

Spirit-Empowered Love in Action

Galatians 6:1–5

Intro: Today Paul moves into some final instructions that flow out of his sharp correction of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In his argument that we are free from the Law, he addresses the issue of church discipline, which is a balance to those who would say, welp, since we are free from the Law I can do whatever I want. Jesus gives us step by step instructions for the full process of church discipline, but Paul is dealing with only the aspect of restoration and helping someone return to walking with Christ.

And how is it that followers of Christ are to follow him and walk on the narrow road that leads to eternal life? We can't do it on our own; he never intended for us to. In his last instructions to his disciples, Jesus said plainly, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) In this same climactic discourse, Jesus told them that as he had been with them — as he walked with them and was immediately present to teach and guide — so he would send the Holy Spirit who would be in them to walk with them and lead them spiritually as Jesus had done walking the dusty roads of Palestine. This walking-around, peripatetic teacher gave the Holy Spirit who would walk them down the narrow highway of holiness. They — and we — are to walk by this same Spirit, be led by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit as we journey on the narrow road while he forms Christ in us. But what about when someone stumbles off the road? What happens when someone is tripped up by sin? What do we do then? In gentleness and love we go to the one no long walking, no longer running, and in love restore them. The Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life is most evidenced in love for one another. As David Platt says, the greatest evidence of the Spirit-filled life is love. Now that we are free from the condemnation of the law, we are free to love, free to release offense, free to serve each other, and free to lay down one's life for our brothers and sisters.

Church discipline?

Galatians 6:1–10 — 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. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is

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nothing, he deceives himself. 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. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 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. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

PRAY

I. Free to Love

Free from the guilt of the law, every Christian is free to love the way Christ loves. So this is a message to all believers. “You who are spiritual...” in v. 1. That is, those who have been born again from above, and hence have been given the promised Holy Spirit. This is a command to the church, not just the pastors or elders or super saints. The care and correction of members of Christ’s body is the responsibility of every member of Christ’s body. So at the front end, let’s say to ourselves, “This is a message for me as a believer in Christ, a follower of Christ.” We are all to be caring coaches and physicians and nurses for each other. Christ points us toward each other in loving responsibility.

Love Restores: v. 1 — Brothers [and sisters], 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.

All sin is an offense against holy God, and is done against the knowledge of both his character, his goodness, and his revealed will. It is cosmic treason against the Creator. All sin earns the wage of death. So because all sin is an offense to God, and because it merits death, the believer in Christ — the Christian — must take all sin with deadly seriousness. “Keeping watch on yourself” is a warning about our vulnerability to sin from a thousand directions — sin is crouching at the door.

Sin does not have one variety. There is hardened sin committed with a raised fist. I have seen it more than once in my ministry where a man engages in an affair — however it began — and when confronted says something along the lines of, “I’m gonna do what I want to do and you’re not going to stop me.” There are other sins, still offensive to God, that are a result of not walking in step with the

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Spirit, or keeping in step with the Spirit, and so tripping from the path of righteousness. These are unplanned, if you will.

Perhaps after a long day at work when you had to skip lunch and the boss jumped on you for something, and someone dented your bumper while you were in the store trying to get dinner for the family on the home... and you get home and you get a call from the neighbor who's made that your dog ate his wife's parakeet and then your 18-year-old tells you she ran a stop sign and crashed the car you just gave her for graduation, and that's the last straw. In a fit of anger you curse and rail against your newly minted adult and vomit out all the rage that has been building all day long and it comes out in one bitter stream that is utterly devastating to the teen. It does such damage that she can't respond and in tears runs out of the house vowing not to come back. Your spouse sees it and says "That's the last time you do this," and she's out. Suddenly the walls are down, the relationships are in tatters. And you are off the road, out of the race, broken and bloodied by sin you didn't plan to do and were not on guard against. You are in the ditch and don't even pretend like you are being led by the Spirit. Your heart and life are ripped and torn as you are "caught in ... transgression." Your brothers and sisters in Christ who are spiritual — they are walking by the Spirit — come to you to restore you. They see you in the ditch, bleeding, beaten up by sin, and they come.

- They do not ignore you, saying to themselves, that's none of my business. That would be unloving.
- They do not come to punish you. That would be graceless and arrogant.
- They do not come saying, "I heard you had trouble. What happened?" just to leave and tell their friends — that would be slanderous and gossipy.

They come to restore, to bind up, bandage to raw wounds of sin and help you out of the ditch. That's the goal: restoration, not punishment or exposure.

It's beautiful, the word restore. The same Greek word used here as *restore* is used in **Matthew 4:21** — **And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them."**

Did you catch it? Did you find it in the verse? It's the word *mending*. They were mending their nets after they had been ripped on the rocks and pulled apart by the waves. They were mending the nets back to wholeness and usefulness. This is the loving role of every member of the body of Christ to every member of the body of Christ. There is an openness of heart and hand in restoration. There is nearness, not distance. Is there repentance? Of course. That is part of the mending process. You

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can't continue to do what caused the damage and put you in the ditch in the first place and expect to be restored or return to the highway of holiness. The people of God come and bind up wounds and help you move away from the sinful brokenness.

All of this is done in gentleness — one aspect of walking in the Spirit: the fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness... It's a tender healing touch, not a sharp jerk. It's the Lord dealing very honestly with the woman at the well in John 4, prophetically exposing and calling from sin, but doing so gently. "Go call your husband." Not, "You wicked, sinful adulterer."

Love restores in Spirit-produced gentleness, knowing that, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." That's the Spirit-born self-awareness at the end of the verse: "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." I am careful to *scope out* the situation to see if I am prone to trip up in the same way.

Some of us know a lady named Cindy in the sister church we once served. Cindy was gifted in a thousand ways. A pianist, a gift for organization, a go-getter and workhorse. Cindy can't walk across the floor without tripping. Her sons threatened to come over every day and wrap her in bubble wrap. We would not send Cindy up on a pitched roof to help someone down. We would be unwise to send a recovering alcoholic into a bar to pull out a someone who had fallen into drunkenness. Christian love restores Christians gently and wisely. So we "keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8)

Love Bears: v. 2 — Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Christians carry one another's burdens. The church does this. Community Groups do this. Individual believers do this. We carry one another's burdens. In light of the verse immediately preceding, we could say this means we help restore, in very practical ways, someone who has been tripped up by sin. We grieve with them at the damage done by sin and seek to help in reconciliation. Is that what is meant? Absolutely. But that is too restrictive an interpretation. There is beauty here in how wide and deep this command is. We help carry the load for each other, whatever it is. There is a financial aspect to carrying the load for each other. Often when I turn on the water in my shower and it comes out hot, I am reminded that many of you helped carry my burden. When we launched in September of 2017 we were tiny and had little money. As is the case with many church planters, the church was not immediately able to pay a salary. On November 7, 2017, when I tried to take a shower, the water was ice cold. My water heater was caput. And I didn't have the money to replace it. By the end of the

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next day you had taken up an extra offering — I don't know how you did it; Steve coordinated it. The next morning I had the plumber out that you paid for and he installed a glorious water heater. You helped carry my financial burden in a lean time. But it's still broader than that. Carrying one another's burdens is to weep with those who weep, pray with someone who is grieved over their wayward adult child; sign up for the meal train when unexpected difficulties arise; help repair an ignition coil or a brake rotor when they wear out; sit in the waiting room while someone is in surgery; write a letter to someone in bootcamp who is lonely. These are all burden-bearing acts of love that fulfill the Law of Christ, which is the law of love. As Jesus ultimately bore our burden of sin and death on the cross, we point to his curse-bearing, sin-defeating love by loving each other in practical ways, making their load a little lighter. This is obedience to the New Commandment he gave in the upper room, as we read in the Call to Worship: Love one another as I have loved you. The lives of Christians are to be oriented to the lives of Christians, sacrificially loving each other until the world is dumbfounded by the way we love each other and simply exclaims, "See how they love each other." Such burden-bearing and fulfilling the Law of Christ will silence the accusations of those who mock in unbelief.

"Pastor, you just said we Christians' lives are to be oriented to the lives of Christians. But what about everyone else? Aren't we to love them, too?" Yes! The 2nd greatest commandment is that we love our neighbor. There is no governor on the engine of love that is working in my life. Love is to mark me. But **v. 10** gives insight: **So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.** Love and generous giving is not optional. These are indicators — evidence — that we are walking in step with the Spirit. It requires a generous Christ-shaped heart to give in a way that reflects Christ's generosity. Christ gives unmerited common grace: Wicked rulers and atheists have a roof over their heads. But there is extravagant love and grace poured out on the saints whom he has redeemed. They are given the eternal riches of heaven. Love of neighbor and generosity to all, *and* extravagant love and generosity toward God's people are produced as Christ is formed in us by the Holy Spirit. Love bears and carries.

Love Tests: v. 3–5 — For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 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. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

This is a challenging thought to unravel and interpret, but it is a warning against pride and comparison. **V5** points to the Day of Judgment: "Each will have to bear his own load." In the judgment

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it won't do any good to point to others who we think sinned worse than us. Nor will it do any good to say, "See how I helped so and so and how good I was to them." Both of those are rooted in pride, and pride is offensive to God. God sets himself in opposition to the proud; he brings down the proud.

We are not anything in ourselves. Any good that comes out of our lives is as a result of God's grace working in us, flowing through us. The nature of the old sinful nature is pride, self-exaltation, and self-love. If at any point we rise above any of that dark sinfulness it is because Christ has given us a heart, new affections, new love, and new capacity to love. There is no room for boasting. Those who boast have their fleeting reward from men, as the Pharisees in Matthew 6. But they have nothing from God. If anyone thinks he is something, he deceives himself. It is Christ, who is being formed in you. It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13) In the judgment, all that love has done through your life will simply point to the love of Christ working in you. Love tests motives and checks pride, giving glory to God.

Let's review that string of imperatives that Christians do as they are led by the Spirit:

- We lovingly and gently restore and mend those who have been tripped up by sin.
- We bear one another's burdens.
- We test ourselves, putting pride to death, pointing to the Great Savior whose love we reflect.

These are joyful duties, if challenging. It is the normal Christian life. And while we may find these duties intimidating and difficult to perform, we will find them sweet and life-giving when they are performed on us.

And what if it is you in need? What if you are the one in the ditch? What if you are the one bruised, broken, or crippled by sin? Maybe you didn't think you would fall into the ditch. You took your eyes off of the finish line and King who calls you there and you stumbled; you were tripped up by sin. Or maybe you thought you could manage sin — just a little, it won't impact my race. But here you are, out of the race. Maybe you managed to convince others, or even yourself, that everything is fine — nothing to see, everything is fine. "Carry on, I'll catch up."

Hear the words of Jesus: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28–30) Will you humble yourself and let the people of God love you and carry you? Will you simply return to the Lord

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in this moment? If you were to ask the people of God, “Will you restore me? Will you help me mend?” Before you got to the end of the sentence the people of God would rush to help you out of the muck of sin, would bind, would mend the wounds and brokenness, and would carry you and your burdens until you are mended and fully back in the race. And we need to do this, because everyone in here knows that we could, and probably have, fallen into the muck of sin ourselves and need someone to give us hands-on Gospel care so that we can again walk by Spirit. Repentance is one prayer away. The healing balm of the people of God is waiting to be poured on those sidetracked by sin.

Beloved, are we ready to restore and mend those caught in sin, tripped up, muddied, bloodied, and broken? That is what sin does. It brings death. But we are to be ministers of the Living Christ — his ambassadors. Is it an extraordinary occurrence that someone might need help to walk in Spirit? Is this a once in a lifetime deal that maybe once we need to restore and mend? No, of course not. This is a daily need. There are steps to church discipline that Jesus describes in Matthew 18. He gives a condensed outline, if you will, of the whole process. What Paul deals with assumes a repentant heart and the goal of restoration achieved. Jesus tells us that if someone will not listen to progressive discipline that are to be treated as unbelievers, since there does not appear to be Spirit-empowered repentance occurring. But let’s make a pledge to each other. As much as is possible, let’s care for and love each other as we see described here so that, God helping us, we never have to put anyone out of the church for hardened sin because we rush to them to restore and to mend. It is difficult and costly. But it is necessary, else we fail to love by simply leaving our brother or sister tripped up, lying broken in the ditch of sin. There is nothing God-honoring about that. Without condemnation, with pride put to death, let’s gently restore those who fall, as Christ restored Peter. Let’s fulfill the Law of Christ.

II. Love Freely

Love Shares

The word is a priority, and the giving of God's people points to that.

Love Sows

What is sown is what comes up.

Love Sticks