

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE CREATES A WORD CENTERED COMMUNITY

Galatians 6:6-10

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt misled or betrayed by a religious leader? What impact does that have on how you relate to religious leaders and authority now?

The highly publicized failures and corruptions of our political and religious leaders coupled with a massive shift in our culture's view of truth have fueled a profound cynicism towards all authority but especially towards those authorities who claim to speak for God. It is a temptation, when we discover that we have been misled by a pastor or have been betrayed by a religious leader's fall into sin to become cynical and mistrusting and thus refuse to listen to any other person who claims to speak for God. It seems that the safest course of action is the one taken by the vast majority of Americans, don't trust yourself to anyone or any one church's teaching but rather make up your own religious belief system by picking and choosing which things you want to believe. A "cafeteria line" religion has become the norm in the U.S.

However, this entire letter is based upon the assumption that there is one word from God that is unique and which must be believed and lived out if a human being is going to heaven. What you believe about God and yourself and about the world you live in and what kind of life you ought to live is not a matter of personal opinion. True faith in Christ is not like eating at a cafeteria where I pick the food I like but more like eating a home cooked meal at home where I eat what my mother sets before me. This word from God has been written down on the pages of the OT and the NT Scriptures. Paul's whole argument has been that the church must be built upon this

revealed word. It is this commitment to God's word that is behind what Paul says in Galatians 6:6-10.

STUDY

1. Without considering context, state the command Paul gives in 6:6 in your own words.

Paul commands those who are taught the word of God to financially support those who teach them the word of God. Paul's point is that the church ought to make sure that those who teach the word do not have to work to support themselves but can devote themselves to the study and teaching of God's word.

2. Why does Paul feel the need to make such a command? See Acts 13:21-23 & 20:28-31 and consider the circumstances that exist in these churches after they receive this letter from Paul. What happened to the elders Paul & Barnabas appointed?

These churches possess the OT Scriptures. They have been given two conflicting explanations about what those Scriptures mean in light of the coming of Christ. Some have been persuaded by the false teachers, others are wavering between the two explanations and presumably some have remained loyal to Paul. Now this letter from Paul arrives and I think that Paul is confident that the tide will turn in favor of the true gospel. But, Paul is not present to follow up his letter with the kind of personal, pastoral work that needs to be done in order to help the wavering, rebuke the belligerent and solidify the faithful. So who is going to do the ongoing work that needs to be done? What happened to all the elders that Paul and Barnabas appointed before they left Galatia the first time? Presumably, they are still in these communities. Perhaps the false teachers have influenced some but most likely others have continued to try to oppose these false teachers. However, it would be difficult for local men to successfully compete with the false teachers from the famous Jerusalem church claiming authority from the original apostles. So Paul, by writing this letter confirms the true message and who the true messengers are. He has now given to the congregation a means

for determining if a person who claims to be teaching the word of God is actually teaching that word. He is convinced the church needs teachers, "on the ground" to take the written word and apply it to the particular situation the Galatians find themselves in. They need teachers to help people deal personally with the truth of the gospel. Therefore, Paul tells the Galatians that they should financially support those who teach the word as he has given it to them.

3. How does v. 7 confirm that Paul's great concern is that the word of God maintains the central place in the life of the church? (Consider: this is the only place this verb "to mock" is used in the NT but it is used in these texts (among others) in the OT: 2 Chronicles 36:15-19, Prov. 1:20-33, Ezekiel 8:17-18 (the phrase: "putting the branch to the nose" in the Greek translation of the OT is "to mock").

This verb is regularly used to describe people mocking God by mocking or ignoring or disobeying God's message and his messengers, the prophets. This is one of the most often repeated themes in the OT. Everyone who despises God by disobeying his word as delivered by his prophets will suffer eternal destruction.

4. How are people mocking God in Galatia?

There are a variety of ways people are mocking God in Galatia. The false teachers are mocking God by teaching a false gospel. Some of the Galatians are mocking God by believing the false teachers and seeking to keep the OT law in order to obtain God's favor. Others are mocking God by not financially supporting the true elders that Paul appointed. Others are mocking God by using the freedom from the law that the gospel gives in order to serve their flesh.

5. The Scriptures declare, repeatedly, that people do mock God in many ways. How can Paul say, "God is not mocked?"

The point of what Paul is saying is not that human beings don't mock God by believing false teachers and ignoring or mocking true

teachers but that no one successfully mocks God. How people respond to God's word and those who teach it will determine what "harvest" they will reap at the end of all things. God will judge men by their response to what he has revealed about himself to them.

6. There are two groups of teachers in the Galatian churches, both claim to be teaching the word of God, both claiming apostolic authority. How will the Galatian church know which ones to support?

Paul commands in v. 6 that the church financially support those duly appointed teachers who are teaching the truth as Christ revealed it to him and the other apostles (See 1 Cor. 9:13-14). He is not saying that we are to support anyone who puts himself or herself forward as a teacher. Rather, we are to financially support those who are duly ordained by the church (Such as the elders appointed by Paul and Barnabas at Galatia) and who continue in teaching the truth of the gospel in accordance with the apostolic instruction as Paul has now explained it in his letter.

7. What do vv. 6-7 tell us about what Paul views as the main thing in a healthy, Christ honoring church?

Paul is deadly serious. He views having equipped, godly teachers who don't have to work to support themselves but have the freedom to study and teach God's word because the church supports them financially, as the most necessary thing in the church. The most necessary thing to maintain the health and safety of a local church and the Christians in that church is faithful teachers of the word of God. Any Christian that does not make the faithful exposition of the Scriptures the primary test as to what church they will attend is committing suicide. You can attend the most unfriendly church in the world which meets in the ugliest building in town with the worst music in town and is totally unorganized in its various ministries but if it has elders who faithfully teach the word of God, then you are in a good church. Any church that does not make as first priority finding and supporting pastors and elders who know the gospel, are able to teach the gospel and who view teaching the gospel in public

and private as their primary responsibility is a church that is planning on not existing as a true church of Jesus Christ for very long.

8. Honestly, how important is it to you to be in a church where the teaching of God's word is primary? Is there anything that matters more to you than this?

9. Describe the process that a farmer engages in when planting (sowing) seed in a field. What motivates him to plant seeds?

When a farmer plants his seeds in the spring he is investing his time, his energy, his thinking, his money into that which he believes will become his income in the future. Sowing requires intense, focused attention to this work in faith. Sowing is work that is motivated by faith in the growing process. He believes that planting these seeds in this land at this time will produce for him more seeds than he planted, at a later date, which will then be the source of his life. A farmer sowing seeds is the ultimate expression of faith. He believes the seeds will grow and produce a harvest and he believes that obtaining a harvest of grain is what he must have to live.

10. What does it mean to "sow to the flesh"? Consider the letter and both the religious and non-religious expressions of this sowing.

One of the ways to sow to your flesh is to believe that God accepts good people or faithful people and punishes bad people. It is to work hard at being religious or moral in the belief that your performance will determine your acceptance with God. This is what the false teachers in Galatia were doing. They taught that obedience to various laws was necessary to go to heaven and to please God. We are sowing to the flesh when we give money or go to church or help our neighbor or read the Bible because we believe that God likes us better because we do these things. We are sowing to the flesh when we believe that our prayers, our decisions, our sincerity, our good works obligates God to accept us into heaven and to do good things for us on earth.

Another way to sow to your flesh looks very different from the religious way I just described but is nonetheless the exact same thing. We sow to our flesh when we invest our time, money and energy in the pleasures of sin or in legitimate creation pleasures as if these pleasures are greater and more necessary than the pleasure of being loved by God through Christ.

11. What are some specific ways you "have sowed to the flesh"? Consider both religious and non-religious ways of doing this.

12. What does it mean to "sow to the Spirit"? Consider vv.6-7 & vv.9-10.

Sowing to the Spirit on the other hand is to live by faith in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures. When you live by faith in Christ you are trusting that God loves you and is going to reward you with heaven, not because of anything you have ever done, thought, felt, or decided but only because Jesus Christ always loved God and people and because he went to hell in your place. If you are a person who has faith in Jesus, then you are a person who has been born of the Spirit. The way you sow to the Spirit is you invest your time, thoughts, energy, and money into the things that increase your faith in Jesus and the faith of others. We are sowing to the Spirit when we give money to the church to make sure we have teachers of the word who do not have to work to support themselves and their family. We are sowing to the Spirit when we do good to all people, but especially to the household of the faith.

13. What are some specific ways you are sowing to the Spirit? What is one thing you need to change in order to give more energy to sowing to the Spirit?

14. What does every farmer know about the relationship between sowing and reaping?

Every farmer who sows corn in his field in the spring can be absolutely certain that he will harvest corn and not oats from that field in the fall. There is absolutely no way to avoid that fact.

Whatever seed you sow in the spring, that is the crop you will harvest in the fall. The other fact of sowing and reaping is that you must wait for the harvest. You can't speed it up or slow it down. The harvest is coming but you have to wait for it. In other words there isn't an immediate result when you plant the seed. Over time you see the plant grow and you can watch the seeds develop but the final harvest is not until the end. You don't receive the fullness of what you have sown until final harvest. The third thing you know about reaping is that you will reap hundreds of times more grain at the harvest than you planted.

15. What will those who sow to the flesh reap? See Isaiah 24:1-13, the contrast with the harvest for those who sow to the Spirit and Matthew 25:46.

If you are sowing to the flesh, then you can be sure that there is a day coming when you will reap from your flesh a harvest of destruction. Everyone who is sowing to his or her flesh will end up in conscious, eternal torment in hell, that's what Paul means by the word, destruction. The contrast is with eternal life and therefore it must refer to eternal death or hell.

16. What will those who sow to the Spirit reap?

Eternal life.

17. When will we reap what we have sown, whether to the flesh or Spirit?

We are not looking for the reward now, we are waiting to receive the reward at the harvest, when Christ returns. That is why Paul says in v. 9 that we are not to grow weary in doing good because at the proper time we will reap if we don't grow weary. That proper time is the return of Christ. Everyone who trusts Christ keeps on sowing to the Spirit, expecting to receive the reward when Christ returns, not before. The primary evidence in the text is the reward of sowing to the Spirit is "eternal life."

18. Why must Paul tell us, twice, that we should not grow weary?

What would happen to the farmer who plants his corn and then when he sees weeds growing in the midst of the corn, says, "I quit. I planted corn and now I've got weeds and corn. I'm not going to waste my time weeding. I'm going to go fishing." The moment the farmer stops farming, he can be sure he won't reap a harvest of corn. That is what Paul is saying here. We are shocked that there are weeds growing up with the corn and there is drought and we are tempted to quit. Children turn away from Christ, marriages are not what we want, church's are disappointing, reading the Bible often seems perfunctory, we are as beset by worry now as when we first trusted Christ, our loved ones are injured or killed, we get sick and we begin to wonder, what is the point of trusting in Christ, of doing good for the sake of Christ? Paul tells us to not grow weary because there are going to be many times in the life of faith when it will appear to not be worth it.

19. According to v. 9 what is supposed to sustain us when we are tempted to quit?

The harvest is coming and it will be great. It will be worth it. Every farmer knows that the harvest of grain is always hundreds of times greater than the seed that was sown. We are to be living in hope of the harvest. If you are sowing to the Spirit, you can be sure that the harvest is coming. However, it will not be here until Christ returns so if you're looking for heaven on earth, you're looking for the wrong thing. Christ didn't die to bring heaven to earth now but to bring you to heaven later. We do not grow weary in doing good, in sowing to the Spirit because we know that we are going to receive a harvest at the last day that corresponds to and will be infinitely greater than our sowing.

20. What are the things that tempt you to grow weary and quit? How are you fighting for faith to press on?