I would suggest to you that one of the reasons, maybe the primary reason, many Christians and churches are willing to settle for an ordinary grace is because they’re fearful that if we talk about amazing grace, Christians will use that as an excuse to do as they please. Now I can appreciate that concern. There will always be so-called Christians who will use anything as an excuse to live as they please. But I would suggest to you, for every one of those, there are hundreds who want to do it right. They want to walk in obedience; they want their lives to count; they want to walk pleasing to God; they want to experience this life that God offers. And sadly, as happens in so many things in our culture, we often, for the sake of the one percent, compromise what the ninety-nine percent need to experience the life their soul longs for. I want you to know that I believe the overwhelming majority of the people gathered here this morning want to live the Christian life in a way that is pleasing to God. You want your life to count; you want your life to matter; you want to do this right. You don’t want to struggle; you don’t want to fail; you don’t want to sin. That’s why when we sin and we blow it, it bothers us. That’s why there are shame and guilt because we don’t want to live that way. And you long to live in obedience to God. My job is to help you get there, and there’s no way you can get there without a full, beautiful, rigorous theology of amazing grace.

So let’s imagine that even though you want to walk in obedience, even though you want to do this right, that you blow it; you fail, and in that moment of disappointment, in that moment of hurt, in that moment of shame and guilt—disappointed that you’ve blown it again—would it matter to you whether or not the people around you are people of grace? That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Galatians, Chapter 6. Actually, we want to back it up and pick up the train of thought in Chapter 5 verse 25. I talked two weeks ago about that being kind of a transition or a hinge into Chapter 6. Wrapping up what he talked about in Chapter 5, he says in verse 25:

**If we live by the Spirit (and we know that we do; it’s the Spirit that’s made us alive), let us also walk by the Spirit (so let’s live that way).** (*NASB, Galatians 5:25*)

This is Galatians 3:3: if you started this journey on the basis of the Spirit, what would make you think you can complete it in the flesh? We started in the Spirit—it’s the Spirit that made us alive. Therefore, walk in the Spirit. This is where you are going to find that life.

Contrary to that is verse 26—the alternative life in the flesh. We often talk about a performance-based value system. It’s not that performance is bad. It’s only bad when it becomes your means of significance, your means of value. This is where you find meaning; this is where you find purpose; this is how you define life. Then we just add religion to that value system, and this is how we accomplish righteousness; this is how we merit favor with God. It’s by our own personal performance, and that then turns life into a competition. It’s a comparison. How am I doing compared to you? When I compare favorably, it makes me arrogant. When I compare unfavorably, it leaves me with a low esteem or despair. We’ve often talked about this. This value system has no winners. It will never have winners. It just can’t. Well, that’s exactly what verse 26 says—this is the alternative to the system of grace.
Let us not become boastful (the Greek word means literally superior. Let us not think that somehow we are spiritually superior), challenging one another (literally competing with one another, the alternative...), envying one another. (Vs. 26)

So this is exactly what we’ve talked about, on the basis of our competition with one another, either we end up feeling like we’re superior, or we end up envying in despair that we aren’t better than we are. But at the end of the day, there’s no winner. That’s always the outflow of this flesh-based system.

So with that in mind, he moves into Chapter 6 to say this is the practical outflow of a theology of grace. Now we can talk all day long about a theology of grace, and as long as you are on an island all alone, you can convince yourself that you are a person of grace. But where our theology gets exposed is in relationships. There’s nowhere in our lives where our theology is more exposed than in our relationships. And you can look at your relationships in your marriage, in your family, with your parents, at work, with your friends... and you get very quickly a sense of whether you are a person of grace or not. It’s exactly where he goes in the text.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness... (Galatians 6:1a)

The word caught means to be surprised. It’s not willful sin. It’s something that happened; you blew it. The word trespass means a stumble; you fell. So it’s not describing someone who’s just playing games with God. It’s talking about someone who really does want to walk in obedience but blew it. In that moment, you who are spiritual, restore such a one. Now what does he mean you who are spiritual? I would suggest that initially the legalist reads that text, and immediately volunteers for the job because that’s how the legalist views himself, “That’s me!” But that’s not at all what Paul’s talking about. As a matter of fact, I would suggest you, in your moment of need, in your moment of shame and guilt and pain and disappointment, the legalist is the last person you need to show up. The legalist is about confrontation and punishment. It’s about convincing you that you need timeout in the dark room. And they volunteer to lock you in the dark room and, “You stay there, and you think about this.” They’re convinced you need to stay there until the pain of the punishment is greater than the pleasure of the sin, and this external conformity will get you to walk in obedience. The legalist actually paints a picture of God that doesn’t make God more compelling; it makes God more fearful. I’m not drawn to God; I’m repelled by God. I don’t want to be among the community of faith; I want to hide from the community of faith. I don’t want to go to church; I want to avoid church. As someone once said, “Why would I go to church when they just make me feel worse?” And it creates a theology that causes us to pull away and hide in the darkness rather than run to the light and find what we need to bring our soul back to the life it longs for.

When he says, you who are spiritual, he’s defining this as he defined it in Chapter 5—those who are walking by the Spirit, those on the basis of God’s grace, who are submitted and yielded to the Spirit, that understand it’s by the grace of God that we are what we are. Therefore, there’s no such thing as superior and inferior. We are fellow strugglers together, sinners saved by the grace of God. And we are willing to roll up our sleeves to get in the mess and to help—not with an attitude of superiority, but rather realizing, as fellow strugglers, we are in this together.

I would suggest to you that the legalist actually finds some delight in the failure of others. Now they would never say that, but when other Christians fail, it reminds the legalist that they are superior. It shines the light on their self-righteousness whereas the people of grace don’t see it that
way at all. I’m not superior and you are not inferior; we are just in this together. And I want to be there with you as we walk our way through this.

**You who are spiritual, restore such a one.** The word restore is a medical term that means to *set a broken bone*. I love the imagery because it really carries the idea of someone in pain. And the last thing they need is for someone to grab their broken leg and shake it. Imagine you are lying in the street; your leg is broken. What you don’t need is someone to give you a lecture as to why you shouldn’t have been playing in the street. In that moment, what you need is kindness; you need compassion; you need understanding; you need someone to gently take that leg and help bring relief to the pain. That’s the whole idea of the imagery there.

**Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.** I would suggest the spirit could be capital “S”. It’s someone who is walking in the Spirit, therefore demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit. It is the Spirit of God in us that gives us what we need, to be what we need to be in these moments. The idea of gentleness, it’s a very interesting Greek word, basically means *strength that’s been brought under control*. It’s used in the first century to describe a horse that has been broken to be ridden. The horse still has great power but the power’s now under control. I would define it as someone who is so strong that that strength has been brought under control.

The legalist is not about gentleness. The legalist is about confrontation and punishment. As a matter of fact, the legalist steps on the scene, confronts the sin, issues the punishment and walks away. It takes no real time or effort. I would suggest that gentleness takes time and patience. It costs you something to be people of grace who are going to be there for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. It does mean you have to roll up your sleeves; you have to get in the mess; it’s going to take time; it’s going to take patience; we walk the walk together. Sadly, far too many parents use the model of confrontation, punishment, and then move on with my day, when good parenting is more of an issue of time and patience and relationship.

He goes on to give us a warning:

...*each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.* (Vs. 1b)

Now what does he mean by that? If your understanding from Chapter 5 is the desire of the flesh is to engage in all kinds of sin, then probably the position you would take here is the concern that, in helping someone else, you were drawn into that sin. Now that’s a valid concern, but it’s not the concern here. The concern is that, in the process of helping someone who has blown it, there is the tendency of our flesh to think of ourselves as superior, to drift back into this competitive performance-based system, where I’m superior, you are inferior; you blew it, I didn’t; that’s why I’m here to help you—because I’m Super-Christian. That’s always the risk when we engage in helping people that have blown it. We start to think: I’m here because I didn’t blow it, because I’m superior, you are inferior, and let me help you with that, which is always the posture of the legalist. And it’s always the temptation that we face. I would suggest that those of us that have been Christians for many years drift into a posture of superiority. We would never say it that way, and we would never admit it, but the attitude that we display towards those who are struggling, we have an attitude that, “I’ve arrived, you haven’t; you blew it, I didn’t; you’re messed up, I’m not; I’m superior, you’re not.” And this is not helpful at all. There has to be awareness that all of us together are sinners saved by grace and we need each other in our times when we fail. Verse 2:
In the words **bear one another’s burdens**, the word **burden** is basically a Greek word that means *a load that’s simply too heavy for one person to carry*. While the legalist adds to the load, our assignment as people of grace is to help carry the load. And in doing that, we fulfill the law of Christ, which we learned in Chapter 5 is the law of love. While the legalist would say he or she values the law, at the end of the day, because of that legalism, they will never fulfill the law. Where the people of grace, because of the life and power of the Spirit—life surrendered to the Spirit—gives us what we need to actually fulfill the law, in this case defined as helping others carry their burden. Verse 3 affirms that the temptation is to consider yourself superior, when he says:

**For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing** *(in other words, this is the concern; this is the temptation), he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one will bear his own load.* (Vs. 3-5)

Clearly, the concern, the temptation is to think you are something, when the reality is you are nothing apart from the grace of God. So the reminder is to examine yourself, remind yourself of your own story. Your story is not a story of self-righteousness. It’s a story of the grace of God. And when I remind myself of my own story, I remember I’m not superior. There’s no such thing as superior and inferior in an economy of grace. Therefore, I carry my own burden. Now this Greek word for burden is a different word. This is basically a military backpack. So it’s the idea that the load I do carry, which is a manageable load—it’s a soldier’s backpack—is the responsibility to remember it’s the grace of God that has made me right. It’s the grace of God by which I stand justified, by which I stand righteous in the presence of God. If I’m going to help others in their hour of need, I have to carry my backpack. I can’t ever forget I’m a sinner saved by grace—nothing more; nothing less. No one can do that for me. I can’t do that for you. You can’t do that for me. That’s my own backpack to wear.

But what’s interesting is: because the legalist piles so much burden on, the legalist is staggered under the weight of legalism and cannot help anyone carry the load. But the person of grace, who wears the soldier’s backpack, because that load is light, is then in a position to help others carry their burden. That’s in essence what he’s saying. Verse 6:

**The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.**

Now there’s no question in this part of the text there are financial, money overtones. The idea is that if this is meaningful, if this has brought you life, you should be willing to support the ministry in order that others might know that which has set you free. I think we get that.

But there’s a larger picture here that I want us to spend a little more time on. It’s the idea that we are in partnership with one another—the one who teaches with those who are taught. If you are in an environment of law, an environment of legalism, the posture of the preacher is that I am superior, you are inferior; I have arrived, you have not—and it’s my job to pound the sin out of you. It’s my job to punish you, to make sure that the punishment is greater than the pleasure of sin because somehow that externally will cause you to walk in obedience.

The very first week I mentioned that ten years ago, when we opened Galatians, someone who no longer attends said to me, “Pastor, you have to understand, I love my legalism.” And I suggested legalism, rightly understood, that statement would make no sense. But in that same conversation, the same person said, “Pastor, I need a preacher that beats me up every week in order to keep me in
line.” It is this idea that what is necessary is to get beaten up by the preacher in order to keep you from sin. Then I would suggest that’s a common mindset of the people of law. But when we understand it correctly, we understand that in an economy of grace, there is no superior and inferior, that we are in this together, that we share together the journey. My job is to help you understand what is true in order that we might experience the life that God calls us to. But there’s no superior and inferior, there’s just a sense that we are in this together and together we are going to get there. On our best days and on our worst days we are going to come together and we are going to get to the finish line together. That’s the essence of what I think he’s saying in verse 6. Verse 7:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

This is a very familiar metaphor in the Scriptures. It’s the idea of sowing and reaping. Now certainly of all people, people who live in the great state of Nebraska should get this one, because our lives are surrounded by sowing and reaping. If a farmer’s going to reap a harvest of corn, you have to plant a corn seed. If you are going to reap a harvest of beans, you plant the bean seed. If you want a flower garden, you don’t plant corn seeds. This is not rocket science. If you want flowers, plant flower seeds. But it’s interesting that he says, do not be deceived. In other words, there’s a high risk we don’t get this. God is not mocked. In other words, you can’t beat the system. This started all the way back in the Garden of Eden when God said to Adam and Eve, “If you sin, you will die.” The serpent came along and said, “You will not die.” In other words, “You can beat the system—there’s no correlation between sowing and reaping.”

I would suggest you there is a huge struggle in our culture to believe there’s a relationship between sowing and reaping. Over the years, I’ve been shocked over and over again with people that will sit in my office and I know that they have maintained a lifestyle of disobedience to God. They have disobeyed God in so many areas of life and now their life is in shambles and they will actually say, “Pastor, why would God do this to me?” Now try to get them to understand, “God didn’t do this to you; you did this to you. You thought you could beat the system; you thought you could sow to the flesh and reap a harvest of righteousness. It doesn’t work that way. You can’t beat the system. What you sow will determine what you reap.”

For me personally, one of the things that most satisfies me at this season of life—at 55 years of age—is that every day I get to go home to the person that I’m most excited about on planet earth. I don’t take that for granted. That is very special. Over the years I’ve had so many people say, “Well you know, you are just lucky.” I used to just let that go; I don’t let it go anymore. It’s not lucky; it’s sowing and reaping. What Patti and I experience together goes back to decisions we made when we were fourteen, when we were eighteen, when we were twenty, when we were thirty, forty, fifty… it goes back to decisions I made yesterday and decisions I will make today.

Choosing to believe God tells the truth and lining your life with that is about the principles of sowing and reaping. But what is he specifically talking about in this text? Verse 8:

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Again, if in Chapter 5 we suddenly redefine the word flesh to mean all kinds of license in sin, then that’s probably where we are going to go at this point in the text—to sow to the flesh is license to do all kinds of sinful things and to suffer the consequences of that. So the legalist reads this text and says, “That’s right. Those are those loser-Christians, the inferior, and I’m not like that.” But I
would suggest to you again, there’s no reason to change the definition of **flesh**. The best way to understand this is to sit down and read the book from cover to cover, takes about fifteen minutes. And you’ll get the clear flow that again and again and again, the word **flesh** in Galatians is referencing **legalism**. The flesh’s desire is to be my own God and to make myself righteous.

This I believe is beginning to summarize the book of Galatians. And what he’s saying is: If you choose to hold onto your legalism, then you are sowing to the flesh. And if that’s the choice you are going to make, you are going to experience the consequences of that, which is corruption. It won’t work. It will ultimately break down your Christian walk. The alternative is to sow to the Spirit. And if we sow to the Spirit, what do we reap? We reap eternal life. Again, this is not referencing merely a ticket to heaven. This is referencing life, the life that my soul longs for.

The very first week of the Galatians study we reminded ourselves that, for all eternity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit has dwelt in relationship with Himself. It’s the essence of the doctrine of the Trinity—the Father loving the Son, the Son the Spirit, the Spirit the Father—that they love and celebrate and glorify One Another for all eternity. That is the very definition of life, what theologians refer to as *The Dance of God*. It’s a beautiful thing. The very essence of salvation is on the basis of the finished work of Jesus on the cross and, on the basis of God’s grace, He has made a way to invite you into the dance, to experience the life that has defined God for eternity, to experience the life that your soul longs for.

On that first week in Galatians, I suggested that there were many of you, if you are to be honest, you would have to say, “It’s been a long time since I danced with God to the music of *Amazing Grace*, that something has happened over the years, and I’m just cranking it out day after day after day.” And I told you my goal through the book of Galatians was to try to strip away the legalism that has drowned out the music, and again to hear the music of *Amazing Grace*, that we might dance again. What he is saying here is: if you continue to sow to the flesh, which is legalism, there’s no way your feet will be set to dancing again. But if you choose rather to sow to the Spirit, to sow to God’s grace, to submit and yield to the One who gives you what you need, then once again, you’ll find your feet dancing to the music of *Amazing Grace*. It says in verse 9:

> Let us not lost heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

Two commands are in that verse. **Do not lose heart. Do not grow weary.** We have talked about this all the way through Galatians: If you want to be a person of grace, you have to fight for it. The default setting every single one of us has is toward the flesh. The flesh’s desire is to be God and to run my own show and to make myself righteous. Every day is a fight to say, “I want to submit and surrender to the Spirit and the Spirit’s role in my life. I want to experience this amazing grace and on my best days and on my worst days I want to run to the light room, and I want to experience the life that God has called me to.” There’s no way you are going to get there unless you are willing to fight for it. Verse 10:

> So then (if all this is true), while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

When he’s talking about **let us do good**, he’s talking about **living out the life of grace**. If we are going to be people of grace, let’s roll up our sleeves; let’s take it to the streets; let’s make a difference in this world. I was having lunch with someone this week and one of the comments was, “Can you imagine what this world would be like if the Christians really got this grace thing? It
would change the world.” We can’t affect everybody else, but we can start with ourselves—that I choose today to be a person of grace, to roll up my sleeves, to get into the mess, to touch the untouchables, to love the unlovables, to take it to the street and to make a difference in the lives of people who are in darkness, who are struggling, who are in pain, who need to know there’s a God who loves them and there is amazing grace that offers them an invitation to join the dance.

I love that he says, **while we have opportunity**, literally, *while we have today*. It goes right back to the idea that every day matters. In essence, what he’s saying is: today is a day for grace. The past is past. You can’t go back. Let it go. You don’t know that you have tomorrow. Maybe you do; maybe you don’t. But what you do have is today. And today is your opportunity to roll up your sleeves and be a person of grace and to take this life-changing message to the streets and make a difference in someone’s life today.

*Our Father, we are thankful that You have opened up the life that our soul longs for through Your amazing grace. Lord, help us to never settle for something just ordinary. Lord, help us to understand that life is found in Your Spirit and is made possible by Your amazing grace. Lord, help us to be people of grace, to roll up our sleeves and take this message to the streets, to people in pain, people in despair, people in darkness. And, God, help us to especially be people of grace in our relationships with one another as believers. Lord, we pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*
Study Questions
We Reap What We Sow
Free Indeed: A Study in the Epistle of Galatians
Galatians 6:1-10

Opening Discussion
1. Brainstorm all the ways in life that we reap what we sow. Consider examples from gardening, parenting, relationships, work, athletics, school, hobbies, etc.

2. Share a time when you “blew it” as a Christian and someone gently restored you. Share a time when you “blew it” and a legalist only made you feel worse? In the end which has more power to restore a person, grace or legalism? Why?

3. What is legalism? How do we assess legalism in our own lives? Is how we treat others, especially those caught in sin, relevant to assessing what we really believe?

Bible Study
1. From our study of Galatians thus far, how would you define walking according to the flesh and walking by the Spirit?

2. The behaviors of 5:26 show up most acutely when a fellow believer is “caught in any trespass.” That’s why only those who are “spiritual” should seek to restore a fellow believer. Why is this?

   How does the legalist respond to a believer who has been “caught in any trespass?” Why does the legalist respond this way according to 5:26?

   The flesh also manifests itself in license. How would someone practicing license respond to someone “caught in any trespass?”

3. Galatians 6:1 records the proper response to one who is “caught in any trespass.” What should we do? Who should do it? How should it be done?

4. According to 6:2, to fulfill the law of Christ (5:14) we bear one another’s burdens. Thinking of the Church as the Body of Christ, how does this verse line up with Matthew 11:28-30?

   How does Jesus give you rest as it relates to Galatians 6:2?
What does this say about the importance of community?

What does it mean to “bear one another’s burdens” in a practical way?

5. In Galatians 6:5, the term for “load” refers to a pack a soldier would wear. The term “burden” in 6:2 refers to a load one person couldn’t carry alone. Only grace reduces our load to a backpack making it possible to help someone else carry his/her load. What is necessary to reduce our load to a backpack? Is this something we do or something we believe?

6. Galatians 6:6-10 refers to living out our value system. What we determine to be of value in how we live day by day will determine what we sow, which will determine what we will eventually reap.

What does it mean to sow to the flesh?

What does it mean to sow to the Spirit?

7. According to 6:10 how should we as believers live today? Why?

Application

1. We cannot accomplish 6:1-5 unless we’ve processed 6:6-10. In other words, if we sow to the flesh we will never fulfill 6:1-5.

What practical things must/can you do to sow to the Spirit? What will be necessary to actually live out Galatians 6:1-10?

2. Is there anyone in your life who is “caught in any trespass” who needs to be restored?

Are you qualified, according to Paul, to do the job? What is your next step?

3. Spend some time praying asking God to help you understand what it means to sow to the Spirit daily.