

Galatians 5:25-6:10

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[0 : 00] So, I wonder what it is that you think makes a Christian a really spiritual Christian.! Or a really spiritual person.

You look at this person and you think the spirit is really with them.! They are really spiritual. Maybe you imagine a monk style Christian who floats around on a cloud of holiness and no problems touch them.

Maybe someone with unusual spiritual gifts. Speaking in tongues or something like that. Well, Paul actually has a different kind of a vision of a spiritual person here.

Remember, if you were here last week, Paul contrasts the work of the flesh and the work of the spirit in a person. And Christians are people who are no longer relying on themselves, the flesh, to be right with God.

But they are taken over and empowered by the Holy Spirit who joins them to Jesus Christ. And so Christians are spiritual people. In verse 25 there, he says we are to walk in step with the spirit.

[1 : 21] So we are to be the people that we are, spiritual people. But Paul wants to now show us what the spiritual life looks like. But what does a spiritual Christian look like?

And it's more run of the mill than we expect. And if you notice the main theme now in our passage, it is all about how our spiritual life is seen in our relational life.

The main theme here is how relationships are changed and conducted by spiritual people. If you just scan over the bookends of this passage, you can see that.

See the mention of the word us. Let us keep in step with the spirit. Let us not become conceited. The repetition of the phrase, one another.

Not provoking one another. Envyng one another. Bearing one another's burdens. And then at the bottom in verse 10, Let us do good to everyone, especially the household of faith.

[2 : 28] You see, you can see how spiritual I am when I am with us. Spirituality, for Paul, is gauged on how you relate to other people, one another.

And it's about here dealing with each other's mess, each other's failures and sins in real world relationships. A couple of things about this here. He says spiritual people, first of all, have a sense of corporate empathy.

Number one, spiritual people deal with each other charitably. Spiritual people deal with each other charitably. So if you look at chapter 6 verse 1 there, what Paul does there, he pictures a situation where someone has transgressed.

They've sinned against God. If anyone is caught in a transgression. So that's the scenario. And the spiritual person should respond in a certain way.

To restore that person in a spirit of gentleness. So the response of a spiritual person should be to agree with Paul here in how he describes what this sinner has done.

[3 : 53] He describes it actually with great charity and understanding. This person in the scenario, they've sinned against God in a serious way.

But the emphasis in the way that Paul describes it is on them falling into this transgression. The emphasis is on the unwitting folly of a transgression that they've been caught in, he says.

Like a bird caught in a trap. It's something that a person has done and it's been really, really stupid. But he emphasises this sin as a mistake rather than a deliberate, remorseless act.

Now it doesn't take away the responsibility of this person's transgression or sin. But the spiritual person is to view other people's sins in that way.

The spiritual person is to give other people the benefit of the doubt. Not to sweep wrongdoing under the carpet. No. He says that things must be restored.

[5 : 07] That person must be restored. The wrongs done must be straightened out. Wrong things must be set in order. That person is to be brought back from sinning.

Stop doing it. But there's to be a sympathy about it. Sympathy about other people's failings and empathy. And the truly spiritual person, the one who walks in step with the spirit, is like that. They empathise with other people's failings. And just in the wider context, I think the reason for this, this emphasis, it comes from a corporate understanding amongst spiritual people of the battles that truly spiritual people face against sin and against temptation.

And only a person who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within them will get that. And will sympathise with that. If you remember in our passage last week, he's just been talking about the war that goes on in every Christian life between the flesh, Paul's way of describing the kind of leftovers of ourselves after we've trusted in Jesus Christ.

The flesh that opposes the Holy Spirit's work in your life. And there is this battle going on within a Christian. The Apostle Peter, he writes, I urge you to keep yourself from the passions of the flesh that wage war on your souls.

[6 : 48] The enemy within is the flesh who fights against the Holy Spirit's guiding and leading to keep you from doing the things you want to do, remember Paul said.

And the noise of that war in every Christian life is there for everyone. None of us, if we've trusted in Jesus Christ and have his Spirit, are immune to that battle.

Actually, the war is a sign that you do belong if that battle is going on. So each truly spiritual Christian is in the trenches.

We're all brothers and sisters in arms. In arms against the passions of the flesh which wage war against our souls. Against the temptations of the people that we used to be and who we were.

The old me and the old you. I don't know if you saw any of the commemorations from D-Day on the TV last week. What was it that kept those veterans heading up the beach towards the German lines?

[7 : 58] Well, in the kind of stories and the interviews, one of the kind of common thing that came out across all of them was that most of them were not thinking about themselves.

They were thinking about the man next to them. That was what got them up the beach. It wasn't a question of me, but it was a question of us. And there was this sense of corporate progress being together that got them through it.

And thinking like that is heading towards what Paul is on about here. Especially when it comes to other people's failures. A church father once said about the sins of a close friend, he fell yesterday but I may fall today.

Because when we're engaged in this battle, as we walk in step with the Spirit, at times the man or woman next to us might fall. And the battle that goes on in our own hearts is so fierce and so scary that we can't help sympathise with others.

And hold our hands out and grab the fallen Christian next to us. It is to our shame, isn't it, that we glory in the failure of others at times.

[9 : 21] I do that to my shame. In my heart I rewrite Galatians chapter 6. If anyone is caught in a transgression I should feel smug about that.

And I can say I could have done so much better. I'm like the Pharisee in the story told by Jesus.

Thank you Lord that I'm not like them. But do you know that lack of empathy that we often display really comes from an immaturity and an inexperience in the war that goes on in the Christian life.

And the most spiritual people Paul is arguing here are the veterans who can sympathise with other people's failures. failures. Since they are the veterans of failure after failure after failure restored by God's grace each time.

Paul is saying that that is the sign of a spiritual person who has this empathy. Because the spiritual person by definition knows what it feels like to be at war with the flesh.

And when you fail my first response should be brother sister I've been there. I've also fallen.

[10 : 39] I've heard the noise of war as well. And so if we lack sympathy we're just acting like civilians with no understanding and no experience of the battle.

And a person who lacks empathy and seeks to restore another fallen believer but in a spirit of harshness I'd suggest knows little of the war with the flesh.

Little of the opposition that he poses because actually he runs riots within them with no opposition whatsoever. The unsympathetic person knows nothing of the malice of the flesh because actually

they've made him their best friend.

Paul adds in verse 2 bear one another's burdens. It is the sense of struggling together against the weight and the pressure of temptation.

So there should be this corporate sense of empathy amongst truly spiritual people those who are walking in step of the spirit to deal with others charitably. Secondly though there should be an individual sense of honesty.

[11 : 51] deal with others charitably. Number 2 deal with yourself humbly. Deal with yourself humbly. We shouldn't misunderstand Paul here because as he emphasizes relationships that us Paul is not saying that the truly spiritual person has no thoughts about themselves actually to be charitable to others and to know how to relate to others properly we do need to think about ourselves and have the right view of ourselves.

And a lack of empathy Paul goes on to say is the symptom of an elevated view of yourself. Let's look at verse 3 Now do you see the logic here?

He says the stuff about relating to others gently verse 3 4 there's the linking words if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing he deceives himself.

So how you are with others springs from how you are with yourself. There are some stories going around of people who've lied on their CVs for job applications and they got into a situation where the truth has finally had to come out.

One candidate was applying for a position as an academic in the field of philosophy at a top university and in his CV he claimed that he'd studied under the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who the only problem with that was that Nietzsche died over a hundred years ago and that came out in the interview and the truth came out.

[13 : 39] another lied on his CV that he mastered the piano by the age of seven but at a kind of board of directors launch event they brought in a grand piano without warning him and told him to play for the whole group.

The truth had to come out at that point. Now they're silly stories aren't they but they illustrate a point here that these bad relationships and harshness and envy and conceit amongst the Galatians is due to an overblown sense of self-importance and that leads to this lack of empathy and of deceiving yourself about yourself it's like fudging the spiritual CV so the original Greek of verse 3 if anyone thinks he's something when he's nothing he deceives himself is probably a bit stronger than how it seems in the English.

Paul is saying there don't think of yourself as something because actually on your own you're nothing it's really strong. apart from what God has given you and made you to be you are nothing and he's not just talking here about your skills and your gifts and your abilities but your very being who you are what you are and he's saying who do you think you are when without God you are nothing you are nobody so the antidote to unspiritual unsympathetic harshness with others is to view yourself humbly to admit that all anyone is is by the grace of God alone and it's really a question isn't it of which standards you use to assess yourself and that is really important because we are to assess ourselves and to think of ourselves and judge ourselves verse 4 let each one test his own work we are to judge and assess ourselves but the question is by which standard because the very easy thing is to compare ourselves with others isn't it verse 4 that's the concern that your boast will be or his boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour but the standards of our lives and the way that we view ourselves is so often based on the failures of others isn't it other people's faults kind of become our norms the sort of line of acceptable behaviour we make it too easy for ourselves as long as

I'm better than them and I haven't sinned in that way I'm good I'm okay that's one of the ways that we deceive ourselves because I haven't done that sin well that makes me someone but if there's a reason to boast it should be in yourself alone and not in your neighbour and those sort of comparisons really don't matter what matters is what you do yourself and there is another standard that Paul gives us not other people it's there in verse 2 bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ we're told here use God's measures on yourself not your measures that you've cooked up in comparison with someone else so someone else's failure is neither a reason for me to boast because I've been there in the war in the battle and neither are they a reason to slacken off as we see others fail their sin does not excuse me or become the standard of my conduct no we are to bear our own load verse 5 so let me try and wrap up a little bit

Paul is saying isn't he here that you cannot be truly spiritual you cannot walk in step with the Holy Spirit and do what agrees with him and merely keep yourself to yourself that the flesh asks what about me but the spirit saying here what about us what about your brother and sister you can't be a Holy Spirit walking stepping with the spirit kind of Christian and not commit to other brothers and sisters you can't belong to Jesus and walk in step with his spirit if you don't have an interest in Jesus people there is no such thing as an independent stay at home Christian unless your circumstances are really extreme

[18 : 58] Jesus teaches us to pray our father not my father if you've got no interest in that or you're only interested in picking open the wounds of fallen brothers and sisters and loving that and sort of revelling in their failures and rebuking in a spirit of harshness Paul is saying look you are acting like a civilian who knows little of the war between flesh and spirit if your first response is to someone else's failure I could have done better you are deceiving yourself no you couldn't you are only what you are by God's grace without God you are nothing St.

Augustine says there is no sin which one person has committed that another person may not commit also Luther adds we all stand in slippery places and so we've got a great sympathy haven't we for brothers and sisters that we know for folk who find themselves caught in some sin or other and they are really sorry and it's been a stupid thing and we aim to help restore them in gentleness and empathy and that kind of response that is what true spiritual Christianity looks like never mind all the razzmatazz it is about messy one to one relationships between brothers and sisters and only people who have the spirit of God have been there and can sympathise because of the battle and can say there but for the grace of

God go I he or she fell yesterday but I may fall today and the mature spiritual veteran comes alongside the fallen and says stand up brother stand up sister in arms together we stand against our common enemy the flesh and I've been there let's pray brothers and Thank you.