
Living the Good Life Together

BOB HEERSPINK

Our study of Galatians shows us that in Christ we are set free. We are no longer bound in sin. We have freedom to live life, but we are not islands; we are not isolated. Our lives are intertwined with the lives of many people. What responsibility do we have for others around us? What does this freedom look like for the body of Christ, his Church? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

Well, we have reached the end of our series of programs, Bob...

BOB HEERSPINK

We have.

DAVE BAST

On Paul's letter to the Galatians, and that brings us to Chapter 6, the final chapter. I especially find myself moved by the end of this chapter, where Paul, as so often in his letters, he kind of addresses a last exhortation or two, and sometimes there are housekeeping details that he mentions, but here in Galatians he writes a couple of statements that are unique to all of his letters. He says in verse 11, first of all:

See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. So at this point his normal practice would have been to dictate his letter, what he wanted to say, to a professional scribe who would write it down; but here Paul himself takes up the pen and signs his own name, in effect; and the letters that he writes are kind of clumsy; they are oversized; maybe because he had some problem or some trouble?

BOB HEERSPINK

Maybe palsy, maybe an eye problem; we really don't know, but when I hear those words it just brings home to me the personal nature of Paul. We so often think of him as just a thinker; he is some kind of a theological head...

DAVE BAST

All head and no heart.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, and this is...

DAVE BAST

Paul is a gigantic brain.

BOB HEERSPINK

That's right. All he did was to think theology; and I see him at the table, he is struggling to write, and he is doing this out of love for the Church because his heart just goes out to the Galatians, who have struggled so much over these issues that have put their very identity as Christians at risk.

DAVE BAST

He cares so much about them, that is what comes through to me. He is passionate. He is engaged. He can write... in other places he talks about with tears, how he says the things that he says. This is so far from a kind of detached, ivory tower theologian. Paul is a pastor who is in love with his people, and who sacrificed for them. You know, one tradition says that Paul caught malaria and was totally spent as a result, and maybe that affected even his eyesight; but here is another thing that he says a little bit later – a few verses later:

¹⁷From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, the sufferings, the persecutions that he went through; literally the stripes upon his back.

DAVE BAST

Right; that is not some mystical thing of the wounds of Jesus, he is talking about the scars from the beatings and the whippings and the scourgings; and he says in effect: You know, this has earned me a right to be heard by you, and maybe some exemption from the people who are criticizing me and attacking me. It is a reminder of the problems.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, it really speaks to his love for the Church, and this is a love that so many people today really cannot understand. You know, in an age where so many Christians want to simply pursue some kind of individualistic spirituality, here is Paul saying: You know, I have suffered all this for Christ, but for the sake of the Church. I was talking to someone the other day, and this person said to me: You know, I can accept the claims of Jesus: His miracles, even his resurrection; but I just cannot get over the Church. I want my spirituality to come to me on an individual level. Why I have to interact with other people, why I have to get involved with people different from me, who irk me, who bug me... I don't understand that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, or I don't want anything to do with it; and you could say a lot of things about that attitude, but one thing for sure, it is not biblical in the New Testament sense. It is not Pauline; it is not the attitude of the New Testament toward our need to be involved – even for all its mess, all its divisions. You know, there were divisions in Galatia.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you think about what is going on here, and it is not just a theological debate. People are tearing at each other. Some people are saying: Hey, to be a Christian you have to follow the Jewish law. There are others who say: No, that is not the way to go. You have some Christians in Galatia who are saying: Hey, do this and you will really be spiritual; and I see that being played out in our churches today. People basically saying: Hey, this is the way to go. Follow me and do it *this* way and you will really be a spiritual person: Come to Wednesday night Bible study; get involved in this program; follow this set of disciplines and you will be a super Christian; and Paul looks at the Church and says: Don't rip apart. Paul is so concerned here at the very end of his letter to see healing in the body of Christ.

DAVE BAST

Another one of the sources of division is sort of choosing sides or following particular teachers or leaders – some of them long dead and gone; you know: I am Reformed or I am Methodist or I am this or that; or some of them living, breathing televangelists or something; and clearly something like that must have been going on in the churches in Galatia, too.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and the Church today can rip apart over the smallest of issues. I mean, here in Paul in Galatians, this is big stuff. Paul says: We are really talking about the heart of the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

Different gospels.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; but you know, I was reading one story, which said: Hey, there is a church which is splitting over the location of the piano bench; two groups have been warring for ten years about this, and now they have become two churches. They are sharing the same building, they have two different worship services, and an independent party has to reposition the piano bench between services; and Paul would just look at this and it would just grieve his heart.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is almost unbelievable, except we could probably all think of examples where church fights happened over equally trivial issues. The question is, what is the Gospel way? We know this isn't right, but what do we do to heal those kinds of conflicts and divisions? How do we relate to one another? That is also what Paul wants to address here in his last chapter.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; because here in Galatians Chapter 6 he gives some very practical advice about how we should live together as Christians. We will talk about this some more in just a minute, but first I would like to invite our listeners to continue this conversation with us on our website.

DAVE BAST

Listeners like you make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures.

BOB HEERSPINK

Plus, your responses to "We are wondering" questions help us to prepare upcoming programs. Finding us is easy; just visit our website: groundworkonline.com.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

So just taking up this conversation at the end of Galatians, in Chapter 6, we have seen that Paul is passionate about the Church. He cares deeply. The reason he is so insistent on what the Gospel is, is because misunderstandings of the Gospel can lead to divisions in the Church, and all kinds of trouble and problems. He has earned the right to be heard by what he has suffered on their behalf; and now, here are the practical exhortations, Bob, that he gives in Chapter 6:1 and following.

Brothers and sisters, 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. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself; ⁴but let each one test his own work and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵For each will have to bear his own load.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, Dave, I love the way Paul weaves together both responsibility for yourself and responsibility for your neighbor in that one passage; and it is a reminder to me that even as we seek to build up the Church, and as we seek to reach out to our neighbor in ministry, we have to take a look at ourselves and see whether we are doing the kind of spiritual self-care that allows us to be the kind of person God wants us to be in the Church.

DAVE BAST

Well, a week or two ago we talked about the fact that errors often come in opposite pairs: Legalism on the one hand or lawlessness – license – on the other; and here we can see a kind of a sense of that in the community life of the church. On the one hand, people who just freeload and take advantage of the fact that they are supposed to be cared for, and on the other hand, the error of being such an individual – of such isolationism – of being such a rugged individualist – that all you care about is: I will take care of myself; I don't need any help from anybody; I won't give any help to them either.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; he really says at least four things in this passage about what we need to do with regard to ourselves. He starts out with self-awareness. We need to watch ourselves or we too will be tempted. You know, I read that and it reminded me of something that happened to me in 4th grade, where I needed...

DAVE BAST

This is an interesting difference between you and me, Bob, because I read that and I thought of a Puritan story from the 1500s. You thought of your....

BOB HEERSPINK

I thought of a moment where my self-awareness failed. I was attending a Christian school, and we started each day with prayer; and as we opened with prayer, I as a good 4th grader decided that I should really check around the room to see if everyone had the proper posture for prayer; and I noticed a few desks over there was one of my classmates who had his eyes open. So of course, being the good student that I was, I raised my hand at the end of the prayer and I said: Teacher, John had his eyes open during the prayer; and she said: Well now, Bob, how did you know that? And I was nailed.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And it was just one of those moments when, you know, trying to improve someone else's spiritual posture, I hadn't taken into account what *I* was doing and who *I* was.

DAVE BAST

Self-awareness; the sense that, you know, I am not going to judge others because I am capable of anything really myself under the right circumstances. I am not quite the good person I might think myself to be.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and why is this so important when it comes to ministering to other people? Well, it is because if we don't know ourselves, we are really not going to be in a position to care for our neighbor. You know, Paul goes on to talk about an attitude of humility: If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. So, if you think you are cool and you think you are at the pinnacle when it comes to spiritual maturity, you really show how empty you are; but you are not going to be able to be used in ministry to your neighbor because all that person is going to see when you approach him or her is your spiritual pride – your arrogance.

DAVE BAST

Our culture is hung up on self esteem, and we keep pushing that. One of our kids told about in grade school learning to sing the song: I am special, I am special. Paul says here, in effect: No, I am nobody special. I understand the issue of self esteem; we can talk about that another time; but here he is calling for the kind of humility that says: I am not superior to you. I am nobody.

Our son was telling us about an incident that just happened. He was with a senior colleague and they came into a room and a guy there immediately jumped up, shook hands, introduced himself – just came across as a

wonderful fellow – ordinary guy; and when they left, my son’s colleague said: Do you know who that was? That was the richest guy in town; he is a multibillionaire; and yet, he didn’t come across as somebody special. That is what Paul is really getting at. If we are going to help each other – if we are going to relate to one another – we have to be able to get low enough to say: I am not above you.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; and yet still recognize what we bring to the table in terms of ministry to others; because Paul, in this passage, goes on to say: Each one of us should test his own actions and then he can take pride in himself. Here is Paul talking about healthy pride. When we really know ourselves and the gifts we have – okay – then we can say: I have something to give to others.

DAVE BAST

There is the right kind of self esteem; to be able to say: I can contribute, I can help you, I recognize that I have things for which I should be thankful to God – that God has given me; and finally then, Paul, the last thing he says is, so each should carry his own load, meaning obviously, those of us who are capable of doing that need to pull our weight. He said elsewhere famously: If someone won’t work, let them not eat...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

To the Thessalonians; so if you are capable of it, you need to provide for yourself so that you can also provide for others.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, we have to cultivate these personal aspects, but not just for ourselves, so that we can turn around and build community, and that is what we need to talk about when we come back, because through this passage now Paul is also going to talk about the way in which we are on the move for the sake of the person next to us.

DAVE BAST

So, there are two specific commands that he gives to us by way of applying all of this, and we will look at those after the break.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into the scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink. Dave, we have been talking about the kind of person we need to become if we are really going to build unity in the Church. We need to have the kind of humility that allows us to reach out in ministry to others, knowing how we are able to realistically minister to those around us; but Paul, in this passage then, also talks about specifically the kinds of things we need to do to make a difference in other peoples’ lives. The first thing that he says I find to be one of the toughest things for us to do in the Church in the kind of world in which we live today. Paul says if anyone is caught in any transgressions, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. That is powerful stuff.

DAVE BAST

Powerful and very difficult to put into practice. Just think about how he words it: If anyone is caught in a transgression... Does that mean that I am the one who has to blow the whistle? Because that is how some people approach it; like you did in your 4th grade classroom. You are on the lookout for who has their eyes open, and it was so and so, Teacher. You know, just the kind of little kid nobody can stand.

BOB HEERSPINK

You've got that right.

DAVE BAST

And you put that into an adult context in the Church, and there are those who feel that God gave them the calling to go to others and point out their faults to them.

BOB HEERSPINK

But see, that is where the humility part comes in, where we have to approach people in such a way, as Paul says in this passage, he says: In a spirit of gentleness. As soon as we approach people in any way that smacks of spiritual arrogance, we will totally lose our hearing to come alongside someone who needs to be encouraged in a walk of obedience.

DAVE BAST

That is where the strength of character comes in, too, because what Paul is calling for is a kind of Christian maturity, the attitude that is strong enough to say: I can take care of myself. I can provide... I have a healthy self esteem, but I also am humble enough to recognize I am capable of doing anything, too. I am not coming to condemn you, but I am trying to come alongside you and call you back. The key word, I think, in this exhortation is to restore; the object is to restore people.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; it is not punishment. The word *restore* actually means to set a broken bone, and that is what you are doing; you are seeking to heal the brokenness that has become evident in someone's life.

DAVE BAST

So, here is a case. Let's just give an example, one that we have all experienced: Somebody is having marital problems in a congregation. What do you do? It becomes obvious they have separated from their mate, so you are not going to accuse them of some secret wrongdoing; this is something that has happened; it is an open break. How do you go about trying to set that broken bone? How do you try to restore them in a spirit of gentleness?

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, one of the most powerful stories of, really, church discipline that I have ever experienced happened in one of my churches shortly before I arrived. There was an individual who took off with another person, okay; left their family, deserted their spouse; the church that night, when it became public knowledge, gathered for a prayer meeting. You say: Wow; instead of keeping everything hidden under the rug, let's come together to pray and to wrestle with this before the Lord; and you know, there was a reaching out to this person; and I think it was after a couple of weeks, this person turned around, repented, came back to the Lord, actually became one of the pillars – one of the strong members – of that church; and I think the power of that healing situation was born of a church that humbled itself and said: We are not coming together out of spiritual superiority, but we recognize that this can happen to any and all of us, and we are here asking for God's Spirit; because it is not our words, it is God's Spirit that is going to make a difference in this person's life.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is a happy ending, but that doesn't happen all that often, does it? I mean, usually in our society people just say: Hey, take a hike; I'll go to the church down the street.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right, right; and I think it is important to recognize that we, as it were, earn the right to this kind of intervention by taking seriously the second thing which Paul says in this passage; namely, we are called to bear each other's burdens.

DAVE BAST

That is one of the beautiful, reciprocal commands of the New Testament: The one-another's; there are a lot of them, and this is among the most beautiful: Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ, Paul says. That is that law to love. We have seen it earlier in Galatians. The only heart and soul of the law that Christians want to obey is this law to love each other, and to do it in meaningful ways by sharing the load together.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, Dave, we sometimes talk about the fact that the Lord never gives us more than we can bear; and maybe we should put that a little differently. Maybe we should say: The Lord never gives us a load that we cannot bear with others.

DAVE BAST

I like that idea. I hadn't really thought of it that way before, but it is true. It is only by sharing the burden that we are able to bear the load – the heavy load sometimes – that he inflicts: Loads of grief, maybe; a load of guilt...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

A load of financial need. There are all kinds of situations like this.

BOB HEERSPINK

And for us to give some real, practical thought as to how we do that. For example, how do we bear the grief that someone is going through? It is more than just going and offering some platitudes. That is often what happens...

DAVE BAST

Funeral home expressions; the things we say.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, you know, well they look so good in the coffin...

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, they are gone – they are deceased. To come alongside that person and be willing to open our heart and hurt with that person; and it becomes part of the way in which we bear that load.

DAVE BAST

Right; some people are better at this than others, obviously. They have a natural sensitivity – a natural compassion; but I think rule one for me has always been: Show up; and that is not as easy as it sounds because it takes some courage to actually come along another person and share in their grief. That is very painful for the person entering that room as well. You feel awkward; you feel bad; but that is rule one: Show up.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, I remember one person saying to me: You don't remember what people said at the funeral home; you remember the people who came; and so much the ministry of presence has power; as we show up and actually are Christ to another person, first of all by our presence, then by listening, maybe by giving physical resources to someone...

DAVE BAST

Practical help.

BOB HEERSPINK

Very practical help.

DAVE BAST

I agree totally. This is not so hard to understand. It may be hard to do, but maybe we need to do a little bit more charitable giving that we don't get tax credit for...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Where we literally come to someone and, maybe even anonymously, help them financially when they are really in trouble. That is a very real way to fulfill this command of the Apostle.

BOB HEERSPINK

And by doing so, we build community. You know, I look at this passage from Galatians and I hear Paul say in this passage: Now, don't be weary of doing good.

DAVE BAST

Keep going and...

BOB HEERSPINK

Keep going...

DAVE BAST

And be the Church.

BOB HEERSPINK

Be the Church today.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is it; that is all we have time for today. There is a lot more to say, but meanwhile, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that will keep our topics relevant. So tell us what you think about what you have been hearing and suggest passages or topics you would like us to talk about on future *Groundwork* programs. Just visit us online at groundworkonline.com and join the discussion.

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