

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works

Part twenty-two - Teaching #2173

Sunday, March 20th, 2022 - 10 a.m.

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The Difference Between Good Religion And Bad

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:1-5 - “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted. [2] Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. [3] For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. [4] Let each person examine his own work, and then he can take pride in himself alone, and not compare himself with someone else. [5] For each person will have to carry his own load.”

The last part of chapter 5 of this letter mapped out the stark contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the manifestation of the flesh. The dark side of our fallenness is painted vividly in **Galatians 5:19-21 - “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, [20] idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, [21] envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things — as I warned you before — that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” - IPAD TEXT**

Paul assumes that Christians, those who truly are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will find growing in their own hearts a *repulsion* against these kinds of sins. They will, in increasing measure, **“crucify the flesh with it**

passions and desires”(5:24).

But these verses that open chapter six deal with a different issue altogether. The issue here is ***how will spiritual people - people indwelt by the Holy Spirit - deal with these same sins when they are manifested in other believers?*** If spiritual people are people who are broken at their ***own*** sins, and are surgically zealous to cut them out and put them to death, how do spiritual people minister the same kind of life to others caught in the very same sins?

The fact that this is obviously the issue Paul wants us to consider is made clear by an amazing fact in these opening five verses of chapter six. Paul opens the chapter describing a person caught in some sin. Yet he mentions that sinner only once in verse one. Then he spends ***five*** verses addressing, not the sinner himself, but giving directions to the ***rest*** of the church as to ***their*** responsibility toward the sinner.

The instructions are necessary, it seems, because it takes far more wisdom and sensitivity to deal with sins in ***others*** than sin in ***myself***. There are issues of tact and discernment and discretion that go far beyond exposing my own soul to the voice of the Spirit and the mercy of Christ Jesus. How will this other person respond? Is he willing to embrace the truth? How can I keep him from condemnation and depression? Or, if he doesn't see the seriousness of his sin, how can I point this out without losing his friendship? These are the issues Paul deals with in these verses.

1) **LIVES ORDERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT SHARE IN A MUTUAL PASSION FOR PURITY AND MINISTRY AND HOLINESS**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:1-2 - “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted. [2] Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

The issue here isn’t “*What difference does the Holy Spirit make to me?*” but, “*What difference does the Holy Spirit in me make to you?*” Whatever other signs may manifest the Spirit’s presence in our midst, surely, in Paul’s mind, this is key. This is what distinguishes *good* religion from *bad*. This is what makes the church the *body of Christ on earth*.

When Paul describes the nature of the church as the *body of Christ*, he takes *individuals* out of the picture entirely and replaces them, not with *separate people* in a *congregation*, but with *different members in a common body*:

IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 12:20-27 - “As it is, there are many parts, but one body. [21] The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” Or again, the head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” [22] On the contrary, those parts of the body that are weaker are indispensable. [23] And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unrespectable parts are treated with greater respect, [24] which our respectable parts do not need. Instead, God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the less honorable,[25] so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other. [26] So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. [27] Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it.”

Notice, there are no *people* in Paul’s image. There are no *individuals*. There are only *parts* of one *body*. What Paul obviously means to show is that these parts have *no independent life of their own*. A hand, or an eye isn’t a *living thing* all by itself. Its life depends on the body.

I'm not sure this is something we believe anymore. All of us are humble enough to admit that we have no life apart from **Christ** - "***Apart from me, you can do nothing.***" And we all say "Amen!" But it's quite another thing, and quite a bit **more** humbling, to admit that I have no chance of spiritual life without **you!** Yet clearly, this is where Paul is going with his teaching.

How will the fruit of the Spirit grow in my life? "Well, Pastor Don, read the Bible, pray, confess your sins, don't swear, lie, cheat, drink or commit adultery." Immediately our minds gravitate to the things we can do **ourselves** (with the help of the Holy Spirit, of course). Paul paints another picture entirely. **You** are involved in the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in **my** life. **You** are involved in **my** battle with the residue of the downward pull of the flesh in **my** life. **You** are **how** the Holy Spirit chooses to work in His Body.

This is how the Holy Spirit works in a church. He ***pulls people above mere self-concern***. This ***must*** be a functional reality in a church like ours. This ***has*** to work.

How many people are there in a large church like ours who are right on the edge of making serious mistakes in their walk with Jesus - and are ***going*** to make those mistakes - simply because there was no one, apart from a preacher they hardly know, dishing out spiritual slogans from a distant pulpit - there was no one to prayerfully come right up along side of them, take them over to Tim Hortons, put a loving but firm hand on their shoulder and say, “You know, I’ll never share this with another soul in the whole world, but ***are you doing OK? I’m worried about you. I haven’t seen you in church. I noticed a change in your disposition. Can I help you in any way at all?***”

All of this is beautifully captured in that word “***restore***” (1). “***Restore such a one....***” Look at another verse where that very same word is used in the New Testament - **Mark 1:19 - “Going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat putting their nets in order.” - IPAD TEXT**

“I don’t see anything about **restoration** in that verse, Pastor Don.”
 Yes you do. The very same word is translated “**to mend,**” or, “**mending.**” It’s what James and John were doing with their torn and tangled nets. Get that picture in your mind. That’s the kind of attention to detail, the kind of slow patience, the kind of unrelenting attention Paul is calling the church to when a brother or sister is all messed up in some sin. ***You don’t throw the net out! You mend it.***

2) **PEOPLE CAN FIND THEMSELVES “CAUGHT IN A TRESPASS” FROM WHICH THEY WILL NEVER ESCAPE BY THEMSELVES**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:1 - “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted.”

Scholars debate exactly what Paul means when he says a brother is “**caught**” in a trespass. Does he mean “**caught**” in the sense that someone has found him out in spite of all his attempts to keep his cherished sin a secret? Or does he mean “**caught**” in a trespass the way an animal is caught in a hidden trap that has suddenly sprung around its hind leg? The actual meaning of the word “**caught**” has this element of surprise in it, but that can apply equally to both interpretations.

I choose “**caught**” in the second sense, like an animal suddenly caught in a trap, only because I think it fits better with Paul’s command to “**bear one another’s burdens**” in verse 2. I think this is a person who didn’t see the results of his actions coming, but suddenly, almost unawares, finds the **burden** of guilt and regret and, perhaps, even repentance, a very heavy load to carry.

Isn’t this the way it so often works? People can live so much of life seeing only their **actions**, and never considering the **results** of their actions further down the road. Certainly there are, in the words of David, “**presumptuous sins**” and presumptuous sinners. But most of the time we are **foolish** sinners who just didn’t see the trap coming until it was too late.

This picture of a sprung trap is an accurate one. It shows us all that sin is easier to get **into** than **out of**. But the Holy Spirit isn’t done with such trapped sinners. He has a plan. And, at different times and different seasons and in different ways, you and I are both part of that plan.

3) WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR MY LIFE?

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:1-3 - “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted. [2] Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. [3] For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

This *is* God’s will for your life. It is so much in the plan of God that Paul calls this restoration ministry the “**law of Christ.**” This is ***absolutely*** what God wants spiritual people to give themselves to. In fact, it is like the law of gravity that spiritual people won’t be able to avoid this kind of interaction with the burdened members of the family of God. ***If they’re listening to the Holy Spirit at all they will be compelled into restoring others.*** It’s a **law.**

But ***how*** is this ministry to be done? We’ve already stated at the beginning of this message that it is much more difficult to deal with the trespasses in the lives of ***others*** than in our ***own***. Are there any guidelines? Do we just “***trust the Holy Spirit***” to smooth out all the details?

The main rule Paul gives is stated in the last part of **verse 1** and repeated in slightly different words in **verse 3** - “[1]...if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted....[3] For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

Several truths stand out in these words:

- a) ***My own potential weakness and vulnerability isn’t to be used as an excuse to keep me from involving myself with my brother’s burden of sin.***

IPAD TEXT - “You who are spiritual, restore such a person....”(3). How many times we pass the buck saying, ***“Who am I to correct so and so? I’m in no position to deal with him!”*** No, says Paul. You and I are not to **assume** that God will work in our brother’s life by the Holy Spirit **apart** from our direct involvement.

- b) ***I am to restore my brother with an eye to myself.***

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:1 - "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*"

How would *I* like to be dealt with if *I* was the one caught in a trespass? Publicly or discretely? Harshly or gently? Patiently or abruptly? In all these dealings I am to remember the golden rule of our Lord - "***Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.***"

- c) ***I am to restore my brother remembering my own weakness and vulnerability to temptation and sin.***

There is great pastoral wisdom in Paul's instruction here. Especially if the sin of the fallen brother is in some area of sexual indiscretion, there is tremendous vulnerability for the restorer to fall into the very ***same*** kind of attraction with the fallen brother due to the power of ***spiritual empathy*** as they work through the details of that problem together.

There is great attraction between the sexes when deep spiritual concerns are shared. Spiritual empathy can draw even mature Christians into sinful attractions. “Remember this temptation” is Paul’s plea. This is certainly **one** area of application in Paul’s words.

Also, I am to undertake this ministry humbly with an accompanying gentleness that is, in itself, a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in my own life - Galatians 5:22-23 - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.” - IPAD TEXT

- 4) I MUST CONSTANTLY RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO SPIRITUAL PRIDE THAT CONSTANTLY RAISES ITS HEAD IN ANY FAITHFUL SERVICE TO OUR LORD

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 6:4-5 - “Let each person examine his own work, and then he can take pride in himself alone, and not compare himself with someone else. [5] For each person will have to carry his own load.”

At first glance these verses seem to contradict everything Paul has just stated. **“Bear one another’s burdens,”** and here, **“...each one will bear his own load.”** But the contradiction is only apparent, not real. Verses one through three deal with my attitude toward my **brother**. Verses four and five deal with my attitude toward **myself**.

I am to resist the kind of pride that manifests itself in **self-congratulation** and **inward boasting**. Nothing can make me feel proud like the recognition that I haven’t stumbled in the manner that my brother has. I am not to use my brother’s fall to elevate myself - not even in my own mind - not for one minute. Paul says, **“Don’t feed your own pride by measuring yourself with those who have fallen into sin. You are not above them. You stand only by grace and the power of the Holy Spirit!”**

And finally, **verse 5** is related to the same warning. We all have the inward tendency to justify ourselves by the practices of others. How many times I’ve heard it: **“You think I’m bad. I’m really pretty good compared to the way my friends live!”**

Paul warns all of us that our own load will not be made one bit lighter by the decline of holiness among others. Our own guilt and our own righteousness in the Spirit will be judged by our Lord without reference to one other human being. In view of these eternal realities and, in view of the need of brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, Paul calls us all to this wonderful, careful balance.

We are to take seriously the responsibility for our own sins, and, at the same time, maintain a generous, restoring attitude with the sins of our brothers. In Paul's mind, this is what ***“walking in the Spirit”*** is all about in this real world of ours.