

Love the Church

Galatians 6:1-10, Rod Fultz

A popular angle on improving your marriage is to know your spouse's love language. In other words, you should know the practical means by which they are geared to receive your affection. For instance, I could buy my lovely wife six dozen roses and she would wonder why I "wasted" all that money. However, if I walk in, sit down and make time to listen to her share her heart and then get up and clean the kitchen, that's a grand slam in her book. She feels loved. It is a good thing for husbands to know how to love their wives. Parents should likewise, know how to love their kids. That builds loving families.

But, is it possible, that we who are members of God's family do not really know how to practically love the Bride of Christ? How do we love the people whom God has chosen to pour out an infinite degree of affection and grace upon, who He in fact, sacrificed His own Son to save? How can we go about loving the church?

Two weeks ago, as we studied the end of Galatians 5, I elaborated on how keeping in step with the Spirit means joining Him in making disciples of all nations. Today, we are going to see the other half of that same coin: Loving those already in the Household of Faith.

Love the Church

The first fruit of the Spirit is Love and the expression of that Love starts with the household of faith. Those who keep in step with the Spirit will be led by Him to grow in harmonious relationships within the body. That is what He does. Listen as Paul teaches us how to love Christ's Church:

Galatians 6:1-10 (ESV)

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load. ⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

This passage is a complete answer to Cain's irresponsible question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" God says: Yes! That is why I made you brothers. One ancient commentator pointed out that (in the Greek) "brothers" is both the first word of Galatians 6 and the last word. Paul's whole argument here lies hidden under that one word. In other words, because God has made us family, we have to learn to love one another in practical ways that glorify and please our Father.

Love the Church

1. Rescue the Trapped

No matter what they say men who own 4WD pickups all secretly live for one thing. Do you know what it is? Finding another vehicle stuck in the mud with no one around to help. They all keep a good chain in the back so that they can quickly wheel up and rescue the stranded motorist. Even if you don't belong to that breed, if you were hiking with your family down by the river and saw someone mired down in quicksand, you would stop and do all you could to get them out. Yet, how many times do we observe our brothers and sisters sinking down in their struggle with sin and pass on by consumed with our own concerns? We assure ourselves it is "none of our business" and we have enough problems of our own. Christ your King says here: Oh yes it is your business!! They are one of my blood-bought sheep. Their soul is of infinite value to Me and they are in the grip of a wolf! You no longer belong to yourself you are now a member of Me. I have put my Spirit within you to empower you to rescue and restore fellow members who have become ensnared by sin.

Galatians 6:1a (ESV)

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

"You, who are spiritual, does not equate to some elite group of super Christians, but every child of God in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. In every church (sadly) true believers will occasionally sin intentionally, denying (at least temporarily) the Lord who bought them. But what happens more often than that, is that sin deceptively lures them off of the path of righteousness and into its mire, like quicksand. That is what this verb we translate "caught" speaks to. Without expecting it believers get ensnared by the deceitfulness of sin. "Transgression" is not the usual word for sin, but it conveys the idea of suddenly going off course.

Have you ever been trying to find an address in a city with tall buildings? Your GPS can't get a signal, giving you no direction for minutes at a time. All of sudden you discover you are on a one way street in heavy traffic going the wrong way? Or maybe you are driving on the highway in a heavy rainstorm at night and hit a puddle and your car hydroplanes over into the next lane? Well, what does being thrown off course look like in our daily lives?

How about a married believer being led by the Spirit aiming to love the Lord with all their heart and love their neighbor as themselves and one day an old flame contacts them via Facebook.

They begin what feels like innocent and cordial conversations before they know it, their heart has been warmed and they remember what it was like. The snare has sprung! They need help.

Here's what makes a child of God (in a scenario like that) doubly vulnerable to being trapped.

1) They live in spiritual isolation.

If all a member does is stroll into this church meeting (like you would a movie or store) and then walk out at the end, if you have little or no relationship with other members in the Body other than to say hi and talk about the weather. Or your latest health challenge. No one in the Body will be in close enough relationship to even recognize the symptoms that the brother is entangled in sin. Lone sheep are prime targets for wolves.

2) They fail to recognize the deceitfulness of sin.

Those strange passions feel so "right" the brother will not recognize quickly enough that the temptation is in fact a trap! They follow their heart instead of the Word of God.

Like the woman of Folly (Prov. 9), sin seduces those who were going straight on their way saying:

Proverbs 9:17–18 (ESV)

¹⁷ "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."

¹⁸ But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

It might not be sexual sin like this It might be something else, bitterness or just a season of doubting or pride But do you know someone in the body ensnared, drawn off course by sin? How will you respond? Don't condemn them, pronounce judgment upon them or gossip about them (that's what Pharisees do).

You rescue them in the Spirit of Gentleness. You are to be like a paramedic gently and carefully removing someone trapped under a wrecked car. See it as a call from God to make time to sit down with them (privately). Through careful and loving conversation allow the Holy Spirit to tenderly probe into their life to see how they are doing with Jesus. Lovingly express concern about what you have observed and see if they are open to your perspective. The only way you will care enough to do this, the only way you will be able to do it gently is by the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit and you will exercise the same grace and charity and the same care towards other sinners, which God Himself extends to you, because gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit.

The Goal (in this activity) is greater than restoration. The word (restore in our text) is the same word used to describe the disciples mending their fishing nets, or to set a broken bone back in place. That is what happens if a man gets caught in a leg hold bear trap. He needs to be gently removed from the trap (being careful not to damage ligaments, etc.) then the broken leg bone

needs to be set back in place. God says, if you are indwelt by the Spirit, you are to be my agents of rescuing and restoring one another. It is your family obligation, if indeed the Spirit of the Father dwells in you. But understand, while you obey this command that sin is contagious. You are not immune to the same temptation which lured your brother or sister astray when you venture to the edge of the quicksand. You are potential prey for the same trap.

Galatians 6:1b (ESV)

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Don't underestimate the law of sin resident in your flesh. What most Christians say (at least to themselves) when they discover a brother trapped in sin is, that's disgusting "I could never do anything like that." They are so arrogant or weak or stupid. You ever think or say that? It is a delusion. You could, and you might do exactly what they did.

In your flesh dwells no good thing it is only the grace of God that keeps you walking with Christ. (Rom. 7). So our cautious attitude as rescue agents needs to be: "Apart from the grace of God, there go I." Love the people for whom Christ died. Go to their rescue when they are trapped in sin. Jesus did it for you, when you were sinking down.

Love the Church

2. Practice Mutual Burden Bearing

Have you ever wondered why in the providence of God He allowed His own dear Son walking in perfect obedience towards Golgatha to become so physically weak in carrying His cross that he needed Simon of Cyrene to bear that tree up the hill? Could it be the lesson that for every human being, even the Son of Man, a time comes where you have a burden too heavy for one person to carry and a testimony that everyone among us will occasionally need that kind of emergency assistance? Also that, in as much as you bear a burden for the least of these (in need) you have done it unto Christ Himself? Could that be the reason?

Paul says yes. In fact, that is what it looks like (practically) to love your neighbor as yourself:

Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Again, this is not a suggestion to be considered. It's an imperative command, either to be obeyed or disobeyed to your own peril. Because, in the church, Satan culls out those unable to carry heavy loads while they are weighed down (with no one to help). He sinks them into depression, self-pity and despair. The Law of Christ (only mentioned here in NT) is clear in the context of Galatians, that Paul means the command is to love one another. We fulfill it by coming alongside each other when we discover a heavy load. How can you offer relief?

1) Listen to them.

Often, people bear burdens in their heart, because they don't really have anyone that cares enough to let them talk about their pain. Don't try to immediately plop down a solution be a compassionate friend.

2) Offer prayer

You church, are good at that. Even stop and pray right then and there. Keep on remembering them. Let them know you are praying with an email or text. Send verses / promises you are praying for them.

3) Serve them.

Watch their kids. Cook them a meal. Help them clean their house. Run errands for them. Two questions for you to ask yourself:

1. Is there even one burden of another member of this church you currently have on your heart? One prayer request you are lifting up, one sorrow, one physical need you have offered to assist with?
2. Are you willing to ask for and receive assistance with your load?

Some people think that carrying their heavy burdens by themselves proves that they are stronger in their faith. But (Stott says) that attitude is actually far more stoic than Christian. See we are so immersed in an independent, consumer mindset that if we do get overwhelmed we think we need to hire a professional to get us out of our jam. That there is no way that God has given members of His church His supernatural grace operating through broken / contrite vessels for healing, help and restoration of my burden.

As we love the church by carrying one another's heavy loads we fulfill the law of Christ. Believe it or not, the biggest obstacle to loving the church like this is not indifference it is Spiritual Pride. The aloof attitude of "having arrived" or having it together which snub the struggling as inferior to yourself. This is why the devil doesn't have to come and deceive many of us; we are already doing a great job deceiving ourselves.

Galatians 6:3 (ESV)

For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Remember how I always tell you that the economy of God is 180 degrees different than the economy of man? In our pride we believe ourselves to be aloof from Christ's command. In actuality you are proving that you are the bottom of the barrel. You are proving the eternal axiom that those who consider themselves first will in fact be last, lowest in the Kingdom of God.

Pride is in essence self-love and is thereby the enemy of true love. The moment we begin to think we are somehow better than, or not as good as, another child of God washed in the blood of the Lamb and clothed in His righteousness, we have become like that blimp that got loose this past week in Maryland. \$2 Billion worth of helium, dragging Kevlar lines all across Pennsylvania, knocking out electricity for over 30,000 people. What was its fate? Shot down with shotguns by State Police.

That is exactly the usefulness of a self-inflated “Christian” is in loving the church. In our attempt to make ourselves feel superior or wish we had some reason to feel more advanced than others, we quench the Holy Spirit. That is why Paul said (on the heels of the command to walk by the Spirit)

Galatians 5:26

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

You will not be in a position, nor will you be motivated to bear one another’s burdens if you are consumed with comparing yourself to them (either artificially inflated or desperately envious of wanting to have what they appear to have). Confess that even now, needing grace to repent. You won’t be able to love the church until you do.

Galatians 6:4–5 (ESV)

But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

At work, each of you probably undergoes periodic performance assessments. You might even be motivated day by day and week by week, knowing that evaluation is coming. That is what Paul is calling us to here, but our Assessor is God on the Day of Judgment. And His standard is the Life of Christ, not the lives of those around us.

Stop comparing yourself to others, that is what Pharisees do. Remember the Publican’s prayer, “Thank you God that I am not like that guy”? Instead recognize the responsibility you have to stand before God and give an account for yourself on the Last day. That is what it means that each one must bear His own load. Literally the word for load here is backpack. No one is going to be able to help you with your backpack regrets on that day. Learn to bear it now before the Father. Assess yourself in light of what He says instead of what you see in others, so that you can freely bear their burdens.

Love the Church

3. Invest in Eternity

An ad popped up in my newsfeed this week talking about a 21 yr. old college student that began investing the \$1500 he had saved up over the summer and his first transaction produced a gain of

\$8000. Supposedly he developed an investment strategy that enabled him to make accurate determinations about when certain stocks would rise. And supposedly he became a millionaire before he graduated college. But is it accurate to call his investment strategy long term planning?

My uncle died last week a multi-millionaire. Not one dime went with him in the coffin. Not one of the hours of rigorous labor he invested building his chain of convenience stores will be reaped in eternity.

Loving the Church is God's investment plan for you to store up eternal rewards.

Galatians 6:6-8

Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

You reap what you sow is a rule of this creation. We don't get to make the rules, the Creator does. Whether we believe the formulas of how the creation works or not, it will not exempt us from the eternal consequences of how we invest what God puts in our hands.

I have never met a child that did not need to be taught to share. It is just impossible for them to conceive that releasing what they cherish into another's hands is actually a good thing. Yet it says here that Spirit empowered sharing is actually gain not loss. When, by faith God's people are led to share a portion of what God has used them to earn with the church. It is actually the wisest long term investment you could possibly make.

Until I studied this passage this week, I always thought verse 6 meant that when you learn something from a teacher or when God inspires you through a preacher, that you were supposed to tell them what God did for their encouragement. While that is not a bad idea, it is not what the text means. It meant (in that day) that the vocational minister of the gospel was worthy of his wages, that, (when you give to the church by faith) you are sowing eternal seed into heaven's fertile field. And you will not be disappointed.

Paul says this is not an accident. It is God who oversees the process. The Sovereign One who you cannot hoodwink or outsmart. He says if you invest in the flesh (not by faith in what God says is best) you will reap corruption. In other words moth, rust, worms will destroy it. If you sow to the Spirit by faith in God's Word, you trade in temporary treasure for His eternal purposes. You will enjoy the rewards of that wise investment forever! That is Abundant Life, Life indeed. The choice is yours.

In the daily grind of this trial filled life, it sometimes hard to believe that it is all worth it. As we watch our friends and neighbors chasing their best life now while asking Jesus to tag along, or Buddha, or whoever promises to help them the most. It can get wearisome but God says this:

Galatians 6:9-10

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Love the Church. Sow the seed God gives you abundantly while it is still the season for sowing. Break up your fallow ground. Stop trusting in what is right in your own eyes. Invest liberally in all people, but prioritize people in the church!

“Give yourself to the Church, imperfect as it is. It is the dearest place on earth to us... The Church is the nursery for God’s weak children where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ’s sheep—the home for Christ’s family.”

—Charles Spurgeon,