

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Gospel in Galatians
Lesson 13: The Gospel and the Church

“Hasty readers are likely to think that there is a division between [Galatians] chapters 5 and 6, and that the latter part treats of practical, spiritual life, while the first part is devoted to theoretical doctrines. This is a great error.

“The object of this letter is clearly seen in this closing portion. It is not to furnish ground for controversy, but to silence it by leading the readers to submit themselves to the Spirit. Its purpose is to reclaim those who are sinning against God by trying to serve Him in their own weak way, and to lead them to serve indeed in newness of Spirit. All the so-called argument of the preceding portion of the letter is simply the demonstration of the fact that ‘the works of the flesh,’ which are sin, can be escaped only by the ‘circumcision’ of the cross of Christ—by serving God in Spirit and having no confidence in the flesh.”

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1, *Revised Standard Version*).

“When men set out to make themselves righteous, pride, boasting, and criticism lead to open quarrels. So it was with the Galatians, and so it will always be. It cannot be otherwise. Each individual has his own conception of the law. Having determined to be justified by the law, he reduces it to the level of his own mind so that *he* may be the judge. He cannot resist examining his brethren, as well as himself, to see if they are up to his measure. If his critical eye detects one who is not walking according to his rule, he at once proceeds to deal with the offender. The self-righteous ones constitute themselves their brother’s keeper to the extent of keeping him out of their company lest they should be defiled by contact with him. In marked contrast with this spirit, which is all too common in the church, is the exhortation with which this chapter opens. Instead of hunting for faults that we may condemn them, we are to hunt for sinners that we may save them.” [1]

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (vs. 2).

“The law of Christ” is fulfilled by bearing one another’s burdens, because the law of Christ’s life is to bear burdens. “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Whoever would fulfill His law must still do the same work for the strayed and fallen.

“In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren. ... For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted” (Heb.

2:17, 18, *King James Version*). He knows what it is to be sorely tempted, and He knows how to overcome. Although He “knew no sin,” He was made even to be sin for us “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). He took every one of our sins and confessed them before God as His own.

“Even so He comes to us. Instead of upbraiding us for our sin, He opens His heart to us and tells us how He has suffered with the same hardship, pain, sorrow and shame. Thus He wins our confidence. Knowing that He has passed through the same experience, that He has been down to the very depths, we are ready to listen to Him when He talks about the way of escape. We know that He is talking from experience.

“The greatest part therefore of the work of saving sinners is to show ourselves one with them. It is in the confession of our own faults that we save others. The man who feels himself without sin is not the man to restore the sinful. If you say to one who is overtaken in any trespass, ‘How in the world could you ever do such a thing? I never did a thing like that in my life! I can’t see how anybody with any sense of self-respect could do so,’ you might far better stay at home. God chose one Pharisee, and *only* one, to be an apostle. And he was not sent forth until he could acknowledge himself to be the chief of sinners.” [2]

In Acts 26:13-15, Saul of Tarsus was having a battle with his conscience. The Holy Spirit pressed into his soul the constant conviction of sin. For him to go on in his mad campaign against Jesus and His followers, he must repress all the convictions and promptings of the Holy Spirit. This was “hard” on him, and it could have led to severe physical and emotional disorders.

The Lord loved him so much that He actually made it “hard” for Paul to destroy himself through impenitence. And when Saul became the apostle Paul, he never forgot the lesson. Ever afterward he was to teach that it is easy to be saved and hard to be lost *if one understands and believes the “Good News.”* Thus, in the words of Jesus, His burden is “easy,” and to oppose His salvation is “hard.”

Such is the meaning of “righteousness by faith,” and the 1888 messengers caught the idea of Jesus and Paul. This was a unique feature of their message, seldom articulated today. Our youth are continually bombarded with the idea that it’s hard to follow Jesus, and it’s easy to follow the devil. In fact, the idea is entrenched in the minds of many Seventh-day Adventists like the Rock of Gibraltar.

Adventists have been accused, and sometimes rightly so, of teaching that Christ will be full of murderous vengeance when He returns the second time. Evangelists have represented Him as coming with some kind of mysterious cosmic machine gun that emits a lethal ray to murder all His enemies. But the 1888 message presented no such distortion of God’s character. The angels told the apostles that it will be “this same Jesus” who returns a second time (Acts 1:11). Sinners will have changed, not He. They will be hardened, not He.

If one smokes cigarettes for years and then comes down with lung cancer or emphysema, can he say, "God has destroyed me"? Truly, "every man who is destroyed will destroy himself."

Note how in one short paragraph Ellen White says seven times that the unsaved are lost solely because of their own choice, and not through any arbitrary expulsion inflicted on them by the Lord:

(1) A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them for heaven. (2) Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; (3) the glory of God would be a consuming fire. (4) They would long to flee from that holy place. (5) They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them. (6) The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. (7) Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God. [3]

If we want to, can we make salvation hard? Yes, if we eclipse the cross of Christ, then we must admit that it becomes terribly hard to be saved. Motivation to consecration and devotion dries up. Temptation to evil becomes overpowering in its appeal. The Saviour becomes "a root out of a dry ground," and His gospel contains "no beauty that we should desire him." Duty becomes a burden, obedience difficult, reading the Bible is boring, prayer is empty, Sabbath-keeping is boring. This is the pathetic "Christian experience" of many church members.

A. T. Jones says: "We have constantly the opportunity to sin. Opportunities to sin are ever presented to us ... day by day. But it stands written: 'Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.' 'I die daily.' ... the suggestion of sin is death to me ... *in Him*." ... As certainly as He is crucified, I am crucified; as certainly as He is dead, I am dead with Him; as certainly as He is buried, I was buried with Him; as certainly as He is risen, I am risen with Him, and henceforth I shall not serve sin" [4]

Perhaps the familiar fact of power steering in our cars can help us sense this. Try to steer a car with power steering when the engine is not running. It's hard to turn the wheel. But if the engine is running, then even a child can twist the steering wheel this way or that. The power makes it easy.

But still, as driver, you must do something. You must *choose* which way you want to go. The engine can never relieve you of that responsibility. You can never sit in your car, fold your arms, and say, "Take me to the post office." But once you *choose* to turn right or left and apply ever so little effort to turn the wheel, immediately the power mechanism goes to work and makes the task easy. This is a fascinating mechanism for it illustrates the gospel.

To those who think they find it "hard" to be saved, Ellen White gives us some helpful counsel: "Many are inquiring, "*How* am I to make the surrender of myself to God?" You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of

sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you; but you need not despair. What you need understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. ...

“The power of choice has been given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can *choose* to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.” [5]

The only difficult thing in being a true Christian is the choice to surrender self to be crucified with Christ. We are never called to be crucified alone—only *with Him*.

But, thank God, it is a million times easier for us to be crucified with Christ than it was for Him to be crucified alone for us! Behold the Lamb of God, and it does indeed become easy. Even if this still seems hard, don't ever forget that it remains much harder to go on fighting against love like that, and beating off the persistent ministry of the Holy Spirit, in order to be lost!

—*From the writings of Robert J. Wieland
and others as noted*

Endnotes:

[1] E. J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, a verse-by-verse study of Galatians, pp. 124, 125; CFI ed. (2016).

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128.

[3] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 543.

[4] A. T. Jones, 1895 *General Conference Bulletin*, p. 353.

[5] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 47

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/MsA8lic2uVw>

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