
Community by the Gospel

Galatians 6:1-18

(Preached on Biblical Counseling Sunday, May 6, 2007)

Introduction Let me introduce: ¹⁷

Bill and Jane – They are prominent members of their church, involved in many ministries. They are respected as Christians. Yet, behind the closed doors of their home, there is great trouble, terrible words, anger and sin. Where do they go for help? What will people think?

Lee – Is a single man reaching middle age. He has a good job and seems to have a good life. Inwardly there is a creeping darkness and twilight in his soul as disappointments in relationships and a growing appetite for homosexual pornography grip his heart in its deadly coils. Will the meds brighten his day? Will they quiet his conscience? Has anyone noticed as he slips away from his ministry in the church? Does anyone know? Does anyone care?

Bernice – Is a single mother with 2 children who has been recently converted. She was brought up in a pagan home and has almost no knowledge of the Bible or the faith she has professed. Her children are out of control. They disobey her, disregard her, strike out at her. She is excited about her faith and overwhelmed with the hardness of life and the consequences of sin. Who will help her?

Does the gospel say anything to people like this? Yes, the gospel is for people like this, struggling in these ways. But it comes to them in the context of community. The gospel brings us into Christ. Then publicly confessing our union with Christ through baptism, we are in the gathered community of a local church. Here there is hope and help as the Word of God is ministered publicly and privately. For each other, God has given His Word, His Spirit and His people. So the gospel brings to struggling people truth that transforms.

But there is the world who offers alternative spiritualities in the form of the psychologies. These pagan myths become absorbed as functional lies. And there are those who teach error, who bring souls into bondage by distorting the gospel.

We are launched into this portion of God's Word from verses 25-26. In the struggle with legalism overtaking a cluster of churches, Paul sees a great danger of how people will respond to one another. Being in Christ and walking with God are primarily about relationships, not rules. Breaking relationships in the church is a very big deal. There are times we must, usually focused on false teachers. But even when Judaizers are on the loose, Christians holding fast to truth must not become proud or conceited with the effect that we envy one another and provoke one another.

Instead, we must love one another in such a way that we move towards people like Lee, Bernice, Bill and Jane.

Assist the Struggling**(v.1-5)**

Here is the mandate for crises discipleship, for Biblical counseling. This short paragraph sums up the needs, focus, standards and outcomes of Biblical counseling. This is why we regularly here call Biblical counseling, Galatians 6 ministry.

Restoration in the Midst of Sin**(v.1-2)**

Biblical counseling is primarily the following ministry.

It is the ministry of the church. This text is addressed to the “brothers”. It is not addressed to a professional class of unbelievers. It is to the brothers. It is first and foremost a relational ministry in which we engage one another in the familiar love, know, speak, do.

It is a ministry to saints overcome with sin. The word “caught” here is not the idea of being found out. It is the word meaning “being run down, being overcome.” There will be Christians who will struggle with sin and need the loving and skilled crises discipleship we call Biblical counseling.

It is a ministry focused on both sin and wisdom issues. The word “transgression” here means a false step in life or a lapse from righteousness. Biblical counseling addresses the issues of the heart that bear fruit in foolish and in sinful choices. It will give both authoritative and advisory counsel, understanding that it must never confuse the two.

IT IS A MINISTRY BY THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUAL. Now, this first means that it is to be done by Christians. But more importantly, it is done by those who are primarily walking in the Spirit and are manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. While we are all to counsel, confront and comfort one another, the Christians who are overcome with sin need the ministry of mature and skilled people.

IT IS A MINISTRY OF RESTORATION. The imperative here is to restore, to mend, to return to full usefulness. Biblical counseling’s purpose is to bring repentance, recovery and restoration. It is to counsel in such a way that repentance from the commission of sin is called for. It is to teach, instruct and help so that the person recovers from the course of sin. It is to patiently strategize so as to assist with the consequences of sin.

IT IS A MINISTRY CONDUCTED WITH A HOLY SPIRIT ENABLED ATTITUDE OF HUMBLeness, MEEKNESS AND GENTLENESS. The exercise of Biblical counseling is the most fertile field for the cultivation and growth of the fruit of the Spirit in relationships.

IT IS A MINISTRY WITH ITS OWN CLUSTER OF TEMPTATIONS AND DANGERS. Those ministering in this way must guard against legalism in their hearts that emerges as harshness, hardness, unkindness and impatience with those being counseled.¹⁸

IT IS A MINISTRY SHAPED BY THE CROSS. It is a ministry that bears the burden of another’s sins, not in a redemptive way that pays its price, but in a relational way that brings reconciliation and restoration. This cross kind of burden bearing thus fulfills the law of Christ to love people in a proactive, intentional, trajectory towards righteousness. It comes alongside the sinning saint and

shoulders the burden of sin, but does not shield them from the chastening and consequences of sin. It teaches a cross kind of mentality: *suffering now for glory later* as the model for growth and change (Hebrews 12, 1 Peter 1-2).

Responsibilities in the Midst of Ministry (v.3-5)

There are three responsibilities emphasized in the context of restoring others and in the larger context of Christian ministry shaped by relationships and not rules. These responsibilities set standards for ministry: we must measure ourselves by them and we aim to restore others to them.

YOU MUST EXAMINE YOURSELF HUMBLY (v.3). We are warned against conceit and pride in the pursuit of ministry. This occurs in your thinking, in the words that run through your mind. When you fail to see your true status before God, then you will be in your own gaze. Self-congratulation and self-adulation will be the song of your heart. Sadly, it will be a deceit. You will simply be fooling yourself with deadly effect in your ministry.

YOU MUST EVALUATE YOUR WORK HONESTLY (v.4). Through another of Paul's ironic statements, we are exhorted to honestly appraise our own works of ministry with an eye toward God's approval. In the context of walking in the Spirit, be sure that you are judging your work of ministry and doings with a sense of the same penetrating insight that you tend to focus on others. As usual, Paul is undercutting all boasting – even the inappropriate admiration of other's ministries that substitutes for working hard at doing well in our own.

YOU MUST EXERCISE YOUR MINISTRY FULLY (v.5). The ESV catches the change in word from verse 2. We are to carry one another's burdens in reference to sin. But we are to carry our own load of ministry. Examining ourselves humbly and evaluating our work honestly undergirds exercising our ministry fully. Each person in the church has a work of ministry to do. When they are overcome with sin, they usually falter in that work, fail to do it well or must be asked to step down because of being disqualified. The work of Biblical counseling is to restore a person to fellowship and to functionality in the church.

Do Good to Others (v.6-10)

Our community in the gospel calls us to help those who are struggling with sin or in ministry. It also calls us to doing good to others.

With a Respect for Your Leaders (v.6)

The church is instructed to ensure that the true teachers and leaders of the church are taken care of here. Their physical needs should be taken care of as much as is possible. Why is it stated this way?

We are to see it as a ministry of sharing out of what God has given us with others who are sharing with us out of what has given them. As a community of people led by teachers, then there is a *koinonia*, a fellowship or partnership of relational sharing that includes financial care.

The church should not think of in terms of hiring a pastor or elders. Paul addresses this issue as a community issue not an employer/employee issue. The vocational elders are not the employees of the church. They serve in exactly as any other elder and are vocationally freed to give most of their time to ministry.

The aim is to free the true teachers of the church from financial pressure to teach or speak differently. In the churches in Galatia as in many places, the true elders/pastors are financially vulnerable if false teachers start undermining their support.

As a Response to Biblical Principles (v.7-8)

You are to do good for others, to help those who are struggling and to share with your leaders because of relationships not rules. You do so as a response to Biblical principles. You understand that God has established the principles of sowing and reaping in our relationships. If you sow primarily in the realm of the flesh then you will reap what the flesh produces. If you sow in the realm of the spirit, you will reap what the Spirit produces. So, we do Biblical counseling and take care of our leaders because this is the way we sow and reap in the realm of the spirit.

In a Resolve of Hopeful Endurance (v.9)

You are to keep on doing good for others even if you do not experience the results now. You resolve to keep on with an assurance that there is a reward. You will one day reap. God may delay the harvest, the results, the reward. But nevertheless, you will reap. This confidence of God's blessing causes a sturdy and unwavering commitment to help the struggling and do good to others. This hope, this assurance, is not losing heart. Those who lose heart and give up have placed their hope in the reward, not in the God of the "due season". So, we need to shift our hope and never give up until the "due season" arrives.

With a Regard to Other's Needs (v.10)

Our responsibility to do good to others extends to all our relationships. When you have opportunity to do good, to help a neighbor, then do so. Mercy ministry to the lost is primarily if not exclusively, an individual responsibility in the context of relationships.

But the primary relationship, the "especially" of our doing good is those who are in the household of faith. So we are to share with leaders and do good to those in need in our faith community. We are, as opportunity affords, to do good to all. Paul is clearly thinking in terms of concentric rings with the priorities moving toward the center.

Pay Attention to the Apostle

(v.11-16)

In the closing of the letter, Paul puts the issues facing them and us on the table. In a simple summary he deals legalism a death blow. For our sake, he closes by focusing on the main things. He has done something very unusual in this letter. He has written it with his own hand. He has not dictated it, as usual. Because of the grave danger they are in, they must pay attention to the apostle. So must we.

Main Issue

(v.11-12a)

The main issue for the church is the focus on the realm of the flesh. The main aim of the false teachers is to make a good showing in the flesh. The word here is to put a good face on it, to make a display of religious zeal. They are more interested in how it appears than what the heart reality is. This is the problem with all legalism; piety becomes about rules and regulations. They accomplish that forcing them to be circumcised. The false teachers worked through manipulation and coercion to compel obedience to the Law in circumcision.

Main Purpose

(v.12b)

They were doing this in order avoid being persecuted and suffering for the sake of the cross. The gospel, the message of the cross, brought persecution from nearly everyone. The zealous Jews persecuted them because of the claim that Jesus was the crucified and risen Messiah. The gentiles persecuted them because of the claim that Jesus was the only sovereign king. Connecting Christianity to historic Judaism through the rite of circumcision helped lessen the pressure from both.

Many false teachers today are working hard to make Christianity as acceptable to all as possible. We have gotten to the point that neither Judaism nor pagans would even persecute most Christians. The message from Christendom is so wide that it makes a narrow target for hatred. Only the Muslims understand the threat and will slaughter even nominal professing Christians.

Main Motivation

(v.13)

They are driven by a desire to boast in what is accomplished and therefore can be measured in the flesh. Paul often exposes the motivations of the false teachers. He has done here in Galatians. He has done in many other of his letters. False teachers are not just all about ideas, they are driven by the cravings and lusts of the realm of the flesh. These desires may be carnal, but sometimes they are esoteric and intellectual. But they are motivated by being able to produce lists and check marks whereby true spirituality can be measured. The resulting emphasis on conduct and visible, measurable fruit often obscures character, the issues of the heart.

Main Remedy

(v.14)

We boast in the cross. The main remedy to legalism and false teaching is keeping the cross up front and center. If we are going to boast, then we should boast only in the cross. What is shame to others is our glory. What looks like weakness and ugliness to others is where the very saving provision and transforming power of

God are. We boast in the cross because there we have been crucified to the world and the world to us. This is simply another way of saying the underlying principles.

Can we echo this? We must be able to say, “Not only will I not boast in anything except the cross, but it is the furthest thing from my mind.” The cross is what we rely on and revel in. It is what we hold up. While we hide ourselves behind the cross, we do not hide the cross. We will boast in the cross alone.

Main Reason

(v.15)

All that matters since the cross is the new creation. That is true in the redemptive historical sense. It is true in our personal history. Whether or not a person is circumcised; whether or not a person is identified with historic Judaism or with the Jews, has no value or worth in the sight of God. All that matters is the new creation, the new realm. All that matters is what God has done in bringing about the new, first in our own hearts and lives and later throughout the whole universe.

Main Result

(v.16)

There will be peace and mercy for all who walk by this rule. He says “this rule” ironically. You want to live by rules? Here is the one rule to live by, the rule that all that matters is God’s new creation. When we live as those who have been made new then there will peace and mercy for us from God and with one another.

One final note, the final phrase of verse 16 is often cited as proof that the church replaces Israel. It does no such thing. Given the context, this phrase is referencing the true Israel, gospel believing Jews. The church does not replace Israel nor does Israel have a separate purpose from the church. In Christ, they are merged. Christ is the true Israel. So believing Jews (the remnant of Israel) and believing Gentiles are both placed into Christ. They are one yet distinct and identifiable. The wall of partition, the Law, has been broken down (Ephesians 2:11-3:11) so that in Christ we are truly one.

Galatians has been about those false teachers who caused trouble in the church by distorting the gospel (1:7). They were lead by someone who troubled the church and would eventually be punished (5:10). Finally, because Paul has taught the gospel to the church and because he is marked by the cross-like suffering in his body, they are not to trouble him any more (6:17).

In our own gathered church, we will emulate the example of Paul. We counter error and false teaching at all points we can. We call you to live primarily in the context of relationships, not by legalism. We help the struggling and do good for others. We will stand up to false teaching recognizing what are the main issues, aims, agendas and affects.

Conclusion In closing on this Biblical counseling Sunday, may I challenge you to consider:

Are you in need of Biblical counseling, crises discipleship? Have you lost the struggle with a sin? Are you overcome? Have you been faltering and failing in ministry because you know you are walking by law or living in the flesh? Is sin tearing you apart? Swallow your pride and ask for help. Allow God to use the skilled and Spirit filled ministry of the Word in personal ministry to reconcile you to God and restore you to ministry.

Do you sense a desire to become more involved in helping people? Approach your elder/pastor or Pastor Greg to indicate that desire. Be prepared to get involved in the messiness of people's lives. Avail yourself of the practical training we offer each Spring. Crucify all that remains in you of the flesh and cultivate all that the Spirit produces so as to be qualified as one who is walking in the Spirit.

By faith, accept and affirm the centrality of community – that God calls you to physically and financially support your leaders, do good to the household of faith and to all as you have opportunity. Do so as a matter of sharing and as a matter of sowing. May I say this with gratitude – you have done so very well with Dan and I. We have much more we want to do in ministry that involves facility and vocational elders. Pray for wisdom in whatever small or large way you can share and do good.

Beware of false teachers who would lead you away from your faith in Christ and adherence to the gospel. Reject all good works, all of them, as the grounds of your right standing with God. Reject any and all who teach such things. Be discerning, particularly given their ready availability through religious media and the Internet.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

As Paul did, hear this petition and blessing:

My dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

NOTES

¹⁷ Any resemblance to any person or couple is unintended. If any of these stories are you, get help in Biblical counseling – now!

¹⁸ The common idea taught by many that the temptation is to the same sin as is being counseled simply will not stand up to the context. Contra the Judaizers who were legislating righteousness with little concern for the heart issues and the struggle people were in, Biblical counseling must have a Christ-like tenderness with people. In this flow of argument through chapter 5 to this point, the temptations then for the “one who is spiritual” would be violations of the fruit of the Spirit.