

Contradictions!!

- "Christians, they're always contradicting themselves!"
- "The Bible's full of contradictions!"
- "They say one thing and do another - hypocrites!"
- I suspect we've all heard these or similar accusations flung at the Church or individual Christians - maybe even at ourselves!
- **There's one obvious one here:**
 - (image: carry one another's burdens with verses)
 - v.2 "Carry **each other's** burdens"
 - v.5 "for each one should carry **his own** load"
- (We'll deal with it later!)
- More seriously, does Paul not seriously contradict himself about the way of salvation, the heart of the Christian gospel?
 - (image: three crosses)
- We talked about **freedom** two weeks ago, **new life given as a gift by God's grace** **but** last week we talked about **growing character**, about how **it matters how we live**
- And in this week's passage he says:
 - (v.15) that what we do, in particular circumcision, doesn't matter
 - but he also says (v.7) you reap what you sow (sounds like salvation by works!)
- The best way to explore this dilemma is by unpacking what it really is Paul is saying here - and the best way to do that is to start at the end!!!

It was for Freedom that Christ has set us Free...

- Galatians 6 is divided in two:
 - v. 1-10 contain some practical helps in living out the kind of Christian life the whole letter has pointed towards;
 - v.11-18 sum-up the essential thrust of the whole letter.
- So, if we turn our attention briefly to the later verses we'll actually give ourselves a reminder of the context of the whole letter - which should hopefully help us look at vs.1-10 more clearly!

The heart of Paul's boast

- (image: three crosses: the heart of Paul's boast)
- v.11 - in his own hand implies **emphasis** on this section; rest of letter by an amanuensis.
- What is it Paul emphasises?
- *v.14/15 "As for me, however, I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; for by means of his cross the world is dead to me, and I am dead to the world. It does not matter at all whether or not one is circumcised; what does matter is being a new creature."*
- Paul's boast is in the Cross - its where he understands salvation was won for him by Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Faced with the cross he had to confess to his sin; face up to the fact that his sin drove Jesus to die; face up to fact that nothing he could bring made any difference; face up to his own utter need.
- For it was **by the Cross** that **Judge Jesus** was able to **cross the courtroom** to the condemned prisoners and **set them free**, granting them their freedom.
- Law, circumcision, church membership, good works - none of these can win us anything.
- **What matters is the new creation worked upon us by Jesus Christ as we kneel in repentance and faith at the foot of the Cross.**
- Paul's boast is in the Cross - not just for salvation, but also for new life.
- Because he has admitted his need, his own emptiness, he has nothing more to

prove, nothing this world can hold against him or demand of him.

- No one can say - "you've got to conform, you've got to live like this" - he has his freedom, he is dead to the world!
- He has a **new life**, a new creation - **lived out by a new Spirit** - the Holy Spirit of God Almighty working in and through him.
- That's the heart of Paul's letter to the Galatians - a proclamation of freedom in the face of a slavery to circumcision, to actions to win salvation.
- **Is that also our boast?**
- In the the Cross? In the indignity of admitting our need?
- Pray God that it is!

Freedom worked out

- (*image: handstand man*)
- Well, all of that makes sense!
- The dilemma comes if we read the earlier part as a **contradiction to** and not a **consequence of** that freedom!
 - rather in the same way if we read the stuff from chapter 5 about the fruit of the Spirit, about character, as a contradiction to and not a consequence of Jesus' free self-giving of himself for our sins, to rescue us that we read in chapter 1
- **The big picture is: you have a new life, live as if you had a new life!!**
- And vs.1-10, like chapter 5 last week, spell out something of the "how?"
- **How do we keep in step with the Spirit? Practically? Day-to-day?**
- Paul gives two areas of help, two principles for daily living:

Principle of Humble Interdependence

- (*image: principle of humble interdependence*)
- First is principle of humble interdependence.
 - vs.1-5, summed up in v.2: "**Help to carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ.**"
- How can I live by the Spirit? How can I live out the new found freedom from the world's selfish ways? How can I display love, joy, peace...?
 - "**Carry one another's burdens**"
- Paul gives a "**for instance**" - an example:
 - v.1 - if you catch someone in sin - don't gossip, don't ignore (leave to fester), don't despise; rather, **RESTORE**.
- Not here told how, but Matthew 18:15-17 contains Jesus' own teaching:
 - "**If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens, you have won your brother back. But if he will not listen to you, take one or two other persons with you, so that every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or more witnesses, as Scripture says. And if he will not listen, then tell the whole thing to the church. Finally, if he will not listen to the church, treat him as though he were a pagan or a tax collector.**"
- In other words, "**Carry one another's burdens**"
- Adopt an attitude that both admits when it needs help and accepts it graciously, and one that is not too proud to offer to help:
 - in simple, unglamorous ways, perhaps;
 - serving tea & coffee after the service, offering to help with the Summer Focus Week despite your doubts about how you could help, or getting that neighbour's messages, or offering a lift to church to someone without a car, or the sympathetic ear, the ready hug or laughter in time of pain or joy, or whatever it may be!!!
- of course, **someone else can always do it...** but God says "**Carry one another's burdens**"!
- *By the way, that apparent contradiction between vs.2 & 5 - Paul is really talking*

about quite different things! v.2 is about mutual help and support, while v.5 is about responsibility - our responsibility before God for what we do, how we respond to his offer of new life, and more particularly here, how we work out the possibilities for new life day-by-day - so no REAL dilemma!

- That's the first practical principle - the principle of humble interdependence - that will help us "let the Spirit direct our lives", into the freedom of love, of joy...

Principle of Sowing and Reaping

- (image: principle of sowing and reaping)
- Second practical principle is that of sowing & reaping (vs.6-10).
- How do we keep in step with the Spirit? Practically? Day-by-day?
- By being careful how and where we sow!
- We all know the principle - sow badly, no crop;
 - don't study, no qualifications or poor grades;
 - poor communication and commitment, shallow relationship, empty marriage;
 - diligence at work, good results, possibly promotion;
 - invest money wisely and in time we'll see a return.
- Same in the spiritual world!
- You want to live by the Spirit, a life characterised by love, joy,...? Then be careful how & where you sow:

Sowing to the flesh

- harbour a grudge;
- nurse a grievance;
- entertain an impure fantasy;
- wallow in self-pity;
- linger in bad company when we know we find their influence too much;
- take a risk that strains self-control;
- Example: elder in another church, at his work became a "father figure" through his care & concern; supported one woman through her divorce; gave her a lift home one night; invited up for coffee... innocent enough? Didn't!
- Don't walk too near the cliff edge - more likely to fall off!

Sowing to the Spirit

- Rather, foster good habits. Make the effort to help or go out of your way in some situation. Carve out time for prayer & bible study - even when don't feel like it!
- Growth won't come overnight! Each tiny step often won't be visible - compare learning to walk, talk, read, write... don't remember individual lessons!
- Sow well and you will reap a life characterised by the fruit of God's Spirit - by God's love, by God's joy, by God's peace, ...

Conclusion

- (image: harvest)
- Paul has painted this picture of the freedom that Christ has brought us into.
- Freedom from the Law's demands, freedom from the condemnation our sins deserve, freedom to live a new life, freedom to live by the Spirit.
- He says to the Galatians - live that life - don't just think about it, learn about it, live it!
- So to us - live that life...
 - ...carry one another's burdens, care and support one another...
 - ...and sow carefully, sow diligently, that you might see a bumper crop of the Spirit's fruit in your life.
- May God grant us his grace through Jesus Christ to live thus, for his glory.
-offering