

So at the end of November we come to the end of journey that began in September when it was all nice and warm! We have been seeing how in this letter written to the churches in Galatia Paul had a very clear message that by faith the Christian is set free from the law to live God's life in the power of the Spirit. This Paul has been showing is what God had intended from the beginning when he made his promise to Abraham. So the idea, being put forward by those Paul described as "false brothers" that to Jesus and faith in him these Christians had to add obeying the law and especially circumcision, Paul denounces as wrong in no uncertain terms.

A couple of weeks ago Gordon was speaking from Gal 5 and especially v25 "Since we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit."

This is a key thought for living the Christian life. In 3:14 Paul wrote, "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

As we move into the last chapter we see something more of the nature of the spirit filled life.

What does it look like when people are keeping in step with the spirit?

### **1. it brings a love for others v1-2**

We saw that again last time if you look at 5:13 "serve one another in love".

Here we get two instances of how that might work out in practice.

a. in restoration and b. in supporting.

#### **a. restoring the sinner v1**

An essential of living by faith is a recognition that we are all sinners and here Paul encourages these Christians recognising that not to judge or shun someone who sins but to seek to restore them. To help through repentance to come back to God and so to come back into the fellowship of God's people. Mind you he does recognise that sin is catching and we can easily be drawn into the sins of others even as we seek to help them.

#### **b. Supporting others v2.**

Paul calls them to "carry each other's burdens".

Paul here is being very practical he knows that in the Christian life those Christians in Galatia and others who would read his letter there would be difficulties. As I go through those difficulties just check and see if you have experienced any of them. Paul knew for these Christians there may be spiritual difficulties, dealing with temptation, times of doubt, or moral difficulties times when their lives were being lived in a wrong way and they needed to be restored to God but perhaps seemed unable, there would be physical difficulties when they are ill or in debt, there would be times when they were anxious for themselves, for their families for their friends. Now Paul knew that all of these

things they could bring to God the father through Jesus in prayer but to help them with these burdens of life God had called them into the family of the church.

But how do I bear my brother's or sister's burden? What does it mean for me today? May I suggest two things.

The first is the need to be body minded. That is to live our life as Christians with an awareness of others around us. Living in today's Western culture that stresses the individual, we find it difficult to think of the group. Even in the church we find it difficult. The first step in bearing each other's burdens is learning to be body minded. I hope we are all learning that to be looking outwards away from ourselves to others and seeing their need

Then secondly we have to be body active. It is not enough to see and note the needs of others we are called to do something about it. We are called to help each other, to carry each other's burdens. I can remember walking with a friend through a village one evening on our way to a Church Council meeting. Across the road we saw a man lying on the ground with a couple of people I didn't recognise by him standing by him. We walked on wondering who the man was and commenting that at least he was being looked after. About ½ hour into the meeting a woman turned up and apologised for being late saying she'd stopped to help a man who had collapsed in the street. I felt very small.

So let me ask who helps you bear your burdens? Whose burdens are you helping to carry? We are called to bear one another's burdens. Now clearly we have to be reasonable about the carrying others burdens because it is not possible for everyone in Christ Church to carry everyone else's burdens. Nor is it possible for me to carry the burdens of everyone here. We have to come down to the manageable, which is why we have thought earlier in the service about our Pastoral Care. It is something we are all called to as we keep in step with the spirit.

To love others is to live God's life and the accusation of the 'false brothers' against Paul was that those who lived 'by faith' without the law could live just as they wished, selfish or sinful but here shows that is not true. The spirit in them and us motivates us to live lives of love.

To keep in step with him brings a love for others.

## **2. it helps us understand ourselves v3-5**

The problem with doing these things is that they can build a pride in us. A pride that I have not sinned at least not that way and I don't have that problem which needs help. In this way we can become self-satisfied. Here Paul refers to these Christians as "nothing". Not a word that is going to help my self-esteem is it? If I came to church feeling bad about myself I now feel worse. But Paul has a point – as always. It is the tendency to feel I have made it spiritually which leads me to look down on others and feel strong as a Christian in comparison and therefore less likely to be sympathetic

towards the person caught in sin or the person weighed down with some burden. But we are all sinners and we all have problems and so rather than look down on others Paul says we should v4 "test our own actions" that is make sure we are living right because "each one should (or better will) carry his own load". That sounds like a contradiction with carry each others burdens. However, the word in v2 basically means burden that which weighs us down while the word in v5 means load and was a common term for a person's pack. Therefore, if we follow the argument through from v1 they were to restore those who had sinned but not to be proud as if they didn't sin because on the day of judgement each will be judged according to their own actions, which we don't need to see as a heavy load because Jesus has borne the load of our sin and guilt. To use the words of John Stott "We are to bear one another's burdens, which are too heavy for a man to bear alone, but there is one burden which we cannot share - indeed do not need to because it is a pack light enough for everyman to carry himself - and that is our responsibility to God on the day of Judgement." Pride should not be part of the thinking of those who live by grace. I am a forgiven sinner because of God's grace and therefore I have nothing to boast or feel proud about.

### **3. it enables us to please God v7-9**

If we keep in step with the spirit then as we saw last time we will deny our sinful nature and instead as Paul puts it here "sow to please the Spirit" and the Spirit is God. It is as we put away our pride and love others in these practical ways that we please and honour God the Father, who is love and has shown us his love in giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sin.

I heard the story once of a man who felt his love as a Christian was shallow and prayed that he might love as Jesus loved. The next morning in his rush to catch his train he knocked a jigsaw puzzle out of a boy's hand. He stood for a moment looking at the train on the platform and the pieces of the puzzle on the floor. Then he bent down and picked them up as the train left the station. A small act but that is what love is, that is what keeping in step with the spirit is and this is what pleases our heavenly Father when he sees in us the likeness of Jesus.

Finally if we keep in step with the Spirit

### **4. it can lead us into trouble v11-18**

Paul drew the letter to an end with a final warning about following those he had described as 'false brothers'. In focusing on living by the law, he saw them as having a wrong aim v12 of wanting to make a good impression outwardly and a wrong motive again v12 to avoid being persecuted for proclaiming the cross. The latter was not a claim that could be made against Paul who v14 would make the cross his only boast and who v17 bore "in my body the marks of Jesus" that is the marks of the punishment he had received for preaching the cross. Friends let us be aware that in our own day and in the church the preaching of the cross is not always accepted. To keep in step with the spirit

and call people through the gospel to the cross and to live by faith is not a popular way. It is the way as Paul points out in v17 to peace with God whereby our sin is forgiven and we are restored and thus it is the way in which we become children of God, the Israel of God but it is not popular.

This then is what it looks like from this chapter of Galatians to keep in step with the spirit. It leads to a love for others a true awareness of ourselves, to pleasing God but not pleasing humanity.

### **5. The message for the churches**

As we draw this series to a close what was it that Paul wanted for the churches in Galatia?

**a. to be gospel churches** – where the gospel was seen as sufficient for salvation. There was nothing that needed to be added to it or could be added to it without denying the gospel. He wanted them to see the gospel as the way through which we enter the life of Christ by his Spirit and in which we continue that life to its fulfilment. The aim of every church including this church should be to be a gospel church.

**b. to be united** – that is churches where all who belong to Jesus and are clothed in him are accepted equally as children of God. We see this in 3:26-29. There we see three 'alls'. 3:26 "you are all sons of God" and he used sons because it was only a son then who could inherit and his point was that every Christian male and female is through faith an inheritor of the promise of God made to Abraham. 3:27 "for all of you who were baptised into Christ Jesus have clothed yourselves with Christ" that is we have all entered a new life become in Christ a new creation and 3:28 "you are all one" whether male or female Jew or Greek slave or free – we are all equal in him and so are all one. We are to accept each other as equally children of God.

**c. to be Biblical churches** – that is churches which submit to the authority of the Apostles as they receive it in the pages of Scripture. In our day we should be the same. The Bible will be our authority in deciding matters of faith and practice and we will submit to that authority even as Paul encouraged these churches to submit to his authority.

These should be the marks of our churches today and while it most certainly is not true of many churches may it under God be true of ours.