

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Spiritual Warfare and Wounded Warriors

I alluded to this text last week and was asked after the service if I would deal with it in more detail. The late Francis Schaeffer wrote a very helpful little book titled *The Mark of the Christian*. In it he noted how people down through the centuries have displayed many different symbols to show they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats (nowadays we use pins), hung chains about their necks (nowadays we see people hanging crosses from their ear lobes!), even had a special haircut. Schaeffer, without passing judgment on these things, goes on to say that there is a much better sign--a mark that serves to distinguish Christians--and that is that they love one another. Of course, Schaeffer did not come up with this insight on his own--he read it in the words of Jesus in John 13:33 – 35. Family ties place us under obligation, and Christians are commanded to love one another and to demonstrate this love to a watching world. Listen to this assortment of passages that underscore this point. “We are to accept one another just as Christ has accepted us” (Romans 15:7). “We are to have the same care for one another” (I Corinthians 12:25). “We are to serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). “We are to show forbearance to one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2). “We are to be kind to one another” (Ephesians 4:32). “We are to be forgiving one another” (Colossians 3:13) and “We are not to speak evil one of another” (James 4:11). Paul prayed that the Philippian Christians might abound in *love and real knowledge and real discernment* (Philippians 1:9 – 10). “Christian love,” wrote old John Brine, “is not a blind affection or passion; it is a spiritually discerning grace.”¹ Likewise, the great Jonathan Edwards defined Christian love as “an ingredient in a merely speculative faith, but it is the life and soul of a practical faith.”² When we walk by the Spirit, He produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. “To walk by the Spirit is to support the weak and the fallen and to bear their burdens.”³

I. DEALING WITH FALLEN CHRISTIANS

We must note the importance of the immediate context of Paul’s words in the opening verses of Chapter 6.

Walking by the Spirit and its relationship to justification by faith alone through grace only solely through the merits of Christ alone is the background to this section of Galatians.

A. The Tone of the Passage

Brethren immediately alerts us to the family metaphor. Christians by their relationship to Christ are related to one another (cf. Matthew 12:46 – 50).

B. Stumbling Christians

Christians sin, sometimes grievously so. Paul’s language implies that the person’s guilt is beyond question. He was *caught* in a trespass. The precise force of the word translated *caught* ΠΡΟΛΑΜΒΑΝŌ is uncertain. It could mean that the individual was actually caught red-handed, so to speak, in an act or that the trespass suddenly ensnared him. More than likely the trespass (transgression) ΠΑΡΑΠΤŌΜΑ falls into the category of the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19 – 21. John Owen noted “If a man be surprised, overtaken with a fault, yet he was tempted to it; for says he, ‘Consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted,’—that is, as he was when he was so surprised, as it were, at unawares. This men sometimes take no notice of, to their great disadvantage. When they are overtaken with a sin they set themselves to repent of that sin, but do not consider the temptation that was the cause of it, to set themselves against that also, to take care that they enter no more into it. Hence are they quickly again entangled by it, though they have the greatest detestation of the sin itself that can be expressed. He that would indeed get the conquest over any sin must consider his temptations to it, and strike at that root; without deliverance from thence, he will not be healed.

This is a folly that possesses many who have yet a quick and living sense of sin. They are sensible of their *sins*, not of their *temptations*,—are displeased with the bitter fruit, but cherish the poisonous root. Hence, in the midst of their humiliations for sin, they will continue in those ways, those societies, in the pursuit of those ends, which have occasioned that sin.”⁴

F.F. Bruce points out that this sin does not refer to a settled course of behavior but an isolated act which serves to make the person truly sensible of the sinfulness of his action.⁵

C. The Ministry of Restoration

John Calvin, speaking out of pastoral wisdom, has alerted us to two extremes to avoid. “The one is, that we wink when any of our friends have offended God, insomuch that even when he hath given some cause of stumbling, we let it slip, because we be loath to purchase his displeasure by rebuking him. And nowadays ye see that the common way of maintaining friendship in the world, is to give leave and license of all misdoing, through Devilish dissimulation...Mark that for one point. But there is also a contrary vice: namely overgreat rigorousness. For this is a property of the Hypocrites, that if they spy a mote in their neighbor’s eye, they cry out alarm upon him, and they must needs follow him with hew and cry, whereas in the meanwhile a great beam in their own eyes is nothing, as our Lord Jesus speaketh of them. Forasmuch therefore as there are many that widen their consciences to swallow up a whole ox [in their own cases], and in the mean season can strain at a gnat when it toucheth other men” therefore we must beware that we be not too rough and sharp in rebuking our brother.”⁶ What does restoration entail and how is it to be done?

1. WHAT IT IS. The word KATARTIZO has a rich background.⁷ It is used elsewhere in the New Testament of *mending* fishing nets (Matthew 4:21). In secular Greek of the day it was used in a medical sense of setting a broken bone or putting a dislocated arm back in place. It was also used in a social context of bringing quarreling factions together (cf. Hebrews 12: 12 – 13).
2. WHO IS TO DO THIS? Restoration is to be done by those who are *spiritual*. These are the ones who are mature in the Spirit. They are the ones who are keeping in step with the Spirit. The implication is that there are some Christians who lack the necessary maturity to do this. “Now we who are strong,” writes the Apostle Paul elsewhere, “ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength” (Romans 15:1). Puritan divine Richard Sibbes wrote, “Those that are fit to comfort others must be spiritual themselves first, as the apostle saith, Gal. vi. 1. Saith the wise and holy apostle, ‘If any man be overtaken,’ as, alas! we are all overtaken with some corruption or other, ‘ye that are spiritual, restore such a one,’ set him in joint, as the word is (*i*), ‘with the spirit of meekness, knowing that thou thyself mayest be tempted.’ The Spirit of God is a Spirit of comfort. The more we have of the Spirit, the fitter we are to comfort others. We see many men will speak very good things, but they do but personate sorrow, and personate comfort. It comes from them without feeling. As he saith, If thou didst believe these things that thou speakest, wouldst thou ever say them so? He that speaks good things without experience, he speaks as if he did never believe them. Those that speak things with experience, that have wrought them upon their hearts and spirits, there is such a demonstration in the manner of their speaking, of a spirit of love and meekness, and compassion, that it prevails marvelously. It is so true that our Saviour Christ himself, that he might have the more tender bowels of compassion towards us, he made it one end of his incarnation, as it is pressed again and again in Heb. ii. And Heb. iv. The apostle dwells upon it, ‘It became him to be man, to take upon him our infirmities, that he might be a merciful Redeemer, a merciful high priest,’ Heb. ii. 17. It was one end of his incarnation that he might not only save us, but that he might be a merciful Redeemer, that he might have experience of our infirmities. Of persecution, he was persecuted himself; of want, he wanted himself; of temptation, he was tempted himself; of wrath, he felt it himself, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ Mark xv. 34. Here is the comfort of a Christian soul, that Christ hath begun to him in all. Therefore it became him to be man, not only to redeem us, but to be a merciful high priest, a comfortable high priest.”⁸

3. HOW IS THIS TO BE DONE? This is to be done in a spirit of gentleness and humility. Note the caution: *looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted* (NASB). It is clear from this that even spiritually mature Christians can stumble. The word for *looking* is SKOPEŌ and is in the present tense. It stresses a diligent attentiveness, a mental state of alertness to the possibility of danger (cf. I Corinthians 10:12). This is, in fact, a sign of spiritual maturity. “Awareness of this is conducive to the cultivation and manifestation of the spirit of gentleness enjoined here.”⁹

CONCLUSION: Instead of describing love as an emotional response to culturally induced felt needs, Paul links it to proper demonstration of gentleness and humility--products of keeping in step with the Spirit and therefore a manifestation of the Spirit’s fruit. The *loving thing* to do is not what public opinion dictates, but what the Word of God commands as the Spirit of God leads. This understanding is not facilitated by polls and surveys but by prayerful dependence upon God, humble service, patient learning, true Christian friendship and genuine worship.”¹⁰ One final thought. My friend, Todd Pruitt, recently posted this pastoral observation: “The church is a messy place. All of the dysfunctions that are present in ‘the world’ are present in one degree or another in the church. It is no use denying this. In fact, denying the flawed realities of the church is counterproductive to the work of advancing the Gospel. Too often people have been invited to ‘get saved’ and join the church because Jesus will repair their marriage, fix their kids, banish their depression, and give them better self-esteem. They

bite on that shiny lure only to discover that they've been pulled into a reality that seems to be just as messy but less honest about it.

This is not to deny the reality of sanctification. God forbid (Rom. 6:1)! But sanctification is often times maddeningly slow (Yours, of course, not mine). This means that you and I will have to worship with, serve with, learn with, and labor with people who are at least as sinful as we are. But of course this is by design. The Gospel is best proclaimed by men and women who are still as dependent upon the redeeming grace of Jesus as they were the moment they were converted. The radical justice and mercy of the cross is best displayed in the lives of saved sinners, a reality Luther referred to as *simul iustice et peccator* (simultaneously just and sinner). It is in the lives of the broken yet redeemed that grace still retains its beautiful aroma.

If the church was made up of fully sanctified people then how would the reality of the Gospel be put on display? No one would need to be forgiven and no one would need to forgive. If everything in the church were peachy then no one would need mercy or be required to show mercy. In the non-messy church there would be no need for patience, willing inconvenience, or sacrifice.

Gabriel Fluhrer over at Ref21 has written a helpful post on the reality of the church this side of heaven. [The] church is made up of people like us: sinful, slow to do good, quick to speak and gossip, full of envy, strife, jealous and hatred. That is what we are apart from Christ.

However, we have been redeemed. We are united with Christ. And now, we can, by God's grace, begin to see the effects of this union in our daily lives. But we still sin and this shows up, perhaps most pointedly, at church.

Added to this great problem of our own personal sin is the fact that we live in an anti church age. I passed a church here in Philadelphia the other day with these words on its sign: 'Barely organized.' Of course, that is hip these days. We don't want 'organized religion' - we don't want 'our daddy's church.' When I saw the sign, I couldn't help but wonder, 'How many of us would go to a doctor's office with the same words on its sign?'

But the church is the place where God has called us to have our souls doctored – hearing the Word preached, serving our fellow saints and speaking and doing good to those without. However, the church is not only God's means of Gospel proclamation, but a place where souls are restored. It is the place where we can find healing, perhaps in unexpected ways – like learning to get along with the people there who are not like us.

This is one reason I am very allergic to the burgeoning 'house church' movement here in the U.S. Having the privilege of knowing suffering saints in actual house churches that meet in countries where saints are persecuted mercilessly, I find it almost laughable that we have such things here in the land of the free and home of the brave. It is indicative of the anti-church age in which we live however.

I wonder, of ten, why are people, particularly young college students, drawn to these mysterious entities called house churches here in the U.S.? Not because of persecution. Rather, I think, it is because they are dissatisfied with the church. And I am sympathetic to them – barely. The church is a place where you can get hurt. It is full of people who are insensitive, unloving at times, insecure and socially awkward.

Here's the rub though: you are one of those people. The problem with the church is not the institution itself, for God has ordained it and sent his Son to die for her. No, we're the problem. So before you go running to a house church here in the free West, ask yourself: am I running to Jesus or running from sinners? You can only run to Jesus as you run with fellow sinners. If you run away from them, you'll be running in circles, not to Christ."¹¹

ENDNOTES

¹ John Brine, *A Treatise On Various Subjects* (rpt. The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1987), p. 104.

² Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 13.

³ S.L. Johnson, Jr., *Galatians: Believers Bible Bulletin* (Believers Chapel, Dallas, TX, 1978), No. 15, p. 2.

⁴ *The Works of John Owen VI* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 118.

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary on Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1982), p. 260.

⁶ J. Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians* (rpt. Old Paths Publication, 1995), pp. 779 – 801.

⁷ J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1972), p. 332.

⁸ *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes III* (James Nichol, 1862), p. 71; Thomas Goodwin, another of the great Puritan divines said concerning this. "Ye that are spiritual, restore such a one, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted,' Gal. vi. 1; so as he speaks of such as have their hearts raised up to the best frame, through the most deep and serious repentance. And now we will suppose one that hath formerly fallen himself into the same sin which another is fallen into, but not yet restored, but himself is returned by repentance out of it; for, indeed, such a spiritual man is of all other like to be the meekest bone-setter of a man fallen; and even such doth St. Paul exhort to consider that themselves may for the time to come be also or in like manner tempted,—that is fall as this man fell,—and therefore so be tempted as to fall into the same sin again that he was fallen into." *The Works of Thomas Goodwin III* (rpt. Tanski Publications, 1996), p. 423.

⁹ R.Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 286.

¹⁰ D. Webster, *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong With Marketing the Church?* (IVP, 1992), p.29.

¹¹ <http://toddpruitt.blogspot.com/2010/09/loving-church-that-is-as-flawed-as-i-am.html>.