

Burden-Bearing, Part 2: Pay Your Pastor

Galatians 6:6-10

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I've chosen a blunt title for today's message: *Pay Your Pastor*. And if the title makes you feel a bit uncomfortable, you need to know it makes me feel even more so! As a rule, pastors don't like talking about money. Even the fearless reformer Martin Luther was squeamish about preaching on this particular verse. "I do not like to interpret such passages," Luther confessed, "for they seem to commend us [i.e., pastors], as in fact they do. In addition, it gives the appearance of greed if one emphasizes these things diligently to one's hearers."¹

Evidently, the Apostle Paul wasn't a big fan of talking about money either; at least not directly and explicitly. For whenever he does speak about money, he does so in highly theological and relational terms. As he does here in these closing verses. Notice how Paul in effect says to the Galatians: Pay your pastor. With these words: "One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches" (v. 6).²

There is an *exchange* that ought to take place within the life of every health church. On the one hand, pastors are to share with congregants the spiritual resources of the word of God, so that congregants can be nourished and equipped to live for Christ. On the other hand, congregants are to share with pastors their financial resources, so that pastors are free of the burden of having to provide financially for themselves, and thus free to devote all their energy to feeding the flock. Within the Spirit-led community of faith, there is to be then *mutual burden-bearing*; both pastor and congregation are to share with each other the good things they each have for the benefit of one another.

¹ Martin Luther, *Galatians 1535*, p. 126.

² You can find this same pattern of speaking in highly relational and theological terms throughout Paul's letters: see Romans (1:13, "reap some harvest among you"), 2 Corinthians (8:6, "this act of grace"), Philippians (1:5, "your partnership in the gospel," with 4:14-20).

But what you need to see from this passage is that this burden-bearing to which you're called is actually in your best interest. Let me state it very plainly: *It's in your long-term spiritual best interest to provide financially for the teaching ministry of your local church.* You stand to benefit immensely – immeasurably, eternally, even – by sharing your financial resources with your local church, so that your local church can be all the more active in sharing the word of God with you and others. Pay your pastor, provide financial support for your local church, because this is in your own long-term best interest.

To some of you this all may sound a bit sub-Christian, as though God saw fit to pander to our selfishness to get us to do what he wants. Here is where we do well to remind ourselves of something C. S. Lewis pointed out in his brilliant essay, “The Weight of Glory,” where he grapples with precisely this problem:

The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.³

So it is with this passage in Galatians. Some of you already understand this; that's why you live such grace-filled and generous lives. Perhaps there are others, however, who have given out of habit or routine, but haven't understand the point. And there may be others still who don't give, not because you're in principle opposed, but because you've never been challenged to understand why you should.

For in these few closing verses of the letter, we find a call, first, *to provide financial support for the local church because you reap what you sow* (vv. 6-8); second, *to persevere in providing support for the local church because you will reap, if*

³ C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays* (HarperOne, 2001), pp. 25-26.

you stick with it (v. 9); and, third, *to prioritize supporting the local church because the local church is your family* (v. 10).

Sowing And Reaping Is Reality (6:7-8)

There are different reasons why people struggle to provide financial support to their local church. I suspect the main reason is, not that people don't have the resources to give; even the widow with her mite had something. But that they don't in their heart of hearts think it ultimately matters. They know parting with another \$5 or \$500 dollars certainly will matter to their personal budget. But what they're less convinced of is that this has any *ultimate* bearing on their life, whether now or in eternity.

Perhaps this is why Paul feels it necessary to fire a shot across the bow of the boat: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (v. 7). It is very easy to slip into thinking that our actions don't matter, isn't it? But what this verse reminds us of is that just as God has created a world in which the law of gravity holds true, so too he's created a world in which *the law of the harvest* holds true as well: you reap what you sow.

Sowing and reaping is reality; the law of the harvest is part of the very warp and woof of this world. And just as it would be unwise to test the law of gravity by driving your car off the top of the parking garage across the street, so too it would be unwise to test the law of the harvest by living a life centered upon yourself. The consequences of failing to observe these laws aren't pretty; flaunting either law will only end in death and destruction.

So, let no one be deceived! Our actions have serious long-term consequences! This is what Paul says in verse 8, as he explains and reinforces the reality of sowing and reaping: "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."

If you live a life sowing to your own flesh, in which your aim in life is to satisfy your own selfish desires, then you will get exactly what you seek: corruption. On the

other hand, if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap nothing less than eternal life. Notice how the Apostle Paul links sowing to the Spirit with eternal life itself. He has in mind, not simply eternal rewards in addition to eternal life, but the gift of eternal life itself.

Don't miss that point, which for some of you is a surprising connection for Paul to make. Because you've always assumed that eternal life was a gift given in response to faith and not to works. What you need to understand is that sowing to the Spirit is simply another way to describe walking by faith; it's a life lived by faith and in reliance upon the Holy Spirit of God as both the motivation and means of giving sacrificially.

You Will Reap, If You Stick With It (6:9)

Of course, sowing to the Spirit isn't easy. In fact, I think it's safe to say that sowing to the Spirit is usually quite hard. Because of the power of our own fleshly, self-serving desires (cf. 5:17), as well as the sin-inducing evil world in which we live (cf. 1:4), it's far easier to sow to ourselves than to the Spirit; to serve ourselves than to pursue the good of others. This is because sowing to the Spirit requires, by its very nature, *self-denial*. And, as we all know, self-denial involves putting yourself to death, which is always a rather painful process; and over time, can be an exhausting process as well. While sowing to the Spirit isn't easy, grow weary in doing it very much is.

Growing weary of doing good is, I suspect, another common reason why people struggle to give; they simply run out of gas for giving. Perhaps they've given some in the past. But for whatever reason, they find themselves no longer in a place of being able to give. Whatever the reason, they don't have the appetite for giving they once had; they've grown weary in giving to support the ministry of the church.

This is why this passage includes a word of encouragement, to stick with sowing and not give up. "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up" (v. 9). This statement has very wide application, really to

all of life, wherever we feel weary in doing good; but it has specific relevance to the issue at hand in this passage; thus, it's an encouragement *to persevere in providing financial support to the ministry of the local church.*

And the key is to keep your eyes fixed on the harvest. That's the only way to stay truly motivated and encouraged during this time of sowing. We get ourselves in trouble when we allow ourselves to get too immersed in our own troubles. Instead, as Martyn-Lloyd Jones encourages:

We need to look ahead, to anticipate, to look forward to the eternal glories gleaming afar. The Christian life is a tasting of the first-fruits of that great harvest which is to come. . . . Go on with your task whatever your feelings; keep on with your work. God will give the increase, He will send the rain of His gracious mercies as we need it. There will be an abundant harvest. Look forward to it. 'Ye shall reap.'⁴

Remember our Lord Jesus Christ. His whole life was lived sowing to the Spirit and not to the flesh, every single moment of every single day. But he sustained himself by constantly keeping in view "the joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2); this is how he endured all the suffering and sacrifice he went through, including his death on the cross.

Friend, is the joy of the harvest clearly in view for you? Do you have your eyes fixed on what is to come? Are you seeking, as Paul advises the Colossians, the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God? Is your mind set on things that are above, not on things that are on earth? Or have you forgotten that, if you are in Christ by faith, then you have died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory on that great Harvest Day (Col. 3:1-4).

Oh what a glorious day that will be! For then those who have sown, not to their own flesh, but to the Spirit, will find that what you reap is not at all in proportion to

⁴ Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 201.

what you've sown; you will sow only a little, but you will reap vastly more than you can even begin to imagine.

Prioritize Giving To The Local Church (6:10)

We have every reason, then, to live generously, don't we? For we know not only that sowing and reaping *is reality*, but we're also convinced that one day *we will reap* if we stick with it. Naturally, then, Paul rounds out this passage with a very broad and general encouragement to abound in doing good toward others: "So then as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone" (v. 10a).

Thus, Christians ought to be marked by doing good wherever we are; goodness is, after all, one of the fruits of the Spirit (5:22). Our lives ought to be characterized by adding value, blessing, enhancing, enriching the lives of those around us. We're to follow in the way of our Lord Jesus Christ, who went about "doing good" (Acts 10:38).

But, notice, that while this verse encourages open-ended generosity, it does so not without qualification: as we live generous lives in the world, *we must prioritize the local church*. Yes, do good to everyone, yet as Paul says here: "especially to those who are of the household of faith" (v. 10b).

The local church, then, must be first in our affection. Why? Because the local church is our primary family: it is the "household of faith." This is the place where we find identity and security, where we receive nurture and nourishment, where we get encouragement and support, where we benefit from teaching and training. The local church is our spiritual home, and those who gather here week after week, they are, spiritually speaking, our brothers and sisters.

You may remember when Jesus' mother and his brothers came to the house where Jesus was teaching and ministering to people. When Jesus heard they were looking for him, he said this in the hearing of the crowds who were gathered: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And then, looking intently into the eyes of those who were gathered to hear him teach, he added: "Here are my mother and my

brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 4:33-34). Those who do the will of God, who bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ, these are the members of Jesus’ family, these are the ones who belong to what Paul calls here the “household of faith.” And they, therefore, deserve our primary attention and support.

You see, you will only prioritize your giving to the local church when you realize – and are truly convinced – that the local church is a truly unique and one-of-a-kind institution. Jesus Christ the head of no other earthly institution. And there is no other human institution that can be said to be Christ’s body, indeed his physical presence here on earth. Nor is there any other institution that can be said to be the place where God’s own presence resides, like he says is true of the church when it gathers in Jesus’ name. We are the temple of God, the dwelling place for the Spirit of God. There is no other institution that has our history, stretching back to before the foundations of the world; nor is there any other with our future, extending forever into eternity. There is no other institution that is as global in scope or as diverse in membership. Nor is there any other institution that is so easy to enter or as impossible, once you’ve truly entered, to every fall out of membership. And think of the benefits – joy in fellowship, peace with God, life eternal.

What does this mean practically? This means that you give generously first to your local church, and then, as you are able, to other Christian ministries or worthy causes beyond that. Christians shouldn’t find themselves in a place where they’re giving generously to support this or that ministry or cause and skipping on support for their local church.

When it comes to prioritizing support for your local church, what’s a good rule of thumb? I would say you should strive to give 10% of your before-tax income to the local church. This is what has traditionally been called a tithe, and it’s a good rule of thumb, a benchmark for generous giving. We should be generous givers, and 10% or a tithe of your income is a good baseline for generosity.

The church is utterly unique, truly a one-of-a-kind institution. And it ought, therefore, to have first place in our affections, pride of place among all the other competing priorities in our lives. We ought to prioritize the local church because this is our family, this is the household of faith.

Conclusion

Surprisingly, the book of Galatians concludes with a word on giving. “One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches” (v. 6). God wants us to hear in this passage a call to *provide financially for the local church, persevere in providing for the local church, and prioritize providing for the local church*. And all because this is in your best long-term spiritual interest. You have everything to gain, both now and throughout eternity.

You see, then, how profoundly *God-centered* this passage is. Giving is ultimately between you and God; no one else. Sharing in all good things with the one who teaches has nothing to do with whether you like the one who teaches, or whether you like his teaching. It’s not ultimately about the one who teaches; it’s about God, to whom you will ultimately answer. It’s not as though your financial support is to be earned as a wage. You will ultimately answer to him; you are either pleasing or displeasing him. And that ought to be your primary, indeed, all-consuming concern.

This passage is also rigorously *future-oriented*. The strong warnings in this passage point us to the future; and they remind us of the eternal consequences that follow from our actions, whether good or bad. So, we can’t read this passage and not be confronted with the value of maintaining an eternal perspective on all of life, not least when it comes to what we do with our money. This present life is not the be-all and end-all of life. There’s more to come; indeed, the best is yet to come.

We need to remember, as well, that this invites us to live *Spirit-empowered* lives. It would be a tragic mistake to think that living generously with one’s resources is about trying harder or being more disciplined or sacrificial, and forget that this is all about sowing *to the Spirit* – living a life of dependence upon the Spirit’s power and

enablement, not in your own strength. This passage calls us to a life of faith, to walk by faith, trusting in the promises and provision of God; thus, this passage calls us to “walk by the Spirit” (5:16), in fact, to be “led by the Spirit” (5:18), to let the Spirit not only give you life, but lead your life.

And, finally, we must realize that the teaching of this passage is deeply *Christ-focused*. By sharing in all good things with the one who teaches you the word, you bear one another’s burdens in the most practical of ways; and so you also fulfill the law of Christ. For Christ is the great Burden-Bearer, who out of his wealth shares all good things with sinful creatures like you and me in our utter spiritual poverty. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Do you know this grace of which the Bible speaks? Do you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: how he who is one with God the Father nevertheless took on human flesh and died in our stead on the cross; how he who was the sinless Son of God, shed his blood for the sins of the world. Do you know this grace, the grace of forgiveness, healing, redemption, cleansing, pardon, freedom, restoration, hope, new life? You can know it, you can have it, if you will turn from yourself, from serving your own flesh, and cry out to the Lord Jesus Christ for his grace.