

GALATIANS 6

Real Series (Part 6)

Recap of Galatians 1-5

Hello! I'm delighted to be with you today... to be in the company of all the wonderful people who make up Christ Church... and to add my welcome to those of you who may be joining us today for the first time. If that is YOU, let me just acquaint you with where we are in our current message series so that you're up-to-speed and can enjoy today's installment with the rest of us.

Over these past several weeks, we've been exploring a letter written by the Apostle Paul to followers of Jesus living in Galatia – a region of the ancient world that is located in what we call Turkey today. Throughout the letter, Paul has been trying to teach the Galatians what REAL Christian faith is all about. Those lessons were needed then – as they still are today -- because it's so easy to slip into a variety of fake or false ways of practicing Christianity that are far from what Jesus had in mind.

For example, faith can become mainly about superficial rituals or saying certain words, when it is the condition and change of our heart for which God cares most. Faith can become a way of exulting in being better than others, when Jesus saw it as being humble before God. Faith can become the belief that we can save ourselves by acquiring enough moral merit badges, when it is Christ's goodness and grace (shown on the cross) that is our true hope. Faith can become a life chained by fear over possible judgment, when Christ's full intention was to set you and me free for the beautiful new life of his kingdom. Ultimately, RELIGION is spirituality dependent on MY power and my products. But REAL FAITH (as Jesus and Paul described it) is about the Holy Spirit's power and his produce. It is about having a daily, authentic connection with God that changes our character from the inside -- so that we look less and less like merely "religious people" and more and more like Jesus.

As you consider that chart, which side do you tend to inhabit now? Which side would you LIKE to live on? I think that if St. Paul were standing here today, he would say to all of us: Keep moving from mere RELIGION toward the REAL FAITH that Jesus came to give us. There's so much more joy and help and hope there.

And that brings us to chapter 6 – to Paul's final words of counsel to the church in Galatia. I really love this chapter. Up to now, Paul has been doing a lot of teaching about theology. In this last chapter, however, he turns to daily life. In the space of just ten verses – that's all I'll try to tackle today -- Paul outlines TWO of the most important CALLS Christ makes to us which, if lived out, can make a REAL difference in anyone's life. Let me touch briefly on each of these calls in turn.

The Call to Communal Restoration

If you want to follow Jesus, authentically, then you will be somebody who recognizes, FIRST, that he calls you to be part of a practice of COMMUNAL RESTORATION. Here's how Paul puts it in Galatians 6:1. **¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.**

One of most critical concepts embraced by everyone who follows Jesus is that we are ALL people in need of restoration. Let me offer a metaphor for this. Our son and daughter-in-law have just bought their first house. It's going to be a great home, but it's definitely a fixer-upper. There are foundation issues and drainage issues and electrical issues. Nobody is surprised or scandalized that it needs work or that I'm naming the fact that it does. First houses are usually like that.

Now, our kids have invited family and friends to help with the restoration process. The project is big and it's wise to seek assistance from others. Some of us have a bit of experience addressing house issues. If we're wise, however, we others are going to approach our role in this, as Paul would say, ***gently***. Our son and daughter-in-law don't need critical, controlling help. They need compassionate, considerate help. And if we're savvy, we're also going to approach our role in the restoration process ***humbly***. As Paul would say, we're going to "watch ourselves" and avoid the temptation to be haughty or hasty with our intervention because, truthfully, we've got issues in our own houses too.

Do you see the analogy here? Our kids have a first HOME that needs work. You and I and everyone we know have a first LIFE that needs work. All of us are doing life for the first time. It's a learning process. Our lives are affected by sin the way a house is affected by mildew, rot, termites, poor plumbing, or old wiring. We don't have to be embarrassed to admit we have issues. We just have to go about addressing them and, if we're wise, seeking the help of others with that.

Paul tells the Galatians that the Church is meant to be a people committed to Communal Restoration. **² Carry each other's burdens and, in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ** – which as we read in John 13:34 is the command to love other people the way he loves them. What if this Church and our families and our friendship circles and the parts of the workplace we have influence over became places where it was OK to admit: "I'm a fixer-upper. I'm working on my issues, but the burden of doing all the fixing by myself (or pretending I don't need work) is too much for me." And what if you and I could gently and humbly offer our help to others and welcome it in our own lives? What might be the impact on others or on ourselves?

The story is told of a queen who had twin sons. As they grew to young manhood, the queen knew she must designate one of them as crown prince, but there was confusion

about which one had been born first. Those who knew the young men regarded them as equal in intelligence, charm, and physical strength. But their mother thought she detected a trait in one, not shared by the other.

Calling them to her, the queen said, "*My sons, the day will come when one of you must take the throne. The burdens of sovereignty are heavy. To discover which of you can bear them most cheerfully, I am sending you both to a far corner of the kingdom. There, one of my advisors, will place equal burdens on your shoulders. My crown will go to the one who first returns bearing his burden like a king should.*"

The brothers set out together. Soon, they came upon an elderly woman struggling under a weight too heavy for her frail body. One of the boys said: "Let's help her." The other replied: "We've a burden of our own to worry about. Let's be on our way." The objector hurried on while the other stayed behind to aid the aged woman. Along the road, from day to day, he found others who also needed help. A blind man took him miles out of his way. A lame child slowed him to a cripple's walk.

Eventually he did reach his father's advisor, who strapped the promised weight upon his shoulders and bid him head home. When the boy finally arrived at the palace, his twin brother was already there at the gate but without the backpack the other carried. "*I don't understand,*" he said. "*I told our mother that the burden she gave was far too heavy for anyone to carry. However, did YOU do it?*" The future king paused thoughtfully and then replied: "*I suppose that when I helped others carry their burdens, I built greater strength to carry my own.*"

The Call to Personal Responsibility

I don't want us to miss that last part about "strength to carry my own." The call of Christ to shape communities that help each other with our burdens – be they issues of sin or struggles of other kinds – is enormously important. But it doesn't eclipse a SECOND major calling that Paul underlines in the next verses. Paul writes: **³If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. ⁴Each one should test their own actions.**

By that I think Paul means, as you participate in the work of Communal Restoration, don't lose sight of the other side of the coin – that is the Call to Personal Responsibility. In modern terms, don't start thinking of yourself as the Chip or Joanna Gaines who can renovate everyone else's life or the Marvel Superhero who can carry everybody else's burdens. Each one of us should test our own actions, says Paul. *We should ask: What are the sins and struggles I'm aware of in my own life right now? Am I giving enough attention to those? What am I doing to address them?* **⁴Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, ⁵for each one should carry their own load.**

I like the way that pastor, Andy Stanley, puts this: *"You [and I] were created to be responsible. Before there was sin in the world... God gave humanity massive responsibility"*—relationships with him, our helpmates, animals and a garden to care for. Stanley writes: *"We are happiest when we have responsibility and when we are managing it well. And when you don't have responsibility, or if you have it and aren't managing it well [think of Adam and Eve after the Fall], you feel kind of bad about yourself. You were created to manage and carry responsibility and to carry it well."*

We've also learned from scripture and from life that *"any community—whether it's... two people, a family, a church, an organization, a business... city... state [or] country—wherever there is a community of any size and people are taking their responsibility seriously, you don't need many rules and regulations. Rules and regulations are needed when people begin to act irresponsibly."* Which is to say when they are no longer being responsive to the call of God. When somebody decides -- "I'm not going to be responsive to God about my choices, the way I drive, the way I use my body, the way I talk to or about other people, the way I spend money or handle conflict or interact with my family or co-workers – my irresponsibility eventually becomes somebody else's responsibility. Other people are left dealing with the fall-out.

Which, again, is why Paul says: **Each of you should test your own actions.** Stanley points out that: *"As long as you're comparing yourself to those around you, determining that you are better than some and not quite as good as others, you run the risk of deceiving yourself into being irresponsible... As long as you are comparing yourself to others, you will make excuses for yourself. [But] when you begin to compare yourself to yourself, you will make progress. It's only when you tune out everyone else's 'status' ...that you can begin to reach your own potential and take on your own God-given responsibility."* **For each of you should carry your own load.**

Let me say in closing today that I know that all of us have responsibilities to our family, school, work, church or country. We've also got tasks that are peculiar to our life right now. Would it make a difference, you think, if all of us stopped comparing ourselves to others and just focused on what God has given us to do? Would it help if we stopped asking others to do for us what we can do for ourselves... or blaming others for what we should have done for ourselves... or ignoring what Jesus clearly calls us to do for others? How would those decisions change life for us, for others, for our nation?

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Let's be a people who answer the call of Jesus to communal restoration AND personal responsibility – to love enough that we bear each other's burdens and, in the process, develop greater strength to carry our own. For this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.