



The Gentle Ministry of Restoration
Galatians 6:1-5

Let me invite you to Galatians 6 this morning as we continue in our series through the letter to the Galatian church. We are walking into the last chapter which means we only have a few more weeks in this book before we move on.

But just to review where we've been the last few weeks, in finishing up chapter 5, Paul has talked about the reality of the constant battle in every believer between the desires of their flesh—that old nature that is still hanging around until Christ returns—and the Holy Spirit that now indwells, seals, and empowers those who are born again.

And while this constant tension takes place in our hearts we are called to walk in the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the flesh. We are called to holiness. We are called to represent the holy God who we now have as our Father.

And then in that last section of chapter 5, Paul lists examples of the desires of the flesh, including sexual sin, social sin, and religious sins. But then contrasts those with the fruit of the Spirit. Those who have the Spirit dwelling in them, those who are walking in the Spirit, abiding in Christ, will manifest more and more in their life fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Now, this line of teaching is important to remember, because even though we are stepping into a different chapter, he is not moving on to a completely unrelated argument. This was originally a letter, without chapter and verse numbers and should be read as a whole document.

Paul has just taught that it is possible for individual Christians to gratify the flesh and not walk in the Spirit. This means, at any time in the church community, many (ideally all, but many) people will walk in step with the Spirit, but there will be others who indulge in the flesh. And again, this is could be true in any number of ways. They demonstrate an attitude that is not in line with the gospel, they engage in behaviors

that are inappropriate for someone who claims to be a follower of Jesus, or they say something that causes concern about the condition of their heart.

And if you've been involved with a church for any length of time, you know that to be true. In a church that regularly has over 1,000 people attend like ours, this is certainly going to be the case. Even on a smaller scale, you've probably seen this in your Grace Group. You've run across this in other relationships you've developed in the church. Given enough time, you will see this play out in the church. But when that happens, we are usually faced with some questions.

Questions like: What should I say to them? How should I say it? Should I say anything at all? Is it even my place to address it?

Well, Paul is going to address in this next section this morning the ever-relevant and difficult question of, **how should we respond when sin is present in the life of a brother or sister in Christ?**

Galatians 6:1-5

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 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.

CALLED TO CONFRONT SIN

Clearly, the Bible's instruction is for Christians to come alongside one another, not only when things are easy or smooth, but also when things might be difficult and messy. And this is true not just when a brother or sister is going through a season of suffering, but also when a brother or sister is indulging in the flesh, demonstrating a sinful attitude, or walking in sinful behavior.

And this is tough for most of us, I think, few people want to feel like they are the sin police. So, oftentimes we try to justify not addressing sin in someone else's life. We might say to ourselves a number of different things.

For example, we might tell ourselves, **it is none of my business.** It is their private life. Who am I to question something so personal in someone else's life? They will just see me as overstepping and sticking my nose where it doesn't belong.

But again, we are actually called to this in Scripture, and not just here in Galatians 6. The author of Hebrews writes...

Hebrews 3:12-13

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. **13** But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

He says, be careful. Sin will ruin you. So be there for one another. Exhort one another because in so doing you can help protect one another from sin’s devastating consequences.

James, too, writes...

James 5:19-20

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

So, if we are to follow the Bible’s calling and design for the Christian community, we can’t really say, it is none of my business. If I have concern, if you have concern, about someone, it is good and right to address it. Now, in a moment we will talk about *how* to do so, but it is our calling.

We might say, **addressing sin is unloving or judgmental**. But consider what is at stake if it isn’t addressed, if you believe sin really is as destructive as the Bible says it is and as you’ve experienced it to be in your own life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about the importance of addressing and confronting sin in his book called *Life Together*. He wrote,

“Reproof is unavoidable. God’s Word demands it when a brother falls into open sin. The practice of discipline in the congregation begins in the smallest circles. Where defection from God’s Word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin. It is a ministry of mercy, an ultimate offer of genuine fellowship...”¹

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 107.

So, addressing sin in a fellow brother or sister's life is actually an act of love. Now, with that said, it could be done in an unloving way, but the Bible is careful to address that as well. But we need to dismiss the idea that addressing sin in one another's lives is unloving or is none of our business.

Let's go back to Galatians 6 and look at verse once again...

INSTRUCTION v. 1

Galatians 6:1

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.

Verse one offers three very important truths about addressing sin in a fellow believer's life.

1. Sin's deception is the danger

This doesn't mean that we have to be quick to criticize and point out people's faults. Love covers over a multitude of sins. But we shouldn't overlook someone who is "caught" in sin.

The word carries with it the idea of being overtaken, as if an invading army has stormed the kingdom and taken reign. But it also carries with it the idea of being overwhelmed, unable to free oneself, and in need of assistance. This sin has become a pattern for someone. It has gained the upper hand, and this person needs help whether they see it or not.

And this is incredibly important for us to understand for our own discipleship and to help others grow in their discipleship. And it is incredibly important to understand in this passage with this call to help restore others when they are caught in sin.

It is important to understand that we, as people, are not merely observers, we are interpreters. What I mean by that is, we don't simply live in the midst of facts that we take in every day; every single person interprets life. We are constantly interpreting our own feelings, thoughts, and hearts. We interpret other's lives, what they are doing, saying, believing. We are always interpreting the world around us. We are always trying to organize and explain what is going on inside of us and outside of us.

The problem for us though is because of the fall, we aren't perfect interpreters. We don't see the world or others perfectly. And we certainly don't see ourselves perfectly

either. Because of the fall and the presence of sin, our interpretations of the world, others, and ourselves are flawed.

Why this is so tricky is that while physical blindness is obvious for the one who can't see, spiritual blindness is much less obvious for us when we are unable to truly see our own hearts.

Paul Tripp identifies several ways in which our spiritual blindness masquerades as other things, making us resistant to acknowledging our own sin.²

For example, spiritual blindness can masquerade as **an accurate sense of self**. James (1:22-25) says that it is only when we look into the perfect mirror of Scripture will we see an accurate view of ourselves. The problem is that we often see ourselves as if we are looking at a carnival mirror: short when we are tall, tall when we are short. Sin causes us to see ourselves as right when we are wrong, righteous when we are unrighteous. Everything is distorted. We see ourselves, but not as we truly are. And yet, we maintain that we see ourselves perfectly.

Another way spiritual blindness masquerades is by the mask of **being sinned against**. Particularly when it comes to relational conflict, we can be so gripped by a sense of being sinned against, that we do not see ourselves as sinners too. We end up seeing all the problems outside of us and none that are inside of us. Jesus said in Matthew 7 that we are in danger of being obsessed with the speck of dust in another's eye while we ignore the plank or beam sticking out of our own.

We can don the mask of **accepting wise counsel from others**. This plays out when someone points out sin in our hearts, we reply with something like, well, not everyone thinks that. The deception of our hearts can cause us to only value those who agree with us and support the decisions we make. When confronted we can say we are seeking wise counsel but in reality, we are seeking support for our own point of view.

Another especially deceptive mask of spiritual blindness is the mask of **biblical and theological knowledge**. If we know the Scriptures well and have a decent grasp of theology, it can give us the false assumption that we can accurately interpret our own hearts. Theological knowledge can also make us assume we are spiritually mature when in reality we might be *intellectually* mature, but *spiritually* immature. It can also cause us to be dismissive of others' counsel with an "I already knew that" attitude. I've seen this play out many times in counseling people. I've sought to apply a familiar passage of Scripture to their lives, only for them to dismiss it. I mean, I know that I've done that myself! But having great biblical knowledge does not mean we are

² This section is largely taken from Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 278-287.

consistently applying it to our lives, and we need to be called back to biblical truths time and time again.

And there are many other masks of spiritual blindness we could identify, but the point is that sin is deceptive, so much so that we are deceived about being deceived. We need others to come alongside us and help us gain a better perspective on our hearts and lives.

Again, sin's deception is the danger.

2. Restoration is the goal

The goal is restoration, not punishment. When seeking to address sin in someone's life we need to have the hopeful end in view, that they will be rescued from the destructive path they are on and be restored to walking in step with the Spirit, living a life that pleases the Lord.

Now, even though the goal of restoration is right and good, that doesn't mean it isn't painful. It is hard to take an honest view of our hearts, especially when we realize that we were unable to sin that was there even though it was obvious enough to someone else that they would talk to us about it. That is humbling and painful. But it is good.

In fact, the word there for "restore" was used to describe the process of setting broken bones back in place. And if you've ever broken a bone, you know how painful that is.

When I was four years old, I thought I was Superman, so I jumped off of my toy box and when I landed I broke my right arm. Even though I was just 4, I can remember screaming and crying, I remember riding in the car to the ambulance, my parents trying to hold my arm in place. I remember being at the hospital and them needing to take X-rays and how painful that was. All of those steps were painful, but they were necessary. I needed to get to the hospital. I needed x-rays. I eventually needed surgery and a cast. None of that was fun, but all of it was good.

It is the same when someone comes alongside and points out sin in our life that needs attention. It is painful, it is hard, it is humbling, but it is good. Because when our sin is seen as the sin it is, we can confess it, repent of it, ask the Lord to grow us in that area.

Again, restoration is the goal.

3. Gentleness should be the spirit

When Paul says that we should restore one another with gentleness, he does not mean leniency, but rather with sensitivity in difficult situations and difficult conversations. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, which is why he says that only those who are “spiritual” should restore others, because only then will it be handled in the right way.

And so we don’t address sin looking to demean someone else, to put them in their place with an air of pious superiority. We are not looking to destroy them, because again, restoration is the goal. And broken people need to be handled gently and with patience.

And this isn’t just Paul’s advice on how to handle sin. It is all through the Bible.

Proverbs 15:1, 4

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger...A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

James 3:17-18 - gentleness demonstrates divine wisdom

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. **18** And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

1 Peter 3:15 - gentleness needed in correcting false beliefs and worldviews in evangelism

15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect

So again, as we seek to restore our brother or sister in Christ, helping them see the sinfulness of their heart and actions, we do so with gentleness. In other words, it takes the fruit of the Spirit to address the desires of the flesh. And so we have to keep an honest watchful eye on our own heart’s spiritual condition in the process - which is what the rest of the paragraph is all about.

We are called to address sin in one another’s lives, sin deception is the danger, restoration is the goal, and gentleness should be the spirit.

But let’s go on and look at the warnings that Paul gives us here as we engage in the ministry of restoration...

WARNING v. 1b, 3-5

Galatians 6:1b, 3-5

1 ...Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted...**3** 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.

Again, it might sound pious or judgmental to hear from Paul that we should confront sin in someone else's life, but notice, Paul is not dismissive of the fact that we are all capable of the same sin.

This passage reminds us that every one of us is **both needy and needed**. Every one of us is tempted to indulge the flesh rather than walk in the Spirit. Every one of us is capable of donning some mask of spiritual blindness that keeps us from seeing the sin in our lives.

So, he says, keep watch on yourself. Guard against temptation yourself. In confronting sin, don't think that you are above it yourself. It is really easy for us to think, I could never do what he/she did. I would never act that way. I could never say those things. But the truth is, we could. It might be hard to imagine in some cases, but the capacity is there in our flesh.

Oftentimes, we compare the best of ourselves with the worst of others. This is what Paul is wanting against here in verses 4 and 5, bearing our own load means that we will all give an account for ourselves to the Lord and not to one another.

So, recognizing the deviousness of our old nature keeps us humble. It keeps us from harboring a self-righteous attitude. It reminds us that the grace that other person needs is the same grace that I desperately need day in and day out.

And the good news of the gospel is that every one of us can find that grace in Jesus.

Look again at verse 2...

GOSPEL v. 2

Galatians 6:2

2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Why do followers of Jesus bear one another's burdens? Why do followers of Jesus seek to restore one another when caught in sin? Because that is exactly what Jesus has done for us.

In fact, think about the incarnation for a moment. That is, Jesus was born into this world with a human body and nature. What we celebrate every Christmas. Have you ever considered that the incarnation was an act of gentle confrontation? That in coming to us, Jesus came to restore us from the sin that we had been overtaken by. That he came to call us to repentance, to be made right with God.

Notice how John described the incarnation in John 1...

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Again, Jesus was and is full of grace and truth. That is, he has come to show us the truth of the Father, who is perfect and holy and righteous. He has come to confront us with the truth that we are not those things. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So, in coming, Jesus, who is full of truth, confronts us but, he is also full of grace.

He comes and says, there is no denying the broken condition of your heart and because of that, the broken relationship with the Father, you need to see that and you need to know that. However, I've come to restore you. I've come to bear your burden on my own shoulders even though it will take me to the cross.

And while Jesus spoke with righteous anger at times with the religious elders of his day, he overwhelmingly speaks with gentleness to those who heed his call for forgiveness and restoration.

Matthew 11:29

28 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.”

If you've never seen or acknowledged your sin and thus have never seen your need for a Savior, we pray that you might this morning. Because of your sin, you are without a right relationship with God, but Jesus has come to bear your sin on the cross and if you turn from your sin and trust in faith in the finished work of Jesus, you can be restored.

If you are a Christian this morning who has done that, know that to follow Christ, the one who gently confronts us for our good, means to do so in like manner with those who make up the body of Christ. We commit to do that with one another, remembering

that sin is deceiving so we need one another, restoration is the goal, and gentleness should be the spirit.

CONFESSION

Let's spend a few minutes in silent prayer and confession, asking the Lord to bring to light anything in our hearts that we might be missing, that we might repent of it and be healed. Also, spend some time thanking the Lord for the work of Jesus who gently confronts us for the good of our souls.

PRAYER

ASSURANCE

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Know that based on your confession and the graciousness of God, your sins really are forgiven and that you are cleansed now and forever. Again, Jesus is the one who has carried your burden and deals with you gently. Let's praise him this morning for his mercy.

VERSES

Galatians 6:1-5

Hebrews 3:12-13

James 5:19-20

Galatians 6:1

Proverbs 15:1, 4

James 3:17-28

1 Peter 3:15

Galatians 6:1b, 3-5

Galatians 6:2

John 1:14

Matthew 11:29

1 John 1:9

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does confronting someone about their sin make you feel?
2. Have you ever had to confront a brother or sister before? How did it go?
3. Why do we need one another to help identify sin in our lives?
4. How does keeping in mind that restoration is the ultimate goal shape the way we confront one another?
5. Why would gentleness be necessary for this ministry of restoration?
6. What does it mean that the incarnation was an act of gentle confrontation?
7. Pray for one another, that you would remain humble to gentle rebukes from each other and that present/future situations would be handled in a way that glorifies Christ.