

Galatians 5:25-6:10

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[0 : 00] I don't know if you watched it last night, you probably didn't, you probably have better things to do. But on Channel 4 last night they started their new reality TV show. It's entitled Eden, which tells you everything you need to know about it.

The idea is that they sent a various array of people off to a Scottish island to try and recreate a paradise world. Now my wife kind of gave up after not quite the end of episode 1, because she rightly could see where it was all going to go.

It's not going to be paradise at all. People are already squabbling and arguing. Why is that? Of course the answer is the problem with the world is not out there. It's not in those people shooting people on the streets of America or blowing up people on the beaches of France.

The problem is in here, isn't it? The problem is with the human hearts. As one theologian once put it in the 16th century, man is turned in on himself. As human beings, we're turned in on ourselves. Focused on our own desires, our own needs. But God's great plan is to make a new people. To renew us. To turn us the right way around again.

[1 : 08] And that's what we've been seeing in this book of Galatians. Chapter 1, verse 4. It's that Christ has delivered us from this present evil age. From this age of people turned in on themselves. Now for those who trusted in Christ, we're being made new.

If you were here last week, we saw the conflict that the Holy Spirit provokes. The Holy Spirit lives in every believer in Christ. There's this conflict between our old natural nature, the flesh.

And this new nature being created by the Spirit. Having spoken about the conflict the Spirit provokes, this week Paul is talking about the community that the Spirit promotes around us.

We see that starting in verse 25, this great command. If we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Everyone who has faith in Christ has the Holy Spirit living in us.

Leading us. And our job is to keep in step with the Spirit. The image here is like a marching band, if you like. Have you ever seen them marching along?

[2 : 11] Everyone keeping in step as they play their instruments and beat their drums, whatever they're doing. Well, the Holy Spirit sets the pace in our lives. We're to march to his beat, not dance to the tune of our own selfishness.

And that's why verse 26 is a natural warning. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another and envying one another. See, why do we become proud?

Why do we provoke other people? It's because we have pride in ourselves and our own achievements and we're running life our own way. But if we know we're only put right with God through faith in Christ Jesus, which Paul has been arguing about all the way through, then we've got nothing to be proud about.

We've achieved nothing. There's nothing in our record that makes God accept us. And so, being conceited, envying one another, provoking one another, that should all go. And instead we should walk in step with the Spirit.

Now, the Spirit's great work is to help us fulfil the command to love. So, you look back up to verse 14. Paul tells us the whole law, the whole Old Testament law is fulfilled in one word.

[3 : 18] Shall love your neighbour as yourself. That's what the Spirit is enabling us to do. The very first fruit of the Spirit, in verse 23, is the fruit of love. He creates love within us.

Now, how does that love work out in the Christian community? In the church. Well, Paul's going to explain that now in verses 1-10 of chapter 5. And he can sum it up in two words, really.

Humility, verses 1-5. Humility, and then generosity, verses 6-10. That's the expressions of love we have here. Let's first of all look at that humility there.

Humility in serving others. Look at verse 1. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

See, love is demonstrated with this humility of wanting to see the fallen Christian restored. That word for restored there is the same word used for fixing nets, or mending a broken bone in other places in the Bible.

[4 : 18] It's about helping someone back to Christ, back to the wholeness that only Jesus can offer. Sin spoils, sin breaks. We need restoration. So this humility and love is shown in trying to restore a believer.

It's everyone's job. The spiritual here are not just some elite. Rather, it's everyone who has the spirit in them. Everyone who's truly trusted in Jesus. Is to help restore one another.

And of course, Jesus is our model here, isn't it? He is the one who came and restored us. When we were sinners, he didn't shout from heaven and say, pull yourself together, do better.

Rather, he came in humility. And restored us. By dying for our sins. Rising to new life that we can have new life. But with this humility in restoring others, there comes a personal accountability as well.

Look at the end of verse 1. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. So we're all open to temptation, aren't we? We still live in this present evil age.

[5 : 26] A world marked by temptation. When we're helping someone else, it's easy to fall into temptation to be proud. Oh, I haven't done what they did. Or perhaps to fall into the temptation to gossip.

Maybe even to fall into the same sin. How many pastors have gone to help out married couples where the husband was having an affair. And they've ended up having an affair with the wife. Who'd been left. We have to watch over ourselves. So here's the first characteristic. Humble restoration of the forward. But secondly, there's humility in helping the burden.

Look at verse 2. Bear one another's burdens. And so fulfil the law of Christ. We all have many burdens to carry in life, don't we? For some it's ill health.

For others it's caring for someone with ill health. For some it's not having a job. For others it's having a job where there's too much to do. Yet we're called to bear one another's burdens.

[6 : 24] As the Spirit creates love in us, he enables us to do that. And again, that's what Jesus did for us, wasn't it? He bore our burden of sin. He carried our griefs and transgressions.

And today, as our great high priest, Jesus stands in heaven praying for us. Giving us grace as we turn to him. Let me give a practical example. Three years ago, just over three years ago now, I was in hospital for about six weeks.

And every day I was in hospital, the church I was part of that time brought meals for my family. And that meant some people drove many miles to do that. Because people were very spread out.

It was amazing things. I got well enough to be able to talk to people. To be able to tell the doctors and nurses what my church family was doing. They were bearing my wife's burdens. Bearing my family's burdens. That can be a challenge for us, can't it?

It's not easy. It's never convenient. But as the Spirit creates love and humility in us, we look to others' needs and not our own. And Paul gives us an incentive for doing this in verse 2, doesn't he?

[7 : 29] Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. It's a funny thing to say really in this letter, isn't it? If you've been following it all the way through, he's saying, you don't have to obey the law of Moses.

But now he's saying, this is how you fulfill the law of Christ. What's he on about? Well, the law that the Galatians were tempted to fulfill was a ceremonial law of getting circumcised, of obeying Sabbaths.

Of doing the Old Testament ceremonial law. Now all of that was redundant now. Because all of that pointed to the coming of Jesus. But when Jesus came, it's not like God had no concern for how we live.

Rather, Jesus came to fulfill all that law pointed forward to. Not only in the ceremonies, but in his life. As he lived the life of love and all to live. And he, of course, sums up the whole law by giving us a command.

The command to love our neighbours as ourselves. It's repeated there in verse 14. And he told us, he told his disciples to follow the pattern he'd given. John 15 verse 12.

[8 : 34] This is my commandment. That you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this. Than someone lay down his life for his friends.

As we bear one another's burdens, we're in a sense laying down our lives. To help other people carry their burdens. It's a little mini picture of what Christ has done on a huge scale for us. So this is what the humility is to look like. It's humility in lovingly restoring the fallen. It's humility in lovingly bearing one another's burdens.

And thirdly, it's humility in evaluating ourselves. Verse 3. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work.

It's easy for us to think we're doing alright, isn't it? As human beings, we love to compare ourselves to other people. Oh, I'm doing better than Bob over there. I'm at church every week.

[9 : 34] I at least pray. I read my Bible. But the danger is we deceive ourselves. It's Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 9. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

Who can understand it? So Paul says part of our humility is a humble evaluation of ourselves. To check realistically how we are and how we're doing. The language here is the idea of testing. Like a jeweler might hold a precious stone up to a light to examine it. See if it's genuine or not. So we have to test ourselves. We're to look for objective evidence, not merely subjective feelings. See, naturally as human beings, what's our inclination? Naturally our inclination as human beings is to judge others and serve ourselves, isn't it? That's our default setting.

We judge others, well they're no good, and we serve ourselves. I get what I want. But the spirit is turning us the right way back again. So we no longer turn in on ourselves. So instead we serve others and judge ourselves.

[10 : 41] We serve others and judge ourselves instead of judging others and serving ourselves. That's how the spirit is turning us round the right way. And you see why we should do that at the end of verse 4.

Let each one test his own work. And his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. Now what's Paul meaning there? Well, let me tell you what he's not meaning. He's not meaning boasting and saying, Whoa, look what I've done. I'm so good. You can see that because of the context here for a start. He's talking about humility. He can't be encouraging pride. Also he's talking about life in the spirit.

So everything that every good that we do is through the spirit's power. So it's not getting proud about what we've done. But also if you look over, if you look carefully at that verse, when does Paul say we're going to boast?

Verse 4. His reason to boast will be in himself. It's not that we boast now, it's we're boasting in a day to come. The day the Lord Jesus comes back.

[11 : 42] Because that's the day we have to bear our own load. Our own responsibility. Our own accountability. For the places God has put us. Responsibilities God has given us.

Each one has that load. I'm a father, a husband. An elder in a church. These are responsibilities God has given me. These are a load I bear gladly.

And on the day of judgment I'll be accountable for those things. You see what Paul is ultimately boasting in here is not merely himself or the spirit's work. He's boasting in Christ through whom he has everything.

Look over the column to verse 14. Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. By which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

So our boasting is not about our own achievements. Our boasting is Christ-centered. Praising God for all his good works. Which we're enabled to do by his grace. And that's why we're to test ourselves.

[12 : 44] So on judgment day there may be no surprises. We may stand firm. So here's the first aspect of what it means to keep in step with the spirit. We're to serve one another in love.

And humility. Humility in service. Humility in restoring the fallen. Humility in helping the burden. Humility in evaluating ourselves. Not judging others.

But as well as humility. Paul then talks about generosity. In verses 6 to 10. But first of all verse 6 talks about generous support for teachers. That the one who is taught the word.

Share all good things with the one who teaches. From the beginning of the Christian church. It has been the expectation that those. Who are set aside for the work of teaching. Can receive financial support from those who are taught.

Because it's an important thing. And I'm thankful for the churches. That have paid for me. So I no longer have to make toothpaste. But I can preach the good news instead. That's my old job. I don't miss it.

[13:45] It was fun. But I don't miss it. But that's just a specific example of the kind of generosity. That we're to show. Look on to verse 7 and 8.

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever one sows. One will also reap. For one who sows to his own flesh. Will from the flesh reap corruption. In other words.

If you invest in fulfilling your own selfish desires. That will go all the way to corruption ultimately in eternity. But the one who sows to the spirit. The one who invests in all that spirit leads us to do. From the spirit will reap eternal life. So part of this general exhortation to generosity. Comes with this call for genuine watchfulness. And watch over our desires and ambitions.

Again. We're checking ourselves. That we're marching to the spirit's tune. Rather than dancing to our own selfishness. We need to be complacent. Not watchful. See here as everywhere.

[14:49] In the New Testament. It's faith alone that saves us. Faith alone saves us as we trust in Jesus. But saving faith is never alone. Because as we trust in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit lives in us and changes us. So while it's faith alone that saves. Saving faith is never alone. That should be seen in our lives. In our generosity. In this particular case.

So there's a question for us all here isn't there? As we look at verse 7. Are we being deceived? Because God will not be deceived.

Are we genuinely sowing to the spirit? Or are we living selfish lives to the flesh? Well this generosity looks like generous support for those who teach the Bible.

Genuine watchfulness over ourselves. And thirdly. A generous goodness to all believers and to others. Look at verse 9. Let us not grow weary of doing good. For in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

[15:50] So then as we have opportunity. Let us do good to everyone. And especially to those who are of a household of faith. Doing good can be hard work. Can't it? That's why charities talk about compassion fatigue.

So we're bombarded with advertisements for people in need. They're worried about tiring us all out. So we grow weary. But Paul has a very big incentive here for not getting weary.

He says in due season you will reap. If we do not give up. What is that due season? Or the sense in which we benefit now. The joy of giving.

The joy of Jesus says we're blessed to give and to receive. But ultimately we'll reap the greatest rewards. The fullest reward when Jesus comes back. What an amazing reward to hear our Saviour. The one who died for us. Say well done. Good and faithful servant. Come enter into your master's happiness. See here's the great cure of compassion fatigue.

[16:50] It's not to look for ease now. But to look for the life to come when Christ comes back. And given that harvest we can reap there. What should we do? Well verse 10.

As we have opportunity. Let us do good to everyone. We can't do good to absolutely everyone. But there are some people God brings into our lives. Aren't there? Who we have opportunity to help. Where sometimes we happen to have some money we can use to help others. But Paul does give a priority here. Do good to everyone. But we have a special responsibility. Especially to those who are the household of faith.

So our spirit enabled generosity. Begins in the global church. Begins with God's people around the world. And overflows to others as well.

So the world longs for that genuine community. Doesn't it? Community marked by loving service. By generosity. That's why Channel 4 has started Eden.

[17:50] I tried to. The hope will be this new community. Where there won't be the frictions and tensions and aggravation and selfishness. That we see in the world. But human beings cannot create that community on our own.

Can we? What the Holy Spirit of God does as we trust in Christ. A few years ago I lived in America. My wife and I lived in America. Our first child was born there. We were students in seminary. We didn't have a huge amount of money. We had some wonderful neighbours who were also students in seminary. We lived in seminary housing. And they had probably less money than we did. My parents were coming to visit us and saying we didn't have enough room in a car.

To go and take my parents and our baby daughter around. And so we were looking into hiring a car. And Dave and Melissa looked and said, Baby, darling, you take our people care. It's only for a week.

You have ours. We'll borrow your little car. We will work at work. And time and time again, on a number of occasions, they would come and babysit for us. So that we could go out.

[18 : 51] They were generous for their time. They were generous for their possessions. It was a loving community. And that was because of the Spirit at work. Creating that community.

Remaking us in God's image. Bearing his fruit in our lives. So in our life together, Paul says, Keep in step with the Spirit.

As he creates this love in you, let that love be seen in your humility and your generosity. Let's pray.