

maintain the churches which had been set up through his preaching. He had written to the Galatians, of course, seeking to set them right about the Gospel and the things of God.

Evangelism and mission have always been Gospel priorities, but this passage reminds us that Paul emphasised the importance of right teaching and the practice of 'doing good'. In our reading, this is the final message Paul leaves the bruised Galatian church; no man or woman of God should slacken their efforts to do good (6:10), and so demonstrate in their own lives what Jesus had commanded His followers; i.e. 'love one another' (John 13:34).

### Application

It is certainly worth asking whether if God's people today loved one another more obviously and treated each other better (as Paul suggested - 6:10), our evangelism would be more effective? The answer would undoubtedly be positive. Certainly most of the people I know who have opted out of the church have done so because they fail to see people demonstrate the qualities of Christ and His Kingdom within the church. They feel that it is hypocritical to claim to be 'saved' and not show a high degree of commitment to love other people both within the church and beyond it (though typically, people within a church fellowship think they show more love than is observed by people outside the church). It is unfortunate that people reduce their own response to the love of God to such an objection, of course, but the criticism is still valid. Whatever Paul might make of our own churches today and whatever criticisms he might make of our theology or church practice in worship or teaching or evangelism, for example, I reckon he would probably end up urging us just as he urged the Galatians; 'as you have opportunity, do good to all people, especially those in the church.'

Held side by side in this passage are two important themes of the Gospel. Firstly, the evangelist's call to make a choice; sow 'according to the Spirit' and 'reap eternal life', or 'sow according to the sinful nature' and 'reap corruption' (6:8). This call goes back to the call of God even in Old Testament times, and is the voice of God calling His people to respond to His love. If we hear this call, then we must respond; there can be no half measures. Secondly, the call of the New Testament brought to us by Jesus' commandment to his disciples to love one another (John 13:34), echoed by Paul's call on the broken churches of Galatia to 'do good to all'. We have no option about this call either, and if we do not know what we should be doing in order to 'do good' for the people around us, then something is deeply wrong. Finally, when will God's people realise that 'love' is at the heart of both evangelism and those 'good works' which are the evidence of our faith, without distinction? There is every urgent reason for all God's people to be united in their Lord.

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. How can we go about sowing according to the Spirit within our churches today?
2. How can we go about 'doing good' to and for all people we meet today?
3. Discuss in your group whether the divisions and dissensions which are evident within the church today help or hinder the Gospel.

### Discipleship

'Doing good' takes a certain amount of effort. Firstly we must open our eyes to the possibilities which exist all around us of doing good, even if when we do not always see them. Secondly, we have to move ourselves to care enough to change what we normally do and put effort into helping others. It can take a great deal of work to shift us from our normal routines in order to begin to do something which we have not done before; and this is the reason why many Christians do not feel there is much they can do. But the challenge will never go away from any of us.

### Final Prayer

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, we ask that may we never be oppressed by the troubles we endure, but offer You the fruit of our life of faith. We offer You the words we say, the deeds we do, the love we share, the hopes we have and the joys that brighten our lives. Lift our hearts we pray, this and every day; AMEN

### Prayer

You have made wonderful things, O Lord; the infinite variety of words and music, the subtlety of colour and the complex changing of the seasons. We praise You for these things, and ask that we may never take for granted the wisdom and power by which You continue to sustain the world as well as save it; through Jesus Christ we pray; AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: Christian Hope

Pray for the renewing power of God's Spirit to bring hope to Christians everywhere, in places where there may appear to be little evidence of hope. Pray for people who are persecuted or exploited, either as Christians or because of race, gender, age or looks; pray that the Good News of Jesus Christ may indeed be liberation and hope for all those who are oppressed.

### Meditation

You know the Lord is at work;

- When prayers are answered before they have been finished;
- When none of God's people needs to ask to find help;
- When reading the church notices makes you glad in your spirit!
- When children are always welcomed by all of God's people;
- When a place of worship is clearly valued by those who use it;
- When God's people have a good name in the local community;
- When new people come to church, and they don't want to leave;
- When both pastor and people know when to repent before God;
- When all God's people find fulfilment in the church and each other.

Then, you know the Lord is at work!

### Bible Study - Galatians 6:7-10

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for you will reap only what you sow. <sup>8</sup> The one who sows according to his sinful nature will reap corruption from that sinful nature; but the who sows according to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. <sup>9</sup> So let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap our harvest, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

### Review

Just as we discovered with yesterday's passage, this reading appears to be a collection of entirely general pieces of advice used by Paul to conclude his letter. Each sentence is a memorable phrase which is steeped in the language Paul uses to express the Christian faith, for example, contrasting the 'sinful nature' with 'the Spirit' (6:8), and urging the people of the Galatian churches to 'do good' (6:9,10). However, although each verse could well stand alone, it does not take too much to see that the advice given by Paul here in this passage is integral with the rest of Galatians. The passage is highly focussed, and it speaks directly to the confused state of the Galatian churches.

If you consider this reading as a whole, then you will see that two main themes stand out. The first of these is reaping (or harvesting). You might feel that the theme is really 'sowing and reaping', but the emphasis here is on the results of someone's actions. Paul felt he had made a clear case against those who taught that Christians should obey the laws of Moses in the Galatian churches (Judaisers), because their teaching had created division and unhappiness within the church. That in itself was evidence that their teaching had not come from the Spirit of

God, and he went on to describe the 'reaped' consequences of this teaching as 'corruption' in verse 8. This is a Greek word meaning 'decay, ruin, moral depravity, that which is perishable'; put simply, the word stands for all the consequences of fallen humanity within the created order. Paul described the results of Judaistic teaching in this way because its 'fruits' were there for all to see, and they were not the 'fruit of the Spirit'. Controversy about the Judaistic teaching of circumcision, for example, had consumed time and energy in the church and hampered the proclamation of the Gospel as well as the growth of the Church. Paul therefore called the churches to 'sow according to the Spirit' and continue the work of the Gospel to bring people into the Kingdom and 'reap eternal life'.

The second main theme is that of 'doing good'. Paul says; 'do not grow weary in doing good' (6:9), and he later emphasises this by imploring the Galatians; 'let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith' (6:10). The picture Paul had in mind was that he had been to Galatia and 'sowed the seed' of the Gospel by teaching and preaching, and the expected fruit from this sowing of seed was the salvation of souls in the present age and the hope of eternal life in the next. However, because of the 'sowing' of false teaching by Judaisers, people who had been saved were heading back towards the 'corruption' of this world (6:8) rather than eternal life, and Paul's urgent call, now he had set the record straight about the Gospel, was that people should do 'good' to each other, and thus demonstrate fruit of the Spirit.

I hope you will agree with me that the best thing people can do after there has been a major problem or division in the church, is to 'be good' to each other. People do not need to be told how to do this, for each of us knows our motives towards others, and whether they are pure and good. Paul's talk of 'doing good' is shorthand for the high qualities of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' as just explained (5:22,23). Loving one another (the command of Christ), demonstrating the 'Fruit of the Spirit' (as explained by Paul) and 'doing good ... to those who are of the household of faith' are all different ways of talking about the same thing. All of these phrases express the godly attitude that springs from the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer. This is what enables the church of God to be at peace and grow.

### Going Deeper

Despite these two clear themes in this teaching, there are a number of other important things to be examined in this text, not the least of them being the first sentences; 'Do not be deceived, God is not mocked.' (6:7). However, towards the end of all of Paul's letters, there is a general drift towards teaching that will build up the church and release its full potential for the proclamation of the Gospel. This is Paul's great hope and desire.

#### **'God is not mocked'**

The remarkable phrase 'do not be deceived, God is not mocked' (6:7) is easy to accept as a general truth, but what does it mean, and what does it mean here? The Greek word 'planasthe' means 'to lead astray', and understanding this helps us with this passage. It is a relatively common word, and it is often used in the New Testament to describe the consequence of false teaching and false prophets (Mark 13:6, Matt 24:4). It occurs notably in the teaching of Jesus who says 'many will come in my name ... and will deceive' (Matt 24:5). Indeed, in 1 Thessalonians, Paul appeals to the church there that he is not 'deceitful' in his teaching (1 Thess 2:3); in other words, he seeks to reassure the people there that he is no false prophet.

The words 'do not be deceived' are so strong, and are used in the New Testament in such a particular way to refer to the consequences of false teaching or prophecy, it is probable that this was in Paul's mind here. It was his shock at hearing about false teaching in the church that caused Paul to write to the Galatians in the first place, and he probably felt that the churches had been 'deceived', just as Jesus had predicted before he died (see above). If you retrace your steps in Galatians and look back to verse 3, you will notice that this same word 'deceive' appears in the strange phrase (see yesterday's notes) 'One who thinks he is something when he is nothing deceives himself!' (6:3). It certainly appears that what was in Paul's mind as he wrote was this thought; the Galatian people had been deceived.

In this light, verse 7 is easy to explain. The church had been the victim of deception; Jesus had foretold it and it was part of the work of evil against the Kingdom that had to be fought. But as Paul now said, 'God is not mocked', or as we might say today 'no-one can make a fool out of

God and get away with it' (the Greek verb 'mocked' also means 'make a fool out of'). Obviously, said Paul, God was sovereign and would not be upstaged by men or women, and false teachers or prophets would not ultimately dismantle His plans and intentions for His people, the church. There may well be trouble in the world, but the purposes of God would always be greater than a group of Judaistic teachers in Galatia!

#### **'You reap what you sow'**

The words 'you will reap what you sow' follow on immediately from what we have just discussed, and the idea is not too hard to grasp, given what we have just explained. Paul sowed the seed of the Gospel in order to found the church, and the expected harvest from this work was the growth of the church, and then at the end times, the reward of eternal life for those who were saved. The Judaisers, however, had sown dissent and strife by teaching a doctrine contrary to the Gospel upon which the church was founded, so how could they expect anything other than the worldly consequence of decay and death? In the world of the New Testament, the word for 'corruption' (see above) was integrally linked with the idea of mortality, decay and death, which were seen as part of the 'nature' of the world. So although it sounds somewhat dramatic to us to include the notion of death in the concept of 'corruption', it would have been natural to Paul.

One difficulty we have with the idea that 'you reap what you sow' is that we use the expression today in a very generalised way, for example, to mean that someone who is angry by nature will live a life which is filled with anger, or someone who is loving by nature will live a life which yields happiness. What Paul is saying is far more radical than that; he draws a stark picture of complete contrasts, between 'sinful nature' and 'Spirit', and between 'corruption' and 'eternal life'. Ultimately, this division is between 'death' and 'life', for this is what we should expect from someone who was steeped in the Old Testament which places this choice before people throughout. Such dramatic contrasts can be found in the wisdom of the book of Proverbs, for example, or the challenge of the prophets (Jer 8:3, 21:8), or the summary of the Law in Deuteronomy; follow God and choose 'life', or go one's own way and choose 'death' (Deut 30).

However, if you read on, you will realise that Paul had mixed up his metaphors! His strong request to the Galatians to 'not grow weary in doing good' so that 'we will reap a harvest' (6:9) does not comment on the nature of what is sown (as in the previous verse), but on the process of growth (rather like Jesus' parable of the sower – Matt 13). Here, the reaping takes place as a consequence of good deeds which are essential to the growth of the kingdom. This is quite different from the kind of 'reaping' Paul was talking about a few moments ago! But this progression of thought is only natural, because as far as Paul was concerned, the 'seed' of the Gospel had already been sown in Galatia and after the disruption of false teaching, all he was interested in was promoting the health of the church and the growth of the Gospel.

#### **'Do good to all people'**

As a Gospel prerogative, the notion of 'doing good' is frowned upon by many people, particularly those who feel that the exclusive priority of the Church must be mission and evangelism. Paul would not contest such an opinion, but we should note that he had a broader understanding of the nature of the church and its mission. When Paul began preaching, expectation was rife that the world would soon come to its end, and the second coming of Christ was imminent. At the same time, however, Paul and others began to realise that the age in which they lived, as we do today, was one in which the new order of 'the Kingdom of God' had come through Jesus Christ, but the old world order of 'sin and death' had not yet passed away. Because Christ had not yet come and time went by, people generally began to look at the church and consider whether they thought it was a 'good thing' or not. It therefore became more important that as well as evangelism and mission, the people of God had to show the qualities of the Kingdom of God to the rest of the world through its regular life and witness, as well as what it did.

Paul was therefore concerned to maintain his churches, and although we think of Paul as a great evangelist, we should remember that his missionary journeys were only a part of his life's work, and he spent a larger part of his time teaching and writing letters to establish and