

A Place in the Family
The Gospel in Action, Part 2
Galatians 6:1-10

I rarely preach about money. “That’s a good thing,” a lot of people would say. There are certain stereotypes that go with different professions, whether they are accurate or not. I suppose “asking for money” is an all too frequent stereotype of preachers, and some preachers surely reinforce such a notion. I suppose that is one of the reasons that a number of teaching pastors shy away from the subject because they do not want to be branded as money hungry. We have enough to account for without supporting that particular caricature.

But, the danger of preaching too much about money is minor compared to the danger of not preaching enough about money! Let me give you an example of what some would call preaching too much about money – I think you will recognize the teacher who spoke these words:

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

I guess that many people would say, “Oh, I agree with Jesus about giving money for the kingdom, but it needs to be God’s kingdom I am supporting, not a preacher’s kingdom.” Fair enough. But, the text we are going to read today tells us that we are to support the teachers of the church. Why? Because when we support a pastor who is preaching the gospel, we are supporting the gospel and we are laying up treasures for ourselves in heaven. This text will also tell us that it is fine to give outside of the church, but God’s family – particularly the family at the church where God has planted us – should be our top priority for giving. Why? Because giving, like sharing burdens, is a family matter.

Three weeks ago, we began a study in Galatians 6 called The Gospel in Action, but weather and other factors delayed the second part of the message. Today is week two of that study. There are three points of interest in our study, the first two of

which we covered the first week. In the first portion of our text, the focus was on helping one another spiritually and with burdens that are too heavy to bear alone. Families do that, don't they? They help each other. Today's focus may feel a bit different, but it is much the same – we help one another by giving generously of our finances and material goods as well as our giving our time and care. The gospel is at stake, and how we give has a great impact on us, on our family, and on the kingdom. How? Let's see. Our text is Galatians 6:1-10. Would you please stand for the reading of Scripture?

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load.

6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

This world has so very much to offer, doesn't it? It can look and feel and taste so very good. I love to watch the young attacking life with passionate abandon, with all of the advances and advantages of the ages, gifted almost beyond imagination, convinced of immortality – elusive to most, but not to the chosen ones who, after all, deserve their success and status. If only it were so! Life can look so good if you work hard and you study to know what is cool and what is not and if you work at perfecting your image. Deep down, you know better. Even so, comfort can be found in playing the world's game, right? If others think you are good, then you are good. I mean, it has to be that way!

I suppose that is one reason the gospel is so unpopular, even though it is life and breath and exceedingly good news to those who believe. The gospel is only good news when the reality of the bad news of our condition, apart from God's intervention, is accepted. In other words, I tend to think that I can be good enough to go to heaven and I don't like it when you tell me that is not so. It may seem like

good news to you, but are you trying to tell me that this guy who was a drunk for most of his life, who beat his wife and kids, is going to heaven because he got “saved,” and after all I have done for this local community that I am not going to go to heaven? The problem with such an assumption is that you are making the wrong comparison. I am not comparing my good works against an alcoholic’s misdeeds, but, rather, I must compare my sin to the Creator’s righteousness, to his perfection.

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul rigorously defended the gospel, the truth that our only hope of eternal life is in Jesus alone. When we give up our hope of heaven through good works and believe in Jesus’ death as payment for our sin, we are brought into the family of God. We take care of one another, as the first part of our text instructed us. That is the gospel in action.

I don’t suppose that there are any of us who think of any decent plan for life as one that is free from sacrifice and the need to overcome obstacles and challenges as they present themselves. What we ultimately have to determine is whether or not we are living for this life or whether we are living for eternity, and that depends on whether or not we believe the gospel, and if we do, to what degree we believe the gospel. You may have been expecting me to say, “How much you *obey* the Lord will *direct* your priorities.” While it true that actions reveal our beliefs, it is also true that what we believe determines our priorities – actions are pretty much the result of our beliefs. No doubt, your faith may waver more than you would like, but when you believe the gospel, your life will reflect your commitment to Jesus. So, your faith may be strong enough to bring you to church most Sunday’s, but do you trust God at the level that it will impact what you do with the money he gives you?

Galatians 6:6 is one of those verses that will test one’s belief: “Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.” If you are using the KJV, you will likely wonder what this verse means: “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” What does that mean? It means, simply, to pay the preacher. If the preacher provides spiritual blessing to you, give him material assistance so that he can continue to bless you, spiritually. The text from a few weeks ago, in 2 Corinthians 4, warns ministers of the gospel against preaching to get rich, so Paul is not saying, “Be a preacher – it pays well.”

Since the gospel was under such heavy attack in the Galatian churches, Paul encouraged his readers to use their material goods to support teachers who preached the pure gospel, which would free them up to spend time in study to answer the opponents of the gospel. Even though Paul refused to take money from some places where his authority was in question, he encouraged churches to pay the church leaders, especially the teaching elder. In fact, he told the Corinthians that he may well have done them a disservice by not allowing them to support him financially when he ministered among them.

Why support ministers of the gospel, specifically, teaching elders? Because the gospel is that important! Under the OT covenant, the priests were supported by the people so that they could attend to spiritual matters. In fact, God's covenant people were expected to give a tithe, or a tenth, not only of their money, but their crops, and their herds as well, which, of course, ended up being more than a tenth. While it is certainly appropriate to acknowledge that the OT tithe was also, in essence, a tax that supported government as well as religious leaders, it is equally true that in Malachi 3, God accused the Israelites of robbing him by not giving their tithes to the temple. But in the very same breath God told his people that if they would tithe, he would take care of them. "Put me to the test," he challenged them.

I am going to guess that the reason some of you do not tithe, is not because you are opposed to the idea, but you feel that you cannot afford to tithe. Alison and I had lunch with a couple from Grace a while back and they were talking about their decision to give 10% of their income to the Lord and the conversation with the husband went something like this – "I thought there was no way we could afford to tithe because I had added up the income and the outgo and there was just no way. But we made the decision to give and I have no idea how the bills were paid, but there wasn't a single time when we couldn't pay our bills. And, there is no way to tell you how it happened, even though I track the money carefully – it just happened. God took care of us."

Now, let me say that the NT standard for giving, found in 2 Corinthians 8-9, is not a tenth – it is a generous, joyful heart. A tenth is a good standard, though, a measuring rod of sorts. Do you believe that everything you have is a gift from God, or do you think you have earned what you have and that you deserve to spend it the way you want? When you stop and really think, I am sure you will acknowledge that God has given you breath, the ability to see and hear and walk, and he has placed you in this country at this time. I think most of us would, deep

down, acknowledge that we have not earned anything that the Lord did not give us the body and mind to earn. Furthermore, Jesus sacrificed his life for our sin. He became poor so that we might become rich – rich in that we have the promise of eternal life regardless of how our financial statements may look. God makes a clear connection between his gift to us and the response of a grateful and generous heart in giving.

You don't have to agree with me about what I think is an appropriate amount for a tithe, but I want to issue a few challenges to those of you who do not give a tenth of your income to the Lord. As 2 Corinthians says, it has to be your decision, but I can at least tell you what I think. First, the younger you are, the easier it is to make a decision to give a percentage of your income to the Lord because the older you get and the more committed you are to bills and maintaining a particular lifestyle, the more difficult it will be to decide to give a portion of your income to the Lord's work. If you make the decision early enough, it will rarely, if ever, cross your mind in your adult life that you should not give a percentage of your income to the Lord. So, begin early!

Even so, no matter your age, this challenge is for you. It makes sense to me to give at least a tenth of your income to the Lord. Even though it is an OT word, I do not think it is inappropriate to call the giving of the firstfruits of your income a tithe. If you have not tithed to this point in your life, it will not likely be an easy decision. If you decide to give, you may want to know whether you should you give on the gross or the net? Let me ask you – how much do you make? Not, how much do you make after taxes, but what is the amount of salary with which our loving, gracious Father has blessed you? “What about bonuses, gifts from others, tax refunds, inheritance, power ball winnings – things like that? Should I tithe those?” Again, how has God blessed you? It's a matter of the heart, isn't it? Don't think in terms of “What am I required to give,” but, rather, “Thank you Lord for blessing me and giving me the opportunity to bless others and spread the gospel!” I am *against* playing the lottery, by the way – but, if you win . . .

If you want a suggestion, which you may not – you may have heard all that you want to hear, thank you very much – but, if you want a suggestion, I would suggest that you tithe your salary to the church – 10%, at a minimum, to the church, which pays not only the pastor's salary, but other staff who are promoting the gospel. Your gifts also allow this building to continue to be a center for spreading the gospel. If you direct all of your money to other people and to other causes, not only will this family's ability to preach the gospel suffer, but there is also the

danger of you receiving glory that belongs to the Lord, and trust me, you don't want that. I don't know what you give or don't give. It should be that way. But, you should give a percentage of your money and trust the Lord to use it for the furtherance of the gospel. You may think that if you designate where all of the money that you give, goes, then you are being a good steward. Or, you could be putting yourself in a place of control and recognition – again, you don't want that. I hope you don't think that I determine where the money here at Grace goes. The budget process involves a lot of people and there are plenty of times that I have a particular interest in something when the deacons or elders say, “Un uh.” They are always open to my suggestions, and yours, as well. The point of all this, though, is to say that you should give to the Lord and trust him. When Jesus praised the widow for giving all she had, she was giving to a Temple System that Jesus condemned. God has it all under control. Trust him.

In addition to giving 10% of your salary to the church, though, give, also, out of your salary, to missionaries and to organizations that have blessed you. If you have profited from the teaching ministry of an individual or organization, you are fulfilling the Galatians 6:6 principle by supporting those who teach you. Then, when you come into possession of extra monies, you can give to the building fund or designated funds here at Grace and/or you can use a tithe of that money to bless other individuals, missionaries, and missionary organizations. And, don't forget to give generously to the benevolence fund.

You might expect me to say something like, “You cannot out give God. The more you give the more you will receive.” I won't say that, but I will say you can never give too much to God. He is the one who talks about blessings associated with giving, although the blessings we are promised on this side of the cross are primarily spiritual in nature, with the huge material gains coming when we are in the presence of Jesus for eternity. Look at verses 7-8: “7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Paul's thoughts come from the OT. He repeated this truth in 2 Corinthians 9 when he was talking about – giving money. In fact, often when these thoughts are expressed in Scripture, the point has to do with giving in one way or another. Do not put a prosperity gospel spin to this and say if you give to God he will give back to you tenfold. He may, because this is a principle of the universe, established by a gracious God who gives beyond what we could ask or think. But, many of the NT givers who were held up as examples to us were poor, and as far as we know, they remained poor. They

inherited the riches of Christ, though, and on this day when we struggle in this life, they are reaping the rewards of their generous giving hearts.

So, when Paul speaks of sowing and reaping, what would make us think that he is referring to money? For starters, it is unlike Paul to put one sentence in the middle of a letter – as in verse 6 – that is completely unrelated to anything else he is teaching. I often point to the fact that Paul’s teaching can mean more than one thing, so that when I ask, “Do you think he means this or that?” the answer is often “Yes.” Here, I think that Paul is incorporating three different things he is teaching in this letter when he speaks of sowing and reaping and corruption and eternal life. First, the whole point of Galatians is to trust Jesus, not your good works, so sowing and reaping has to do with your belief in the gospel. Second, Paul passionately argued the incongruity of belonging to Jesus and living like the devil in Galatians 5, so there is a principle of the way we live now impacting our future in this life. Third, Paul encouraged the Galatians not to waste their money on themselves. If you have family or friends who don’t follow Jesus, they most likely think you are nuts to give a tenth of your money to the church. Paul argues that it is not misguided to give from a grateful heart, because, at some level, the quality of eternity for you depends on what you do with your resources. You will reap what you sow. When you think about it, this is a surprisingly strong call to give. It is God’s call, not mine.

Paul wraps up this section by encouraging his readers to persevere in living out the gospel. Our brothers and sisters who are being killed by ISIS and by other unbelievers all over the world are coming into their reward. Do not look at this life as a young, successful secular artist or business person might and think that this life is all there is and it will never end. Your hope is not in this world, your hope is in Jesus. Furthermore, your first responsibility to give is to your church family, then to all men and women, boys and girls, all of whom are made in God’s image. You may think that if you have the choice between helping a brother or sister in Christ, or, helping an unbeliever, then your responsibility is to the one who doesn’t know Christ and that your brother or sister will understand that you are doing this for the gospel. But, Paul says that the gospel in action first takes care of the family, then it looks for opportunities to good to those outside the family. Much of this “doing good” will require giving of your financial resources. This whole passage involves giving in one way or another.

So, it is time to call a family meeting of this covenant community known as Grace Community Church. Since Jesus commands for our giving to be done in secret,

there will be no disclosures of giving records. In fact, while this is very much a family matter, it is first and foremost, a matter between God and you. It is time, though, for you to make some decisions. While it might seem appropriate to suggest that you take a week to pray about it, the Word seems clear: you are called to give. So, the challenge is this: put the Lord to the test! If you have never given before, you might start with 5% rather than 10%, but you may just as well take the Lord up on his challenge and put him to the test. I have never known anyone who said, “We started tithing and we went bankrupt,” or, “we made the decision to tithe and it was the worst decision we ever made.” In fact, every testimony I have ever heard about someone deciding to give on the basis of what Christ had done for him or her is accompanied by a bright smile, a huge grin. That is a generous giver. That is a grateful, joyful heart. Let’s pray.