

Galatians week 8 Gal 5:26-6:18

If I were to ask you to think about some of your habits, I wonder what would come to mind?

Or if I were to ask you to think of some of friends or relatives' habits – maybe your spouse, or children, or a close friend, what comes to mind?

The things they do repeatedly.

They might be good habits....or they might be bad habits!

Often we think initially of the bad habits that annoy us – clothes left all over the floor, dishes left on the table, towels all over the bathroom floor.

Sometimes we have to think harder for the good habits, and we may not always appreciate them until that person's not around. I took the funeral of a friend's husband last year, and he had achieved all sorts of things in his career as an academic, but the thing that has most stuck in my mind from the eulogy was that every day of his working life he had made his wife's sandwiches.

What are your habits?

There's a saying:

Sow a thought, reap an act;  
Sow an act, reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, reap a character;  
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

In our reading today Paul tells the Galatian Christians they will reap what they sow. And he encourages them to "Sow to the Spirit rather than to the flesh."

What does that mean exactly?

If you were here last week you will know that we looked at how Paul contrasted the desires of the flesh with the fruits of the Spirit. The desires of the flesh included sexual immorality, idolatry, sorcery, quarrels and strife, drunkenness and such like. He warned that those who gratified the desires of the flesh would not inherit the kingdom of God, and urged his readers to 'live by the Spirit' which then leads to holiness of life as the fruits of the Spirit grow in our lives – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

In our first reading from Galatians in Ch6 v 7-10 Paul is again saying we have a choice to make: when we become Christians the Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts, but

our lower nature still exists, and works in opposition to the Spirit. We have a choice about which we follow.

‘Sowing to the flesh’, means indulging and gratifying the ungodly desires we have, stroking and cuddling the flesh instead of crucifying it. It could mean nursing a grievance, or harbouring a grudge, indulging in gossip, trying to turn someone against another, dabbling in the occult, sleeping around or looking at porn, getting drunk, losing your rag...the lists goes on! If left unchecked those things become habits that lead to decay and destruction.

Sowing to the Spirit means focussing on the things of God – the things that are above, asking, “What would Jesus do in this situation?” And then doing it. It means releasing forgiveness, being a peacemaker, building people up rather than tearing them down, being faithful to your spouse, serving others rather than yourself. It includes seeking God in prayer and Bible reading, coming to church on Sunday to worship and receive from God so that we have something to take out into the world. Sowing to the Spirit leads to holiness, and the fruits of the Spirit growing in our lives.

And in these verses Paul shows us what living by the Spirit means in practice in terms of our relationships, especially our relationships with other Christians.

What’s the first fruit of the Spirit?

Love.

And what’s the law of Christ?

To love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

So what does that look like in practice?

First Paul says what it **shouldn’t** look like

5: 26 “Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.”

Remember he was writing to a church where some of the Jewish Christians were saying the Gentile converts had to become like them. They thought they were superior. That their way of doing things was the right way, and they put others down. Others were feeling inferior, maybe envious of the more confident, more outspoken people, and perhaps put themselves down.

Paul is saying there is no room in God’s family for that kind of sibling rivalry and petty squabbling. The right

attitude, the Spirit-led attitude, is to know who we are in Christ – dearly loved children of great worth – but not to think of ourselves as better than others, because our brothers and sisters are also dearly loved children of great worth, chosen by God, saved by grace just as we are. We need to build one another up, spur one another on to love and good deeds, not tear each other down.

So think about our family here. Maybe look around. Do you look down on anyone here? Or do you feel inferior to anyone here?

In God's eyes we are equally precious. Pride and envy, thinking ill of others or of ourselves - these are among the things we need to crucify.

What about the positives? What **should** love look like?

V2 'Bear one another's burdens' Help each other when the load gets too heavy.

There may seem a contradiction in what Paul writes in v 2 and v5, because in v5 he says 'carry your own load'.

But the words he uses are different. The word used for our own load is a word that can mean a back pack, or a

rucksack, something designed for us to carry. He means do the things God asks of us.

The word for burdens in v2 means something too heavy to be carried alone.

What might that look like?

Two examples: When we had twins, back in 1996, and suddenly we had two demanding bundles of joy that took over our lives. When they were first born friends from church arrived with meals, cakes, one organised a babysitting rota so I had a couple of hours off once a week, and after a year or so with very little sleep, two friends offered to have them for a weekend so that we could have a break.

More recently, in 2005 when I had thyroid cancer, Simon's parents came to stay, again our friends arrived with food, took the children to school, prayed with us, and really carried us through that year.

I have a friend who also has twins. When someone asked her what advice she would give to someone who was expecting twins she said, "I'd tell them to join Penny's church!"

She wasn't a believer, but she had seen how our friends had cared for us.

If we sow to the Spirit, our lives will be characterised by love, and it will show.

The seeds we sow often begin as thoughts, but thoughts lead to actions and actions lead to habits.

I'm told it takes six weeks to form a habit. But if we make the effort, good habits – godly habits - become a way of life.

It can take seconds to end a habit. A bad habit. You just need to crucify it, and ask the Holy Spirit to take control of that area of your life. It's an act of the will, but with supernatural help at hand.

And the power to break a bad habit flows from the cross.

Paul says in 6:14, "May I never boast in anything except the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Paul knew that he was a sinner saved by grace. He had had that amazing encounter on the road to Damascus, and had come to realise that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, and that his death on the cross was an atoning sacrifice

for his sins. He knew that all his previous efforts and achievements were worthless compared to knowing Jesus and the forgiveness he offers. He knew it wasn't circumcision that mattered as he says in v15, "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but new creation is everything!"

He knew he had been made new through the cross of Christ.

It's the power of the cross that breaks bad habits.

Jackie Pullinger – Chasing the Dragon. Working with drug addicts in the walled city in Hong Kong. When people turned to Christ, the power of the addiction was broken.

Freedom comes through faith in Christ and the new life he offers which we live in the power of the Spirit. That was the same for both Jews and Gentiles. They no longer needed external marks of the flesh, nor the Law of Moses, to belong to God's family. In Christ all belong, all are saved through faith, all have received grace, all are children of God. The call of God is to go forward, in unity of heart and mind, living in the power of the Spirit, loving God and one another.