

The Rev. Billy Cerveny:

Hey, let's pray together

Father, thank you for the gift of your word. Thank you that you say it never returns void

I pray tonight, Lord, that you would

Speak through your scriptures, you'd speak through me, Lord, that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

I thank you, Lord, that you are who you say you are. And I pray this in your name, Jesus, amen.

Hey everybody, we have a good weekend. We were in Steenhachey this weekend. Who was there? Frank, you were there. Raise your hand if you were a Steenhachey person. Not that many. It was awesome. It was really fun. Next year, you need to do it. It was about 4,000 degrees. We were at that place in the summer, though.

The other day I was driving my car, and I came up here, I was driving through maybe by Riverside High School or somewhere, and I saw they were having football practice out on the field in the middle of July, and people were in full pads, and I thought to myself, that is unbelievably, I can't imagine that as sustainable. And it also brought back this memory of, I think it was the month of July. It was 1982.

Bobby Bowden football camp at Florida State University. I was just, it was the summer between my seventh and eighth grade year, and me and a bunch of my buddies who were playing football at the time went up there. It was 157,000 degrees up there in Tallahassee, and we were in pads and helmets and running around. I went to Episcopal, and there was a certain brand of people that played football at Episcopal, but when you go to a place like Bobby Bowden football camp that kind of draws from the inner boundaries of parts of Florida, you realize that there are different breeds of football players in the state of Florida that showed up there. And there's this one guy, I'll never forget his name, I will just call him Jimmy. And Jimmy was 13 years old, but he was also six foot three, 275 pounds, and I'm sure he had a beard shaved with a buck knife. He was a big old corn fed boy.

And he was like, he was this oak of a man child, oak tree of a man child, that every coach looked at him, just thinking, man, we're gonna get this guy for our team. It was unbelievable. And the thing about Jimmy was, he may not have been that smart, but at least he was mean. He was that kind of mean where, you know, throw you on the ground, dog cussed you kind of mean. And he was mean to anyone that was smaller than him, which was everyone, but especially me.

Because at the time I was, you know, 13, I was probably five feet tall, weighed 120 pounds wet.

And I knew that Jimmy, I couldn't take Jimmy, but I also knew that I was a lot faster than Jimmy. And then I could, and the one thing that if I was ever to kind of retaliate to this guy that was always so mean to me, the one thing that I could do was that I could make fun of him from beyond arm's reach, and he could never catch me. And I had this one thing that I got to came up

with this idea that I was gonna give Jimmy a nickname. And it had to be a nickname that I knew would stick, but also one that I knew that he hated. So I called Jimmy Boo Boo. Now, if you ever see Jimmy, Jimmy was not a boo boo, and everyone thought that was hilarious. And it stuck. Well, it made him crazy. Well, we're about halfway through the week, and we're lining up on our teams. We have this scrimmage. And there's two things I remember about this scrimmage. One, we're in full pass. Jimmy was on the other side of the team for me. And the first thing I remember was the first play of the game, they handed Jimmy the ball.

And this was Operation Boo Boo's Revenge because he came around and literally stepped on me and knocked me so hard, I can still taste it.

The second thing I remember was that for some reason, the parents were in the crowd at this football camp, and they were watching this game. And it's by about halftime, we were beating the other team

and we were winning decisively.

And about halftime, this man walks into the crowd, into the stadium, and it was Jimmy's father.

And with every play they made, he's, if they were losing or they failed, or every mistake they made, Jimmy's father started laughing out loud.

And he started yelling. He was yelling insults at his son down on the field.

And I remember everyone in our team looked, and it was just a matter of time before the entire stands were quiet. And I was only 13. I didn't really fully understand the ways of the world. But one thing I knew, looking down at him, was that his dad was drunk, like real drunk.

And for that moment, I realized that I got an insight into why Jimmy was the way he was.

And when the game ended and we all were walking off the field one direction, Jimmy walked off in his other direction by himself with his head hung low.

Like I said, I was only 13, but Jimmy began to make sense to me a little bit more.

I remember thinking to myself that it didn't just give me an insight to him, but it gave me compassion.

There was this kid who was just bully,

but now I realized he was just hurting.

But he had this story for which I had no reference point. And in that moment, I remember thinking to myself, oh gosh, how could you? Now Jimmy and I never became friends, but I'll tell you this, I never called him boo boo again. I'm not sure anyone else did either.

That was this living parable, I think,

for what is a famous phrase that people say nowadays?

And it's that hurt people hurt people.

You know what I mean?

It's people that are wounded.

When anyone is wounded, when you or me where I can't deal with the pain in a healthy way, or something that life has done to me or brought my way,

it's like having a piece of glass in your heart that you can't get out of. And you begin to walk, and you walk with this limp.

And everything about your life is about trying to either mitigate that pain,

or everything about your life is to try to ignore that pain. Or everything about your life is to try to make that pain go away.

And when it's unresolved, you just can't do it. And most of the time, when people get near you or they begin to touch a place in you that hurts, man, you can lash out.

Because I'm gonna hurt you before you ever have a chance to get near that open wound in my life. Can you relate to this?

If not in yourself, maybe around someone around you, but we all do it.

We hurt people hurt people and it's this cycle.

Jimmy's dad hurt Jimmy, Jimmy hurts us. We hurt Jimmy, and the wheels on the bus go round and round. And we just keep going.

It's really familiar.

It's also hard to see when we're doing it, but it's really easy to see what other people are doing it to us. And this apostle Paul, when he writes in Galatians 5 and 6, he's stepping into the middle of this because what's happening here in the church in Galatia is they're really divided. We talked about this last week.

The Galatians that Paul had preached the gospel of grace to them, he left, and this faction came in and began to teach these Gentiles. They say, that's great that you love Jesus. That's great that you're saved by grace and grace alone. But there's this one little thing we're gonna add to the equation. And that's this thing called circumcision that you can't really follow Jesus unless you follow his law and do this.

Well, Paul writes in and he's saying, that's absolutely wrong, but by the time he gets to them, and there's this huge, bitter division between the church,

the Judaizers and the people preaching circumcision are angry at the Gentiles, and the Gentiles are angry at the Judaizers. And then there's people caught in the middle or trying to appease everyone, and Paul's saying, stop.

So he writes this letter. And when he writes this letter, he's not just trying to fix them theologically.

He's trying now to bring them back together in this mess and teaching them how to heal, now that they've hurt one another. And what does he say? He gives the gospel answer. He says in 525, we just read it. He says, we gotta keep in step with the spirit.

That's a great spiritual platitude.

What does that mean?

He unpacks it. See what Paul says in his letter right here in this passage we just read, as he's telling us, he said that we have to think truthfully about one another.

And what he means when Paul is saying that, he's saying that he realizes that when we are hurt, when someone reaches in and damages us in some way or offends us in some way, something happens to us. It triggers the big three of our sin. It triggers our pride.

It triggers my shame, and it triggers my fear.

And all three of these things come together to twist my perception.

And what happens is it twists my perception of events because what I do in those moments it minimizes the details of the things that I don't wanna see. If something's happened, my shame and my fear and my pride come in, and I will minimize the details of what I don't wanna see about a circumstance, and I will maximize the details of what I wanna see, the things that make me look good.

But it also, when I think more dangerously, is it twists our perception of ourselves and our others and of others.

And how does it do it?

We forget that we are these fallen sinners.

Forget that we're fallen sinners.

Paul writes in 6-3, he says, "We think that we're something when we are nothing."

And here's what that looks like.

When someone comes in and they hurt my feelings, I clutch my pearls, right? You know that expression?

How could you?

Who would do such a thing?

I would never.

Oh, yes, you would.

And give it a matter of time, it's gonna be obvious that you're gonna do those things. The problem is that we're just blinded by our anger and our rationalizations.

It's kinda like that story I just told you about Jimmy and myself.

See, Jimmy does that thing, his sin was so obvious, and it was easy for me to hide behind that.

But the truth of the matter is, I wasn't innocent in that situation, was I?

Not at all.

And the truth is, when you know Jimmy's story

and you consider what I did to him, in fact, what I did might've been a little bit worse.

I might not have been as grumpy, but I sure found that wounded place in him and I stuck my finger in it and I turned the screws.

But in my outrage in that moment,

my pointing a finger at him, I couldn't see myself.

I thought I was something when I was nothing.

And what Paul's saying in this is he's saying our rationalizations and our justifications, we create these sinless caricatures of ourselves.

I create a picture of myself that helps me sleep at night.

Oh, I may have done this, but I never would've done it if you hadn't done that.

It's like this magic trick. So I forget I'm a sinner.

That's only half the equation, but I also forget that my Christian brothers or my Christian sisters, that they are the beloved of God.

In the same way that I will turn myself into a caricature of virtue, like a paragon of nuance, complexity of good behavior,

I will turn them into a caricature of the hurt they have performed against me. I will make them a living representation of their offense to me. I don't allow them any nuance. You're just a liar.

You're just mean.

You just don't tell the truth.

And what happens is that I strip them of the nuance. I don't consider the context of anything.

I don't consider the alcoholic father that's sitting in the stands and shouting insults down on the son.

In the church, we don't consider that the other person is a blood-bought lamb of Jesus who is just as riddled with flesh as I am,

who's just as tempted as I am, that's just as baggage-laden as I am.

Nope, you're just that thing you did to me.

The crazy thing about those two things, about the way that I convert myself in those moments and the way I convert you, is it happens in a microsecond, doesn't it?

We can all relate to this.

It's like the ninja-like reflexes of my sin kicks in, and I can convert my perception of you and of me in a second. And all it does is create distance, and it creates division.

So what's the solution?

When we read this passage, what Paul is telling us, he's telling us to walk by the Spirit. Now, listen, that's not just some weak, anemic spiritual band-aid.

It's not some platitude that we don't just go walk by the Spirit.

What the Spirit does is it's powerful.

Because the Spirit is not just, and you've heard me say this many times, it's not just God's warm, fuzzy department.

The Spirit illuminates.

It gives me the ability to see the things that I cannot see on my own.

And one of the things that it gives me the ability to see, it allows me to see Jesus.

It allows me to read Scripture and for me to fall into it and to resonate with me. It allows me to come to the communion table and for me to have an encounter with God. That is the Holy Spirit's work. But the Holy Spirit is also God's administer of reality in my life.

It allows me to see things the way they are and not the way that I'd wish they were, including myself and including you.

John 16, it says the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin.

It opens my eyes, it allows me to see where my sin is.

Man, that's hard.

That's so hard, isn't it?

Because what happens is everything about our flesh resists that thing.

My pride doesn't wanna see my sin because I wanna be good enough. My shame doesn't wanna see my sin, the things that I've done wrong because, well, that just stirs the realities of my shame because what my shame always whispers in my ear is you're not enough or you're a failure, you're not good. It's just to admit my sin is a confirmation of that, right?

And that's all so scary. But when that happens and my flesh kicks in, it just keeps me from growing. It keeps me from healing in my relationships.

And the challenge I have for you today is the same challenge I have for me. Gosh, do I need this?

Is are we willing to agree with the Holy Spirit?

Are we willing to agree with what the Holy Spirit, are we willing to walk by the Spirit in conflict?

Are we willing to see what we bring of our own into that conflict, the sinful things that we bring of our own? Even in those situations where you're right and they're wrong, where Jimmy might have brought the first offense in that situation I just told you about, but the ways that I responded to is in a sinful way.

Am I willing to see that? Or is the nature of my anger just so hard and so strong that I've always feeling justified?

I don't hear what I'm not saying

because there's some of us in here that have been wrong in ways that were a product of abuse or terrible ways in worse. So what I'm not saying, I'm not trying to both sides this. I'm not speaking to situations like that.

I'm not trying to say, well, if you just saw your side of it, everything will be okay. That's not what I'm saying. I'm talking about the situations of conflicts and marriages and friends and church where there's not just raw wickedness.

And what Paul is doing here is he's saying he's not just calling us to being self-aware

because there's a functionality in this, because here's what happens.

And I confess to you, I struggle with this. I think we all do.

Ask my wife, it's true, I do. So easy to get prideful in these moments.

And what Paul says here, he said, this is not just about self-awareness.

So when you own yourself in a conflict,
when you own yourself in this place, it softens your heart posture.

It strips your shame and your pride of its power.

And what it does in that moment is it humbles us.

And we need this.

And we have to have this because Paul is calling us to do something far more dramatic next.
What does he say in verse six, one we just read? He said, "Brothers, if anyone is caught "in any transgression, you who are spiritual "should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."

This is not just saying don't be harsh.

He's saying that we have to restore people that have sinned against us.

You know, in order to do any sort of restoration,
any restoration of anything else, the first thing I need to restore is my perspective.

I can't just see them as that one-dimensional thing I just described, can't I?

I gotta see this full-order perspective of what they are.

I gotta see what they're dealing with, who they are, what they were meant to be, what the damage is, and why it is.

I gotta tell you, that is really, really hard to do.

Let me give you an example. A couple years ago, our family we went over to Croatia,
and we were in this little town called Split. And Split, if you've ever been there, it's a beautiful town, but it's an old seat of the Roman Empire. And there's this palace in the middle of it that was Emperor Diocletians. And it's fun to see you got these guys dressed up like Roman guards with their spears and all that kind of stuff. But you go there, and thousands of people come a year to stand in front of these ruins,

these staircases that look like a giant's come and step on them, or an archway that's kind of half-crumbled, or a pillar that goes to the top and kind of is holding up nothing.

And the reason all these people are coming to see, quote unquote, "the ruins,"
they're not coming there to see the ruins.

What they're doing is they're coming there to see the glory.

No one ever traveled anywhere to see ruin, a pile of rocks.

What they do is they show up to this place, and they look, and they can see this half wall or this three-quarter of a pillar. They can still see the glory of the original artist.

They can see the chisel marks of the stone worker.

Or they can admire the mathematical genius of the person who created this archway that is still standing after these thousands of years.

You see, Francis Schaeffer he's this Presbyterian pastor who died years ago. It's one of my favorite quotes, and I use this all the time.

He says, "We are glorious ruins."

And what he means by that is that we simultaneously reflect the glory of God and the ruin of sin at any given moment.

That at any given moment, God's fingerprints that he meant to display his glory, you can see if I'm willing to look enough,

but I'm also surrounded by this pile of rocks that shows the way that sin and self-interest and pride and shame and all those things have wrecked my life.

And when Paul comes in and he tells us to walk by the Spirit and restore one another, the first thing he would have to do is restore our perspective.

I gotta come to you and I gotta stand before you and I can't just see a pile of rocks.

I can't just see a pile of rubble.

I gotta see the chisel strokes of the original architect,
of the original artist.

I gotta see the handiwork of the creator. I gotta be willing to stand before you and see the glory of God before sin and self-interest and shame and pride kick that structure in.

Knock down the walls of your personality
or your defenses or whatever it is of my stuff.

We gotta do that and it sounds beautiful, doesn't it? It's one of the hardest things you will ever do because it requires a dying to self in a way that is excruciating.

Picking up a cross that is unbelievably painful to bear, and that's why Paul says you can't do this. You have to walk by the Spirit.

So, how do we do that?

You have to see the way that Jesus did that to you first.

You have to see that when Jesus came,

that he came and he stood before you

and he sees, and when we stand and we look at the ruins of our lives, the things that are a product of our own hands, the sexualities that we have toppled over the ways that we have marred the image of God in our life,

the ways that we have toppled the archways of relationships,

family situations, whatever it is, and we all have something.

Jesus stands before us, and rather than just pointing at us and saying, "Look at this pile of rocks."

Because of his death and resurrection, he says, "I see the glory that was there.

"I see the glory of who you are, "because I was the one who created you."

And through his death and his resurrection and his Holy Spirit, he comes in and he says, "I am not gonna wipe you out and create a whole new thing. "I am going to grab you and I'm gonna rebuild you into what you were meant to be, "what you were originally intended to.

"I'm gonna restore the years at the locusts of Eaton, "and I will put stone upon stone, and I will rebuild you into the creation I intended you to be." And one of the principle ways that he does that in our lives

is by calling us to keep in step with the Spirit as we move into conflict, because to be human is to have conflict. To be in relationship is to have conflicts.

And the Lord works through those.

And the way he does that is how he grinds the reality of God's love into our heart by moving towards others in conflict.

It's true in John 16,

that same Spirit that convicts the world of sin,

it says that it also convicts it us of righteousness and of glory.

In the same way that the Holy Spirit allows me to see the sin in me and even the sin in you, it allows me to see the glory in you and in others.

This is a profound work of the Spirit that allows me, if I'm willing, to stand before others who have hurt me. And remembering by his grace,

that we can begin to pry our fingers from around our own anger and from our own resent,

that we can pry our fingers from around the love that we're withholding, and we can say, "Man, I am gonna move towards someone." In love, that sound impossible?

It is on your own power. It is on my own power.

You have to be willing to see them as God sees them.

A glorious creation that has been vandalized by the indifference of others.

Someone that is precious and young at heart,

who's had their heart broken by the words of a drunk or abusive father, or through their own bad decisions?

And when we step into that place, the Holy Spirit gives us eyes, and I can see the chisel marks of the original artist.

And when I love them and I love them in that place, imperfectly, guess what? The original artist works through me.

And he begins to speak to those places, those broken places.

And it's there that we do the most incredible work of the Spirit, where it says in Galatians 6.2, that we begin to bear one another's burdens.

That I can step in and I can see the ways that you're wounded, and I can share the ways that I'm wounded.

To bear your burden or to bear one another's burden doesn't just mean that let me help you carry the thing you can't carry. It implies a mutuality.

You ever had one of those friends that loves to help you? Will help you with anything, but for some reason, over time, you realize, wait, they never let me help them.

They never let me help them. There's some value in this mutual relationship where they are letting you love them while they are loving you. It creates this bond, and it creates a healing.

And it's a gospel journey.

So here's the deal, sometimes we can get there in conflict, and sometimes it's not possible.

But like with guys like Jimmy, like I don't know where he is. I don't know where that guy turned out. I pray that he's met the Lord, and I pray he forgives me.

But I'll tell you this, I know this, and I know this for him, and I know this for you, and I know this for me.

I also pray that we have rest, because this work of the Spirit, keeping step of the Spirit,

as it says in Philippians 1, 6, "And he who began a good work in you "will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

So whether we do this perfectly or imperfectly, it is the Spirit that works, and he will one day bring this to a resolution as he is restoring all the things that the sin and brokenness of this world has destroyed.

Amen.

Amen.