doing good in verse 10, it speaks about...

...letting 9 and 10, let us not become weary and doing good for it at the proper time. We will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who are Christians.

Now, I've said it several times in the church here. And you know it, when Paul or when Jesus repeats things, it's because they're important and he says it twice. Let's not give up doing good. Let's be doing good.

It's repeated for emphasis. And it's brilliantly outwardly looking, isn't it? Oh, we're so self-obsessed. And yet the Bible constantly says, well look, how about looking out and doing good to others?

[27 : 19] It's not really about patting ourselves on the back. It's about serving. And it's about doing good particularly to those who are Christians, not exclusively, but particularly.

Don't just see the Christian community as the petrol station for your spiritual life that you breeze into when you're empty and then breeze out again. But see the importance of serving and being like Jesus in the fruit and in doing good.

And then sometimes you think, well, why are we bothering doing good? I'm so unappreciated. Nobody notices. Nobody says thank you. I've burnt out. I've fed up with doing good.

Jesus says, just, you know, keep going. Don't give up. Why? Because there will be a harvest. It's not just random.

It's not just for the sake of it that you're doing good as a Christian. It's because there is a harvest because how we sow, we will reap. And are we reaping to please the Spirit?

[28 : 24] And that's a great encouragement to us. He never just asks us to do things because it's duty. He never just says things for ritual's sake. He asks us to do good because he wants us to enjoy the harvest of that, which will happen.

Peace and mercy and harvest of righteousness. I don't want to say anymore. There's so much in this chapter. It's a wonderful chapter. It's a tremendous letter.

We would do well to memorize this letter. We would really do well to know it back to front. It always takes us to the cross. It always is telling us such really important things about our Saviour and about our lives.

The Gospel is so new. It's so fresh and it is always so radical. God forgive me if I make it dull. God forgive you if your Christian life is dull and boring and repellent to other people.

Shouldn't be. As we are children of the Most High. And as we are children of our Father. And the question remains with us.

[29 : 40] Who are we living to please? Where is our heart? What matters for us in our lives? Who do we want to please?

Because it says a lot about our spiritual place where we are. Are we Christ or are we not? And if we're not, the tremendous importance of dealing with that.

It really does matter so much. And the challenge to walk the line. In a legalistic way.

But as children who want to please the Spirit. Walk the line. Enjoy the view. Because He will walk with you. And He will walk in you.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your goodness. And we thank you for your grace. And we thank you for the freshness of your word.

[30 : 40] Forgive us when we have just oozed boredom in our Christian lives. And we've been sowing to our living in such a way that is all about ourselves.

And about maybe materialistic pleasure. Or just hedonistic pleasure. Just pleasure for the sake of it. And we've left God out of the picture of our hearts and lives.

We've made Him a distant and disinteresting appendage. Forgive us Lord for that. Forgive us for sowing the wrong things.

And sometimes for weeping then as a result. In a way that is not pleasing to you. And we take great courage and great comfort from the fact that these truths are redeemable for us.

And that we can get back the years that the look is defeating. And that we can serve you and follow you in the way you want.

[31 : 45] In a way that is really still going to be so blessed and so pleasing to you. And also therefore fulfilling for us. Help us to be fulfilled as individuals.

Not in a cocoon, in a self-absorbed cocoon. But as we give and as we empty ourselves and find ourselves refilled by your spirit again and again.

Lord we pray and ask that you would help us to care for one another. And to restore gently those who we love, who we maybe feel and know and can see have drifted far from you.

And we know that requires an honesty and a spiritual humility and a spiritual openness that sometimes is very lacking in our Christian communities.

Help us not to be afraid of doing good nor of being holy. Pray especially for the young people. Such an important stage of their lives that they would just open themselves to you absolutely and completely.

[32 : 51] And we pray that we would be open as we look out in our congregation. And new people come along and when visitors come that we would be really interested and concerned about them and for them.

Thank you for people who have responded to our request for accommodation. It may seem utterly unspiritual or unimportant to pray about that or think about it, but it just says so much about our lives and the direction and the perspectives that our lives take.

So help us God we pray and help us to move forward in your grace and we thank you that your Holy Spirit will enable us to live this way. Can forgive us when we have drifted and can give us freshness on a daily basis.

Lord help us to enjoy that and may we sing with a sense of pleasure and joy in our hearts as we conclude then. And may you bless the origin praise evening with all the different churches tonight and may it be honoring to you and unifying.

And may it bring a burden and concern for the whole city of Edinburgh as we gather together in Jesus name. Amen.