

“So Then, As We Have Opportunity ...”

Galatians 6:10 reads, *“So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward those of the household of faith.”* There are two things which need to be considered about this verse: 1) what the verse does not teach and 2) what it does teach! First, let us address the issue of what the verse does not teach. The verse does not teach general benevolence to all men from the church treasury. There are those who wish to “tap” the church treasury to aid any indigent person, giving this verse as “proof text.” This verse does not sustain their position for the whole of the chapter gives instructions to individuals and their personal actions; not to congregational action. Repeatedly the emphasis is on what individuals are to do. *“If any man be overtaken in a trespass”* (6:1). *“Bear ye one another’s burdens”* (6:2). *“If a man thinketh himself to be something”* (6:3). *“Let each man prove his own work ...”* (6:4). *“Each man shall bear his own burden”* (6:5). *“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”* (6:7). The responsibility of the church, from its treasury, is to saints. *“Now concerning the collection for the saints”* (1 Cor. 16:1f). *“Now ... I go to Jerusalem, ministering to the saints”* (Rom. 15:25). *“For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you”* (2 Cor. 9:1). As one reads the scriptures regarding benevolence which the church extends, always, no exception, the benevolence was for saints. To open the treasure to the non-saint is to go beyond things written, something we are forbidden to do (1 Cor. 4:6).

But we dare not focus solely on what the passage does not teach; we must focus on what the passage does teach. It is God’s instructions that the Christian who is the salt of the earth and the light of the world must not harden his heart about the unfortunate state of his fellow man, whoever that needy person is, Christian or non-Christian. When Jesus was asked, *“What is the great commandment?”* He asked His questioner what He thought which one responded: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, an a second one like unto it, and thy neighbor as thyself”* (Lk. 10:27). Jesus agreed with him, saying, *“Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live”* (Lk. 10:28). *“But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?”* (Lk. 10:29). It was at this juncture that Jesus gave His parable of the Good Samaritan concluding His parable once more, He asked for a response from His questioner: *“Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers?”* and the grudging admission of that man was: *“He that showed mercy on him.”* Jesus then said, *“Go, and do thou likewise”* (Lk. 10:36f). Jesus’ point in this

parable was that my neighbor is he who needs my help and sometimes he may be my enemy!

In Jesus' sermon on the mount He said, "*Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy*" (Mt. 5:43). There is no passage that is phrased exactly as this but in the sense in which it was given, it expressed the true spirit of the Law. Israel was commanded to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan. She was to make no covenants with them (Exo. 23:31f). She was not to enter into marriage with any of them (Deut. 7:3). She was to exercise this extreme behavior because of the danger of becoming addicted to their gods with the attendant immorality that come with that idolatry. Still, Israel also was charged that she was to in no way, mistreat the strangers that dwelt with her. She was to remember she, too, had been a stranger in a foreign land (Exo. 22:21; 23:9).

"*We love, because he first loved us*" (1 Jn. 4:19). The death of Jesus for us manifested His love for us and is a fitting example of how we should act. He left us an example that we should follow His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). Just as wives, whose husbands are not Christians are urged to so live before their husband that even without the word, they may be gained "*by the behavior of their wives; beholding your chaste behavior, coupled with fear*" (1 Pet. 3:1f); so Christians, in similar manner, are to live before the world, that without the word they may be gained to Christ, seeing the good lives of Christians who are in the world. This is not to say that one does not need to word in order to be saved. To the contrary. No man can become a Christian apart from the word for the word is the seed which has life in it and the means through which he comes to believe (Lk. 8:11; Rom. 10:17). Still, the word can be preached not only in sermons, but also in the lives of those who have obeyed that word. We must live soberly, righteously and godly before our fellow man. We must always remember that compassion is not just something theoretical; it must be practiced and, as Paul so clearly teaches, the Christian's compassion must be bestowed on those who need it, whether that one is a Christian or not; whether that one is a foe or not. "*As we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, especially those of the household of faith*" (Gal. 6:10)!

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