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Scripture, Galatians 6:1-5

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵For each will have to bear his own load.

Introduction

Paul is teaching a practical lesson on true spirituality. We can do many things and follow many customs to practice spirituality such as: seek out a spiritual leader, attend worship, spend time in prayer, or committ to a spiritual retreat. But Paul is reminding us that those who are spiritual are involved in redemptive relationships within the Christian fellowship. In other words, true spirituality goes beyond personal practices and reaches out to others in love.

Verse 1. *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

Brothers... Here we are reminded that this is a letter to the church. This is how people who know Jesus are to understand themselves and treat other people.

...if anyone is caught in any transgression.... Paul has previously taught about the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Now he will talk about those who have succumbed to the flesh and have been caught in their sin.

First we remember that believers are capable of sin, and we should not be shocked when we discover a brother or sister has stumbled in their walk. The media can make a big deal about a Christian who falls into sin, and quickly the charge of "hypocrite" is leveled as if that should be a great surprise. The truth is we are all hypocrites, but sometimes we seem to get away with it.

It is good to repeat a point from the previous lesson that Paul is not referring to habitual and willful patterns of sinful living. He is acknowledging the

fact that Christians do sin. How should we handle this?

...you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Now Paul is going to speak about those who are spiritual. Perhaps we can glean some of his ideas about what it is that spiritual people do in real-life relationships.

Spiritual people should be in the practice of restoring those who have fallen into sin. At first glance this seems like an obvious admonition, but this is often not our response to a brother's sin. We often ignore someone's sin because getting involved can be messy, time consuming, and potentially unpleasant.

Other times we find ways to punish the lapsed believer. This can be gossiping, ostracism, scolding them, or treating them with a haughty attitude.

But, we should restore them and do so with a gentle spirit (which is acting out the fruit of the Spirit). We should focus on treating those who stumble the same way God treats us. There may be sad or hurtful consequences to sin, but, in the end, God desires that we would be restored to complete fellowship. What if the Lord were to ostracize us? What if He would punish us as we deserve? What if He held us up to ridicule and condemnation? This is not God's way.

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

We do not minister to people with a sense of superiority. Often we minister to those who have stumbled in a way that is similar to our own experience. In 2 Corinthians 2:3-4 we are told,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

We respond to others’ problems and trials with the comfort we have received from God. Even when we fail there is always the hope that God can use our failures for His success.

It is also necessary that we take care not to stumble into the very sins we are attempting someone else to overcome. Sin can be enticing and when we are weak and not spiritual we may slip as easily as anyone else.

Verse 2. *Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

When we bear someone’s burdens we model what God does for us. He invites us to cast our anxieties upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). We are behaving like Christ when we take up another’s burden. These burdens can be restoration from sin, but Paul likely has other things in mind, such as helping others to understand truth as it is proclaimed in the Bible. His main concern throughout the book of Galatians was to lead this congregation back to truth—it was a burden that Paul was shouldering even though it was personally exhausting.

We are told that this fulfills the law of Christ. It is a loving action to help others lift the loads that can press them down. It is a loving act to show others truth.

Verse 3. *For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

A flight attendant once told Muhammad Ali to fasten his seat belt and prepare for takeoff. He replied, “Superman don’t need no seatbelt!” The attendant replied, “Superman don’t need no airplane!”

It is easy for us to think we are something more than we are. God can humble any of us in a moment—seemingly out of the blue.

What does Paul mean when he says we are nothing? We should consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

We have already read there is no reason for a believer to be haughty or puffed up. But, at the same time, Paul is not saying we are insignificant in God’s sight. We are made in His image and we are meant to fellowship with Him. On the one hand we are the crown of God’s creation, and on the other hand we are fallen people who are so wicked we do not even understand our own sin.

Verse 4. *But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.*

This seems to be a rather curious idea—especially that each one will have reason to boast in himself. Paul is saying we should have an accurate assessment of our strengths and weaknesses. The false teachings of the Judaizers would convince the Galatians they had to compare themselves to the Judaizers to know their value. Paul is saying this is a false comparison. Rather, we are to evaluate ourselves in light of God’s standards and not human counterparts.

It is possible to have too high of an opinion of ourselves, but it is also possible to have too low an opinion of ourselves

Verse 5. *For each will have to bear his own load.*

In this passage of Scripture two different kinds of “loads” are mentioned. In verse 2 we are told to bear one another’s burdens. This type of load is the Greek word that means a heavy load, like the cargo of a ship. We need to help each other for one cannot lift such a load alone.

The load here is more of an individual burden, more like carrying a backpack. There are specific tasks and burdens that are ours to carry. With God’s help we can take care of ourselves in the normal course of life, but recognize there are heavy burdens that we cannot manage on our own.

